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Contemporary American Indian Poetry Sandra L. Sprayberry, Guest Editor

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Introduction

Sandra L. Sprayberry

Although the focus of this special issue is contemporary American Indian poetry, such a genre distinction remains problematic. As Brian Swann noted in his introduction to *Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry*, "Too often a classification can . . . be used to pigeonhole and thereby deny full regard" (xviii). I will not presume to pigeonhole (or rabbit-hole) this issue of *SAIL*.

A trickster, rabbit is poetry-in-motion, as Diane Glancy reminds us in the poem which opens the issue, "Tough Cookie." A trickster, American Indian poetry is.

But just what American Indian poetry is may be as elusive as that trickster rabbit, particularly since most Native writers write in shifting forms, multigenres—myth, story, poem—and often within the same text.

Hypertextuality—we're constantly reminded as we surf the Net—is the wave that has yet to crest. Yet the net that can save us on-line offers an interestingly Native design: the Web. By some miraculous design (perhaps Spider Woman's spinning), the works included in this issue connect.

The three poets represented, via poem or interview, converse with each other and their readers. Whether using the words "picket fence," "border," or "two worlds," Diane Glancy, Alex Jacobs, and Maurice Kenny suggest to readers the constructs—between cultures, between genres—that we should de-construct. Thus central to the conversation of readers is the question of how to read contemporary American Indian poetry.

Advocating a conversive approach, a conversation between European theorist and Native poet, Susan Brill effectively erases the line so often drawn in the sand as she reads contemporary Navajo

poetry.

In conversation with each other, the essays "*We, I, 'Voice' and Voices . . .*," by Janet McAdams, and "Spider Waits: Charlotte DeClue's 'Voices,'" by Elizabeth McDade and Robert Nelson, discuss the polyvocalism of contemporary Native American poetry as communal conversation.

Polyvocalism and hypertextuality in a postmodern age have often been written and read as descriptors of the fragmentation of American culture. Contemporary American Indian poetry, however, is a rewriting that necessitates a rereading, and much conversation.

Because he is the spark that began my own conversations in this discipline, I would like to dedicate this issue to Rodney Simard. *Mitakuye oyasin.*

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Tough Cookie

Diane Glancy

I.

A myth means what can't be put a finger on.
It talks about something connected
but not directly with
because meaning is a dissembling of parts.
In other words the closer you get to meaning
the harder to talk about
because meaning is not a whole
but multi-placed as it speaks.

It moves to whatever dictates.

(As if there's a view behind a picket fence
the slats of which are staggered
so you can't see beyond
but as you walk
if you don't look directly
you can see the scene.)

That distance has to be there to space between.

Yes.

Myth dulls the abutment of all the given.

Otherwise we succumb.

II.

Once there was a rabbit with only three legs but he made a wooden leg so he could hop. That was the time the sun was hotter than it is now, and the rabbit decided he would do

something. He took his bow and arrow and traveled where the sun lived. Each day he got hotter. The only thing on earth that doesn't burn, said the rabbit, is cactus. So he made a house of cactus where he stayed during the day and traveled at night. When he came to the east he saw the ground boiling and knew the sun was coming. When the sun was halfway out of the earth, the rabbit raised his bow and arrow. His first shot killed the sun. Rabbit stood over the sun and cried: the white part of your eye will be clouds. The black part, the sky. Your kidney will be the stars, your liver the moon and your heart the dark. And they were.

(from *American Indian Myths and Legends*, selected and edited by Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, Pantheon, 1984).

III.

Now think in terms of the (hic) too-hot sun.
The rabbit taking off the heat.
Showing us the unseeable in a way we cannot
but looking to contingencies
and disseminating them
that's what myth does.
Otherwise (as I said) the sun would burn us up.
Just look at the rabbit and the sun dispersing

IV.

until the myth's no longer the rabbit and sun
but their principles moving
which in this case:
imbalance is the Native American mode of empowerment.
When you're striving
instead of having achieved and sitting back
you can take on something in the neighborhood
of the sun.

V.

Which isn't the only point.

VI.

A myth's a story moving to its separate parts.
Whatever situation can alter.

Meaning fits whatever can interpret
according to which is applied.

Get to the point the white man said
listening to the Indian
which is the point
meaning differently at different times
which dissolves our hope for a single melting pot

VII.

of simple outcome.

At St. Lawrence Catholic School
there's a boys' door and a girls'.
Those words are cut into the stone above the doors.
I think that's how the rabbit lost a leg.

Pulling loose.

Or *trimming tulips*, the mind *knee-jerks*.

Think what it must have been traveling in the heat.

A prosthetic rabbit with a bow and arrow.

The possible *kulump* of the wooden leg
as he hopped.

The desert of the east

when the sun was living in the earth.

The lonesome journey where it boiled.

VIII.

There's also the aspect of myth as not true.

The connotation in other words.

The false leg. Or possible humility.

Oh there's no meaning here.

(All meaning does mean none.)

IX.

But this hot is hot,
the rabbit thought as he traveled.
And took his pocketknife to the cactus
to carve a little house.
A picket fence.
After all he'd carved a wooden leg.
The walk maybe lined with jellybeans.
The roof sprinkled with paprika.
The kind of house you wanted as a child
when you built things on a summer afternoon
and found the earth thinning under the sun
and you could run anywhere
which is the meaning of myth.
Until someone had to *dosomething*.
Why not the rabbit?
It would be his arrow that killed the sun.
Having lost a leg
the rabbit could offer loss to others.
That's the principle of reciprocity
and he had the power of.
Well, *giveit a chance*, the rabbit said.

X.

Just think of the *conjectives*.
The rabbit's short-circuiting trip
between a father saguaro or barrel-cactus mother.
The variables of meaning.
The *scorched scened*, in other words.
Yes. Myth's a bag of jellybeans in a schoolyard.
A gist of all the implied.
The breadth of stars and moon.
The palpable dark of the heart.
A sun we still can't look directly at.

We, I, "Voice," and Voices: Reading Contemporary Native American Poetry

Janet McAdams

During the canon debates that have been waged so fiercely in recent years in the United States academy, much talk has focused on the inclusion of formerly excluded literatures, especially those written by non-white and/or female authors. One genre, however, has become so marginalized that its increasing exclusion from curricula and its virtual invisibility in the canon wars have gone unnoticed. Poetry, especially that written by contemporary poets, remains the most excluded, the least read and taught, the most marginalized genre of our time. Despite its marginalization, however, it is possible to discern a canon or "dominant mode" operating in contemporary American poetry.

Ron Silliman has noted that "questions of canonicity, of the survival of poets and poetry, are determined institutionally, rather than between texts or aesthetic principles." He adds, "The primary institution of American poetry is the university" (157). As Silliman and others have argued, this "dominant mode"¹ has emerged from "The Workshop" of creative writing programs that have proliferated dramatically in the last fifteen years. Small literary magazines have proliferated as well, an increase which might presuppose a broad pluralism in the publication of poetry. However, many of them are university based and funded; the poems that appear in these magazines and emerge from the creative writing workshop are strikingly uniform in style, subject matter, and length.

Indeed, the workshop format does lend itself to the creation of homogenous verse. Because the act of criticism is placed largely in the hands of student writers—who tend to be cautious and conservative readers—much of the discussion of a particular poem focuses on *difference*, that is, where the poem at hand departs from received

norms. Student writers ostensibly are encouraged to experiment and practice different styles; however, the scope of such experimentation is narrow and the formal styles engaged do not differ from each other in significant ways. Implicit parameters for content emerge; in my own M.F.A. program, for instance, the characterization of a poem as "political" was understood as a highly negative criticism. Furthermore, it is customary to expect students in M.F.A. programs to produce a poem every week; lengthy, ambitious projects are therefore hardly encouraged. The "Workshop" or "dominant mode" poem can be characterized by its brevity, its dependence on voice, its conflation of voice and person, and its attention to personal experience.

While theorists have been puzzlingly remiss in their attention to contemporary poetry, two small but increasingly vocal critiques of canonical or "dominant mode" poetry have emerged. The first privileges poetry from the so-called Language community; the second, which I will call the multicultural critique, focuses on the poetries of marginalized peoples and is continuous with the broad-based challenges to the university canon. In one of the few critical volumes dedicated to bringing together contemporary theory and contemporary poetry, editors Anthony Easthope and John O. Thompson describe these two distinct "modes":

Against a bureaucratise which displays a numbingly generalising style . . . emerges a poetry of emotion, confession, plain speech, lived experience, recrimination—where the experience and anger is that of those whom the system marginalises. The rollcall of the underprivileged may by now be well-known—women, workers, blacks, gays, the poor in the West, the poorer in the developing world, the handicapped, the young, the old—but within each category (and no doubt blocked by the very categorisation) are voices which demand to be heard *as poetic*. . . .

Equally against bureaucratic language but *also* against everyday natural speech itself, with its rule-governed syntax, semantics and pragmatics, its tendency to efface itself as sounds, words and sentences in the service of friction-free communication lies a poetic practice of defamiliarisation which is calculated to frustrate the demand for communication, a practice which has been given attention throughout this volume. . . . What makes Language Poetry more "language-y" than the typical poetry-workshop generated text is its preparedness to explore new ways of making language *resist*. (209)

Thus, as these editors would have it, the "best poetry" of resis-

tance, or otherness, should resist through textual strategies, unless the "experience and anger" being related emerges from the "underprivileged," in which case conventional textual strategies are perfectly acceptable. Indeed, these people have only to speak to be "heard as poetic." In other words, practitioners of Language poetry *write*, while so-called underprivileged poets *speak*. One mode is defined by practice and its practitioners have agency. Poets of the *other* mode have identity.

This brings me to a problem I perceive operating in not only the "multicultural"² critique of poetry but multicultural literature in general: the collapsing of "voice" as a literary strategy into "subjectivity" as an identity category. As Dorothy Hale has noted in an article about African American literary theory, "Voice has become the metaphor that best accommodates the conflicting desires of critics and theorists who want to have their cultural subject and de-essentialize it, too" (445). Having a voice, that is, *speaking*, and constructing "voice," an act of *writing*, have become indistinguishable from each other, or at least this is so when we invoke the "rollcall of the underprivileged." The blurring of these categories is especially problematic for reading poetry, because of the received Romantic tradition that seeks to equate poet and speaker. With contemporary U.S. poetry, the problem is exacerbated by the seemingly natural and spontaneous voice privileged by the Confessional Poets.

"Voice" in the lexicon surrounding marginalized literature has been rewritten as the singular of "voices," that is, the actual speaking voice of the previously silent, marginalized individual passing through language as if it were transparent. Thus, the subaltern subject is not only essentialized through her "voice" but cannot construct voice apart from her own identity, an identity valorized for its "anger and lived experience." The move to conflate the marginalized writer with her speaking voice is complicated by the desire of many critics to perceive all marginalized literature as representative. Thus, "voice" is read as individual, conflated with the writer's identity, and perceived to be speaking for a collective.

The conflation of voice and identity in the multicultural critique is ironic when we note that the dismantling of voice is the very textual strategy privileged in Language poetry. Language writing dismantles voice in order to "frustrate communication," according to P. Inman. An operating premise behind Language writing is that voice as a category must always invoke an individual speaking subject, or as Inman has written, Language poetry seeks a "constant defusion of the idea of 'voice' [because] . . . [t]he subject is a channelling device. It fixes one's view on her/his own life. On her family history, on his career, on their strategies for self-improvement . . . All the while

obfuscating the social forces that put them where they are" (224).

Thus, different as these two critiques may be in their institutional bases and priorities, each centers on "voice," and each, in its own way, advocates an erasure of "voice." The Language writers wish to do away with "voice" altogether; the multiculturalists wish to collapse it into identity. While an aggressive critical response to the dominance of voice-centered, plain-style poetry is clearly called for, neither of these approaches satisfies, since both presuppose "voice" as a category of individuality and do not admit the possibility of a "polyvocalism," that is, a truly collective voice. I am not speaking here of the marginalized writer as representative, that is, the individual who invokes a collective when she speaks, but rather, "voice" constructed outside of or prior to an individually determined and bound identity.

Both approaches are especially problematic for addressing contemporary Native American writing because they fail to address the ways Indian poets are reinventing "voice" as a literary category. Only recently has Native American writing begun to appear with any regularity in teaching anthologies, and then its presence is so slight as to constitute a token nod in the direction of so-called multiculturalism. Many universities still do not offer a single course dedicated to Native American writing. It is common practice among those that do to construct syllabi that either include no poetry at all or include "translations" of as-told-to oral narratives and call them poetry. (I could say something about why people in English departments are more interested in positioning themselves as anthropologists than in engaging living, breathing, speaking writers, but that's a different paper.) Thus, contemporary Indian poetry is twice-marginalized: outside the canon of *read* literature and misread—when it is read—because existing critical models fail to address it.

I do not wish to make the sorts of glib connections between Indian writers and oral cultures that have become so popular in our "New Age." As Arnold Krupat has cautioned: "[For] just about every . . . contemporary Native American writer I am aware of—the storytelling of an ancient oral tradition is taken as providing a context, as bearing upon and influencing their novels, poems, stories, or autobiographies" (171) but "most of the references I've encountered to the ancient or legendary or oral nature of the written text in question appear to be honorific, strategic, nostalgic, largely ahistorical, and unspecific" (173). However, many American Indian writers employ writing strategies informed as much by community-based, performed "literature" as by Romantic notions of the individual artist and individually authored artifact. A voice-centered critique, when voice is presupposed as individually determined, necessarily misreads subjectivity when it is constituted collectively. When voice is collapsed into identity, Indian

poets are denied agency, as if voice were an incidental manifestation of personality and not a literary technique.

What I wish to do is re-examine how "voice" functions in the writings of two contemporary Native American poets, Ray A. Young Bear and Linda Hogan. In both Hogan's and Young Bear's work, "voice" is neither a merged category of identity and writing nor the individualized voice of dominant mode poetry. Rather, "voice" becomes a site of play between individual and collective expression; it is dynamic rather than static.

Mesquakie poet Ray A. Young Bear's second collection is entitled *The Invisible Musician*. Literally an unseen frog, the invisible musician is also a poet/singer, and song emerges "invisibly," sometimes collectively. In "*Wa ta se Na ka mo ni*, Viet Nam Memorial" the invisible musician makes the speaker doubt his right or ability to sing:

The knowledge that my grandfathers
were singers as well as composers—
. . . did not produce
the necessary memory or feeling
to make a *Wa ta se Na ka mo ni*,
Veteran's Song. (41)

What the speaker is questioning is his own role in this ritual, as an "I" who wants to "honor them," but whose name does not appear on the Wall, figured here as "a distant black rock":

For a moment I questioned
why I had to immerse myself
in country, controversy, and guilt;
but I wanted to honor them . . . (41)

At the end of this poem, he resigns himself to not singing, recognizing that the invisible musician, the unseen frog, can sing because it is not *personally* implicated in the "country, controversy, and guilt." The song of the invisible musician, thus, is a community-bound ritual, unattached to an individual singer, and was "the ethereal kind that did not stop."

In this poem, Young Bear has described his own position in relation to songmaking. In the collection as a whole, however, he *enacts* a collective voice and establishes a kind of play between his role as individual artist/poet and traditional singer. The opening stanza of "The Significance of a Water Animal," the volume's first poem, for instance, deconstructs the boundaries not only between the individual voice and the collective but between human being and earth:

Since then I was the North.
Since then I was the Northwind.
Since then I was nobody.

Since then I was alone. (3)

The stanza invokes Emily Dickinson, who reappears later in the book, suggesting the different "literary" traditions that influence Young Bear's work, as does the occasional appearance of a Mesquakie traditional song, in both English and the Mesquakie language. The erasure of individual voice is both described and enacted in this stanza, as the "I" moves into increasingly limited categories until he is both "alone" and "nobody." Individual voice is further disrupted in the second stanza:

The color of my black eyes
inside the color of King-
fisher's hunting eye
weakens *me* (3, my emphasis)

Not only is the speaker physically and concretely weakened, but the category "me" begins to break down, as the speaker finds himself reflected and doubled in the Kingfisher's "hunting eye." A shift occurs midway through the poem, so that the first two stanzas function as the "story of a water animal" listened to in the third stanza, even while the continuous but transformed voice of the "I" or "me" persists throughout the poem.

Like Young Bear, the Chickasaw poet Linda Hogan reinvents "voice" as a site of "play" rather than as a fixed category. "Glass," from Hogan's 1993 *The Book of Medicines*, begins with the image of the mirror in which identity is multiplied into increasingly smaller, diminishing reflections:

When I was a child
I would stand between mirrors
and see myself grown small,
infinite
and far away. (65)

The subject fragments in the first stanza and almost disappears into its many reflections. The second and third stanzas defy a presupposed center: the voices that speak in them are curiously disembodied, coming from nowhere in particular:

I didn't know the ancestors'
lives had been traded
for the vision of our faces
inside our own hands.

I didn't know I would someday drink
the fermented
body of another god
and become the color of holes
in danger of breaking. (65)

These lines reproduce fragmentation even as they document the destruction of Chickasaw belief systems and their violent replacement with European ones: the "lives traded" in a foreign system of barter in stanza two, the forced conversion to Christianity in stanza three. The speaking voice in this poem first fragments, all but vanishes, re-emerges as polyvocal, a trace, the "color of holes," and identity is deferred behind an "infinite" series of representations, the signified increasingly removed from and consumed by its signifier.

The poem's sensibility shifts in the last stanza as the "I," the lost self, becomes "we." The appearance of the trickster Raven indicates a teaching story, a means by which the speaker understands her own experience in the context of a broader, community-based experience. Her identity dissipates after she catches sight of herself, as Raven discovers his true nature—that he is "shiny and black" instead of white—after seeing his reflection in the water. As Raven "walks out" from the "circle of revelations," the mirror, so does the speaker emerge from the mirrors in which she has been trapped, now into a "we" instead of an "I," conscious of what is "longed for" (and lost) as well as what has begun to "live again." The speaker is living "in the cracks," a place "between," from which identity can now be recognized as collective and multiple.

In "The History of Red," Hogan is also remapping identity by constructing a persona that need not be singular and unified in order to be coherent. She delays making use of the pronouns "me" or "I" until the ninth stanza—nearly the end of the poem—so that "we" as collective pronoun precedes a clear reference to the speaker. Interestingly, "we" becomes collective *and* historical, upon the entrance into the poem of the singular speaker, reconstructed retrospectively to include the speaker's "mothers," who appeared in the third stanza:

A wildness
swam inside our mothers,
desire through closed eyes,
a new child
wearing the red, wet mask of birth,
delivered into this land
already wounded,
stolen and burned
beyond reckoning. (9)

Because the voice of the poem now includes the speaker and is collective, she is both the "new child" of the fourth line and its mother. Hogan has reinvented the present-day world by laying claim to an other, "older" one, thus deconstructing linear time and proposing the simultaneity of different worlds. By constituting subjectivity across temporal boundaries, Hogan diminishes them; by constructing "voice"

as a window between worlds, subjectivity cannot be "fixed" temporally or spatially but must remain dynamic.

In "The Truth Is," a poem that appears in Hogan's 1985 volume *Seeing through the Sun*, this split is even more extreme. Manifested in the body, the speaker's two heritages constitute irreconcilable halves, separate selves warring within a single container:

In my left pocket a Chickasaw hand
rests on the bone of my pelvis.
In my right pocket
a white hand. Don't worry. It's mine
and not some thief's.
It belongs to a woman who sleeps in a twin bed. . . . (4)

The poet's radical division of the body itself into white and Indian halves is a direct grappling with the increasingly troubling question of what constitutes Indian identity—both legally and socially—for the location of this conflict in flesh parallels controversies over blood quantum requirements imposed on Indian nations by the federal government and taken up by these nations themselves. Implicitly indicting such terms as "halfbreed" or the trendier "hybrid," the poem goes on to say:

. . . I'd like to say
I am a tree, grafted branches
bearing two kinds of fruit . . .
It's not that way. The truth is
we are crowded together
and knock against each other at night.
We want amnesty. (4, my emphasis)

What the speaker would "like to say" but cannot is that mixed-identity is a simple question of biological hybridity, in which two "pure" or discrete entities produce their separate but useful "fruit." Instead, she rejects this "separate but equal" glossing over of the very real violence which created mixed-blood Indian people. "Crowded together" in the "twin bed," the speaker's two selves speak in separate voices; one of them claims:

Linda girl, I keep telling you
this is nonsense
about who loved who
and who killed who. (4)

But the other one insists:

Girl, I say
it is dangerous to be a woman of two countries.
You've got your hands in the dark

of two empty pockets . . .
you know which pocket the enemy lives in. . . .
And you remember who killed who. (5)

There is no synthesis here in a body at war with itself, a body on which is inscribed violence and genocide, for the juxtaposition of red and white hands inscribes the very real history of "who killed who" and marks the "enemy"—"amnesty" is not possible and the poem's occasionally flip tone does not disguise the exhaustion of the speaker(s) at having to "be a woman of two countries." Trapped in an originary identity, one which arises from and remains in the body, the personae of this poem remain in stasis, forever contained and trapped.

Charles Bernstein has written that the dominance of plain-style poetry

is predicated on the exclusion of other modes of writing . . . whether they be described as difficult or gay or primitive or third world or black or abstract or feminist. The claim of and for a plain style is involved with an homogenization of the concept of voice and person, implicitly advocating a voice that is white, male, middle class, and heterosexual—whether practiced by men, or women, blacks or whites. (140)

Or Indians? one might ask.

For to suggest that Indian writers are "dismantling" voice (as opposed to a different or *other* way of constructing it) presupposes the individual lyric voice as a sort of primary trope. And the presumption that all poets practicing in the United States—whether they be "men, women, blacks or whites"—are speaking from—or could be located in—the sort of debased confessionalism Bernstein is criticizing reinscribes the received master tradition they are attempting to criticize. Hogan, Young Bear, and other contemporary Native American poets subvert the "homogenizing of voice and person" of dominant mode poetics by constructing voice in the interstices between individual and collective, between the "literary" and the "oral."

Their work demands a new model of reading, one that begins with questioning what excentric constructions of subjectivity and identity have to do with literary voice. Clearly, as Arnold Krupat has noted, investigating the influences of tribally specific oral traditions on contemporary Native American writers is important work, and as of this writing, largely undone. Finally, a truly multicultural canon and critique should not always begin with Romanticism's construction of the individual artist, and it should not patronize and essentialize the marginalized poet, who may be a culturally interesting subject, but who is also a writer.³

NOTES

¹"Dominant mode" is Charles Altieri's phrase. He writes: "A mode becomes dominant when the ethos it idealizes develops institutional power—both as a model for the ways in which agents represent themselves and, more important, as the basic example of what matters in reading and in attributing significance to what one reads" (8).

²My use of the term "multicultural" is ironic and in no way intended to dismiss or discredit the long overdue challenges to the canon presently taking place in universities and elsewhere.

³Ellen Arnold and Nicole Cooley read earlier versions of this essay. I am grateful for their comments and suggestions.

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He Walks in Two Worlds: A Visit with Maurice Kenny

E. Grant

Maurice Kenny lives in the middle apartment of a brick house situated on the side of a hill overlooking the eastern end of the small Adirondack village of Saranac Lake, New York. His workroom faces Mt. McKenzie's twin peaks, which shimmer or shine or remain hidden, according to the whims of the sky. I had travelled two hundred miles to interview him and was well-armed with my marked-up copy of *Tekonwatonti: Molly Brant* (New York: White Pine Press, 1992) and several notebooks. Maurice greeted me in the kitchen, and as we settled in around the ever-present pot of coffee, he talked of life and poetry.

He had been working on a second version of his autobiography (due out in the Spring of 1995), which had been commissioned by the University of Oklahoma Press, and he talked of the frustrations of capturing one's life in words on a page. "A lot of pain. A lot of pain," he said. He read from sections of it, framing his recollections with the memory of John Crowe Ransom's searing comment to the fresh and then-aspiring poet. "You have no rhythm," the mighty editor of the *Kenyon Review* wrote. Crumbled within, the young NYU student almost abandoned his drive to capture life in poetry, but Professor Douglas Angus at Butler University a few years later coaxed and coddled and revived and inspired his muse once again. Twenty-three books, innumerable awards and honors, and forty years later, Maurice Kenny is still writing poetry.

He had agreed to let me interview him if we could speak, among other related subjects, of his epic, "*Molly*," as he always affectionately refers to *Tekonwatonti*, which lived close to his heart for the twelve years it took him to complete it. Tekonwatonti, or Molly Brant (1735-1795), was the sister of Mohawk chief Thayendanegea, or Joseph Brant.

Molly married Sir William Johnson (1715-1774), an Irish immigrant, commissioned as a Major General with the British and Superintendent for Indian Affairs north of the Ohio River. After his death, she became the warrior-chief of his British-allied Indian troops during the Revolutionary War. Her place in American history has been under-recognized, if not completely overlooked, Maurice believes, and so his purpose in composing this epic of her life was to shed light on her, to assure her prominence, and to right historical inaccuracies and lies.

Tekonwatonti is a remarkable achievement for modern poetry. Written to be read chronologically, the book begins with the waters of New York State flowing with the cycle of life, flowing with the movement of people through history. Maurice uses a montage of historical voices which reveal from new perspectives the complex cultural and personal politics of pre- and post-Revolutionary America. Reading the book is like standing with one's feet in the mud along the banks of the Mohawk River. He captures the smells of the villages, the passions of the bedrooms, the lusts for dominance and ownership, the strengths (and weaknesses) of spirit with a concreteness and an accuracy that linger like the stones of an old house. By attempting drama, character, beauty, truth, and candor, Maurice grapples with the challenges of reconstructing historical personae, which cross gender, race, and culture lines.

We talked frequently throughout my visit of Molly's and William's relationship; the intercourse, exchange, and mingling of cultural worldviews; and how or why Maurice chose the motivations and attitudes he did for particular characters. I noted as I studied the book the deep, undying love Molly had for William. It seemed to be what motivated her to lead the Indian troops into battle for the British and to nurse the wounds of loss without him on Carleton Island in Quebec, but the love was broader than just love for an individual man, as Maurice took pains to point out: it was a passion for the survival of her people, for the way of life of the Longhouse. "I, too, am proud," Molly says in "Molly" (146-47), "to lead these young men / . . . / In death their blood / will scar my hands forever."

Then I questioned William's declaration of love for Molly. William was a well-known and self-avowed womanizer who aspired ". . . to breed / sons like the farmer's stalks of corn . . ." (83). I suggested that his "Molly, dear Molly, you consume me" in "William" (95) rings false.

"All the men in America say that to their wives," Maurice said. "'Honey, I *do* love you.' 'Then why were you out with your secretary last night?' 'I don't know.'

"I used it because it's very typical of our times. If a woman's ever had a man in her life any length of time, whether she's married or not,

of course she's going to have heard it. And you see, I firmly believe, even though this is an historical book, dealing with historical characters real and alive, somewhere in there, I must be reflecting my time in which I live, and I'm certainly trying to do it there with his character."

But we didn't leave the conversation at that; Maurice continued to probe the nature of love between a man and a woman, exploring in some particular depth the relationship between his own mother and father. "I had a father who was a philanderer," he told me. "He would come home, and the next day when he would go to work, my mother would show me his underwear where there was lipstick.

"Craig Womack, who just got his Ph.D. from Oklahoma, and just got a job at Nebraska, wrote a very long, long, long piece, covering all of my work, but mainly on *Molly*, and he sent me a copy of it, and it's coming out, or maybe it's already out, I don't know, in an Indian journal out of UCLA. And he claims—and we did long talks and interviews together, and he did a very good read—and he claims that *Molly* is my mother, and that Sir William is my father."

Maurice would neither agree nor disagree with this interpretation, but did not quibble with my suggestion that in composing the characters of William and Molly he was drawing on his own life experiences, experiences that draw from both his Indian and his non-Indian heritage.

"Yes, well, of course I am," he said. "But to return to your question, why *couldn't* William love Molly? My father loved my mother. To the day he died, he carried my mother's picture in his wallet. He paid her life insurance till the day he died. And she had remarried and so had he. So why can't he [William] love her [Molly]? Read *Wuthering Heights*. Who did Cathy marry? She didn't marry Heathcliff. But she died in his arms! I'm a romanticist. Don't forget that. I'm not a classicist."

We returned to the theme of his romanticism later, but went on to explore his characterizations, noting in particular how well he depicted Sir William's essentially WASP arrogance in "Sir William Johnson: His Daily Journal" (82-84). "Well, when he had his clothes on, he had to act that way," Maurice said. "He was a tenor of the times. He was one of the 'great leaders.' He had an image to keep. The English Crown was depleting Johnson's coffers as fast as they could deplete it, so he had to pretend he had all this money he didn't really have that was owed to him by the Crown. Once he took his jacket off and settled down with the mulled wine and danced naked, he was fine and dandy. That was one of things that was held against him by the historians—dancing naked—by the people around him. He went Native. Completely. Once he took those clothes off, he was Native completely.

"I would not be surprised, if there was any cannibalism going on

at that time, if he did not eat of flesh. He would have been expected to eat it, and I'm sure he would have. . . . It was mainly a captive, a warrior who had shown great valor on the field, great prowess, and to eat a piece of his flesh was, in a way, honoring him, a way of gaining his powers, his prowess. Also, they sometimes even ate a piece of his penis for that same reason—because they thought in the penis is the manhood. We still think that way. We haven't changed that much."

Although the consumption of human flesh is not an especially "romantic" subject, Maurice's romanticism is otherwise evident throughout the book, particularly in the ancillary character of George Croghan, also an Irish immigrant and Sir William's second in command. "I plowed a small dream" (79), Croghan muses. He, too, married an Indian woman, and it is into his mouth that Maurice places the central, the key characterization of Molly in "George Croghan" (118-20). Nearly half of this eighty line, eight stanza poem identifies or suggests sexuality or, at least, sensuality as the source of Molly's power. "She was the prettiest girl I'd ever seen in the colonies" (119), Croghan declares. Hinting at a sexist depiction, I asked Maurice about this, but he said he was reflecting the value system of the times, and also revealing the Indian influence on Croghan's worldview, since he uses natural imagery and figures of speech to capture Molly's personage: "Her cheeks were the brown of autumn hills, / her lips the reddest of sweet strawberries, / her eyes the depths of the river winding and cutting / valleys of the land, her smile was such a river" (118).

There are recurring images throughout the book of several natural aspects, water being the most predominant, but blackberries, strawberries, and the forest receive significant attention as well. "John Fadden says there's a darkness in my forests," Maurice said. "He asked me one time, 'Why are you afraid of the woods?' 'What did you say, John?' He said, 'Why are you afraid of the woods?' 'I'm not.' He said, 'Yes, you are.' I said, 'John, I was brought up to believe there are good spirits and bad spirits, and bad spirits live in the woods.' And I said, 'You were brought up to believe that, too.' He said, 'I feel a fear of the woods.' I said, 'If there is, John, it's a fear of the unknown. What's behind the tree? What's in the other room, listening to us, right now?'"

Maurice claims a sensitivity that can't be explained "scientifically." We had been talking earlier in the evening about "Aroniateka/Chief Hendrick," who died mysteriously near Lake George. His bones were never found. "I was there some years ago," Maurice said, "driving through the land. The hair on the back of my head stood up, and I have funny things like that happen to me. I get to places where there should be a marker of some kind. There's not a marker. I can be sound asleep in a car and cross over the Mohawk River, going to

Albany. Sound asleep. I sleep deeply. I'm dead. And I'll wake up. I'll wake up and it's not the river calling to me. It's Jogues. Isaac Jogues [*Blackrobe*]. Because that's where he entered. It's just down the line a bit from the bridge to come up into the villages. That was his first stop on the Mohawk River."

But we returned to the subtheme of sexuality/sensuality which so characterizes Sir William Johnson, and which is depicted in particular detail with careful historical accuracy in many of the other "characters." I commented to him that there's a lot of sex in the book. "Yes, I know," he said, "but this is something that Paula [Gunn Allen] and I talked about many years ago. She said, 'You know, you're the first native poet to use the word *blood*.' She said, 'I mean *blood* in the sense of violence.' She said, 'You're not afraid to use the word *tomahawk* and split open somebody's head.' And Nancy Johnson, who used to teach at UB [University of Buffalo], it wasn't because of *Tekonwatonti*, but she has devised a course she calls 'Savage Women.' Now she uses the book, the text, in it, and she brought me to UB, and I did a talk about it, and she found the same kind of thing going on in some of the poems, too. And I think I used *savage* once or twice, years back, '73 or '72. But Paula was saying, 'You're the only one who's got the blood and guts and will stand up and use words like that, where we wouldn't allow a Caucasian to use them anymore. But you do it, and that's one of the original things you've done, to bring that back. Also, your sexual references,' she said. 'You have a lot of them even though we know Indians don't have sex.' Well, they may do it through rape. (Laughter.) They don't love. We don't love (more laughter)." He reached for the text and read from "Cornbury, Viscount Edward Hyde/Governor of New York/New Jersey Province/ (Queen Anne's War)" (33-34):

sparkling diadem
slipping on your ear
fantasy brought you a throne
Anne's dainty slipper
for midnight walks
to catch the heated breath
of recruits' self-debate
under robes hiding
from your thieving eyes
as you stalk behind the beech
gripping the trunk as you
would grip the young soldier
and how wet your hands
not with semen spurting
from his sweaty flesh . . .

bloody from the kills
of turtle, bear and wolf

put on your scarlet gown
dress to the throat in lace
scratch the lice eating at your crotch—
we take you very seriously—
and spy

(Maurice is a Master Reader, his voice rich and melodious—whether he's reading before an audience of several hundred or sitting in his own kitchen at midnight, using a poem to make a point in a conversation with a visitor. He had told me earlier in the evening that a poet can make a living, but the money doesn't come from publishing; it comes from giving readings, making appearances.)

I had enjoyed "Cornbury . . .," but didn't like the Viscount himself. "Well, he's not to be liked," Maurice said. "The whites didn't like him either. He was one of the early governors, and he was a transvestite. He wasn't homosexual. He was a transvestite. He liked dressing himself up as a woman, and he fancied himself as being Queen Anne. He's a well-known historical person."

There are many well-known historical persons dealt with in the book—New York Governor Clinton, Washington ("Town Destroyer"), Pontiac—and others, mostly Indian, not so well-known and not represented, even in a speculative mode, in our history books. Molly, of course, is depicted with great particular detail, but others, too, whose lives are rendered with dignity, and in being rendered at last, at all, the complex fabric of pre- and post-colonial America is revealed. For example, William's black slave, Jennie, and their daughter, Juba, presented a language problem for Maurice. What did the speech of a black slave sound like in the middle of the Eighteenth Century?

When I posed this question, he reflected on the complete uncertainty of anyone today knowing what one isolated slave sounded like. There was a great deal of slave trading among the Caribbean Islands, Mexico, the Southwest, the Southern colonies, the Northeast, and French Canada. So, William's Jennie could have been from anywhere. There is no historical record, but, Maurice said, he was trying to give her dialect a voodoo chant quality. "I wanted to get away from my voice," he said. "Black English wasn't created till much later. They [black slaves] were not chronicled. They were ignored. I mean, that's why she said, 'Paint Juba instead.'"

He was alluding to the poem, "Molly's Likeness: Smallpox" (116-17) when Molly refuses to have her portrait painted because "I did not wish my great-grandchildren to see / my face." She was scarred with smallpox, and when one of the painters told her, "Oh! But Lady

Mary Brown, dear Molly, / we can erase those scars," she reflects:

But could he, truly,
could he really erase my scars
and the scars that cling still to the lodges
of Canajoharie; replace
living flesh on emptied beds, beds covered
with blankets soaked in the liquids of death?
. . .
perhaps tomorrow
you'll decide to paint Juba instead.

Maurice's own "painting" of Juba incorporates chantlike language—"jumm jumm jumm jumm / fire jump fire jump"—which he admitted was a best choice situation since no one can know what either Jennie or her mixed blood daughter, living as they were in William's and Molly's household in a German community, sounded like. The variety in dialect, however, contributes to the rich texture of voices which distinguish this historical epic.

We talked intermittently of his artistry, his sonics, metrics, line breaks. "I love line breaks," he declared. "I taught Wendy Rose her line breaks. She would admit it. 'I adore the line breaks, and you're so great at it. Tell me how you do it,' she said." He didn't tell *me* how he does it, but he did speak to a question I had about his use of the slash (/) in an untitled poem (134):

The first
shots reached
the world
revolution/
independence
was on/father
against son against
brother/torn between
England and freedom.

The Indian lost.

"Well, Michael Castro some years ago did a piece on me, and he said, 'Maurice will probably disagree,' and I did, 'but he often uses certain conveyances of Charles Olsen's Projectivism.' At the time, I totally disagreed. I said, 'Hey, I haven't even read Charles Olsen.' He said, 'You did, too.' I hadn't read a lot. I had an understanding of Projectivism, but I had a better understanding of Objectivism because of Williams, and it's not too far Olsen took Projectivism, expanded Objectivism into Projectivism. And so [in using the slashes] I wanted to make sure the reader stopped. I don't believe in spaces in these lines. I very rarely use spaces between words in a line. I don't like

that way of writing. I mean, when a lot of contemporary poets will put wide spaces between words, it's false. It's phoney. It doesn't mean a thing. Well, they say, 'That's when I take a breath.' Well, you're breathless by the end of the poem then because you've all those spaces to take the breath in."

I suggested that the spaces might have a visual impact. "Not on me. Not on me," he replied. "Those slashes there. I wanted you to make sure you stopped there. It's a kind of sprung rhythm. Kind of. Like Hopkins. He would put an accent over it to make you stop, to make you give more stress to it."

This is the only poem that employs the slash, and if it doesn't cause you to pause, as he intended, the book itself will, and you will never be able to think, again, of the Thirteen Colonies or the Revolutionary War in the way you were probably taught in school because he brings Indians and women and slaves and others into sharp historical light.

"I'm really greatly disappointed in the acceptance of the book," Maurice told me. "I got one bad one, really bad one [review]. Some guy in *World Literature Today*. They had an historian do it instead of a poet. That broke me up. Dennis [Malone, Editor of White Pine Press] sent it to me, and he said, 'I don't know where this guy is coming from.' I don't know who he was, but that was the only bad review I got. I was hoping that it would get more. I wanted more. But not in my lifetime. It's an old book now. It's two years old. *Blackrobe* got it immediately. *Blackrobe* got the most reviews of any book of mine. All over the place. All over the place."

Blackrobe had been nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1989 and generated a great deal of excitement. Abenaki writer and editor Joseph Bruchac and many others regard it as an epic. But "Molly is the epic," Maurice said. "I intended her book to be an epic." It certainly has an epic scale, spanning years before the French and English moved into and fought in the Mohawk Valley, expressing well the integrated qualities of the Iroquois interaction with the land and waters; covering the turbulence leading up to and including the Revolutionary War; and exploring the memories and significance of those times and Molly's role in the cultural transformation that dislodged a whole nation and scarred the memories of a people whose experiences have been misunderstood and excluded from general history texts. Molly's story is the story of an Indian community; she speaks in a collective voice, upstaged only by the experience, by the will of the land and her creatures, for while the beginning frame of *Tekonwatonti* captures the endless flow of history through the strong imagery of water, the book ends with "Old Coyote in the Adirondacks" (196):

He stood

on the shoulder
of the country road
waiting
for us
to pass
so he could
enter
the night
to sing
on the curve
of his hill.

In the morning when Maurice and I continued our visit over a fresh pot of coffee and moving away from "Molly" and into other subjects, he talked about coyote, not native to the Northeast. "Coyote is a very wise animal," he said, slowly and with emphasis. "Of all the creatures on the earth, they survive the best. We've got 20,000 of them in the Adirondack Mountains. We don't know where they came from. They are wise. They came here. They knew there was food, and they knew they could survive, and they did.

"In Oklahoma, they're still killing them, and hanging their ears on the 'vettes. Lance [Henson] writes about this. He's got some very powerful poems that deal with killing the coyote. Coyote's a strange guy. He's a s-t-r-a-n-g-e guy."

I offered that I didn't understand him totally.

"I'm not sure that you're supposed to understand coyote. If you were to ask Peter [Bluecloud], who's written several books now on coyote, does he completely understand him? He'd be the first person to say, 'No way! That's why I write stories about him.' Trying to get an understanding is often why we write, is trying to get a handle or an understanding on some concept or other."

In recent years, faculty across the United States have been, out of ignorance, led to believe that the Sixties brought about a renaissance in Native American literature. This subject and the claim by some that Maurice Kenny is the "Dean of Native American Literature" evoked a strong reaction from Maurice. On the idea of a renaissance he said, "This was something, I believe, Kenneth Lincoln is responsible for in one of his books. . . . I don't believe in a renaissance. I really don't. It's always happened. It's always been there. There has never been a rebursting out of poetry or story or song with Native people. And this perhaps is why I hold respect for [A. LaVonne Brown] Ruoff because she understands that continuum. She has a firm hold on that. Most of them don't understand that hold. They don't know what the word means. She does. She has a hold on that word. I respect her for that. I don't believe in the renaissance. It has never stopped for

traditional people. It has never stopped.

"People have always been writing. It just has not been published. If you're a traditional Hopi, Lakota, Iroquois, whatever, you've always sung your songs. And there's so many rites in which the singer must write the songs fresh, original songs, so there's always been writing going on.

"Again. Through the Beats. Basically when they gave up on the institutions, they had to go hunt for new things. Suddenly they realized, oh, my God, there are Indians out there. They got faith. They got spirituality. Let's go over and steal it. Another form of Manifest Destiny."

We had talked earlier of the "charge" that he was the Dean of Native American Poetry, but he had dismissed it in short order without any explanation, only claiming, "I really am a very modest person." But I pressed him and he responded strongly:

"Again, this is the white man saying, 'Take me to your leader.' The one and only leader. There isn't anyone. Scott [Momaday] certainly opened the door for the Wendys and the Leslies and the Simons. Of course in the Indian community they call me an elder, and that has much more honor to it than *dean*. The term *elder* is much more honoring than *dean* because *elder* doesn't say you're the one and only leader.

"There is no one leader, and that suggests there is a leader. It's true I have done a lot. A lot. In the Native community and in the non-Native community. As they all say, 'He walks in two worlds.' And I do, but it's not necessarily by choice, but I do walk in two worlds. There are no two ways about it. Oh sure, Jerry Rothenberg was the first to say that. 'He lives in two worlds.' I do live in two worlds.

"But how can I escape it? I teach in colleges and 99% of my students are Anglos. They're not even Afro-Americans. They're not even Asian-Americans. They're mainly Anglos. I give to them as much as I feel I should give to them of Native culture. If they're studying Keats and Shelley, how can I bring in Native culture, right? Not too easily. Maybe Wordsworth because of Pantheism. But not too easily, and that's not the course they're taking."

As I finished my third cup of coffee and was gathering my things to hit the road, we finished our conversation, chatting loosely about how the meaning of poetry has changed.

"My generation in college," Maurice said, "Not necessarily high school, when we went to school, we had people like Werner Beyer and so forth who was a great man and a great teacher. They still love poetry. It still is not a shameful thing to be a poet. You weren't even classified as being a sissy. Werner Beyer is a long way from being a

sissy, believe me. So my generation still got the beauty and the truth of poetry, and it's needed in our everyday life. This is what we are taught. I try to teach it to, say, your generation, and your generation has always come along and said, 'Ah well, I like poetry, and, yeah, I'm going to read poetry, but is it really important in my life?'

"And your generation is also teaching it to a younger generation, twenty years younger, and they have got the whole idea that poetry, it's not sissy, it's boring. It isn't necessary. 'It won't get me a job, but then nothing is going to get me a job.' And therein is the difference. The younger generation from you—you still have fondness for language—they don't even know what language is. They have no respect for language. And you know what, Elizabeth Grant? When that happens, they've lost their culture. It ain't no more. It's only MTV, Beavis and Butthead, and the Flintstones. That's all it is, and that ain't a culture."

Maurice speaks always with a passion. And as a host, he is ever kind and gracious. As he walked me to my truck, he laughed his signature laugh, a loud and genuine explosion from his diaphragm, emitted in rapid, overlapping bursts. I thought, as I drove off, yes, Maurice walks in two worlds, and he laughs in two, as well.

[AD]

Spider Waits: Charlotte DeClue's "Voices"

Elizabeth H. McDade and Robert M. Nelson

The text of Charlotte DeClue's poem "Voices" was first published in 1990 as the lead work in a *SAIL* special edition on New Native American Writing. Prior to the publication of "Voices," DeClue, who is Washashe Osage on her mother's side, had already published about 20 poems in a 1985 chapbook entitled *Without Warning*. Most of those poems had been subsequently republished in anthologies, including Joe Bruchac's *Songs From this Earth on Turtle's Back*, Rayna Green's *That's What She Said*, and Beth Brant's *A Gathering of Spirit*. Since the publication of "Voices," a couple of new poems by Charlotte have appeared in *SAIL*'s Winter 1992 anthology of new Native writing. In 1992 more than 20 new poems also appeared in an avant-garde arts journal entitled *Stiletto II: The Disinherited*. Charlotte has also been a frequent contributor to *Concepts*, a magazine published by the inmates of the Joe Harp Correctional Center in Lexington, Oklahoma. More new works of hers appeared in the *Returning the Gift* anthology co-published by University of Arizona Press and *SAIL* last Fall. Despite this published exposure, Charlotte DeClue is a relatively unknown name in the field of contemporary Native American writers. Given the range and power of her poetic voice and vision, we think her work certainly deserves wider recognition, especially among teachers looking for strong texts that present contemporary American Indian experience on distinctly Native American terms.

The Voicing in "Voices": Who Speaks, and for Whom?

As critics who were trained in the formalist school, we can't help seeing a certain initial paradox in a text like "Voices"—the same paradox that also makes it hard to talk coherently about the authorship of other Native American poems like Ortiz's "My Father's Song,"

Silko's "Toe'osh: A Laguna Coyote Story," and Tapahonso's "In 1864." On the one hand, there is a singular persona in such works: "the Poet" or (to confuse oracy with literacy for a moment) the Speaker, even if that Speaker is presumably speaking the words of others not herself. On the other hand, it is clear that this poem is designed to evoke a sense of voices—designed, that is, to privilege a polyvocal authorial identity. This paradox obtains (at least in the case of "Voices") whether the text is framed as a read text or as a heard performance. To hear DeClue read the poem is to hear a singular voice, DeClue's, claiming (through the use of the first person pronoun "I") at one point to be a post-menopausal grandmother, at another to be a man who has "many titles," and at another to be a shrewd ambidextrous adolescent. One wonders what exactly *is* the relationship between such a writer and the voices that the writer articulates.

Our sense is that, in the printed text of "Voices," as in the texts of many Native American works derived from oral tradition, a special relationship emerges between the "singular" voice of the Poet and the multiple voices which constitute the voice of the People for whom the Poet comes to speak.

In DeClue's poem "Voices," the polyvocalized identity is from the very beginning that of the Osage people. Taken together, the nine voices of the nine stanzas comprising the text serially record a transformation of Osage identity. Aligned within a specifically historical context, these voices polyvocalize an Osage version of post-Contact history emphasizing some of the major transformative events of the past 150 years. The nine "voices" come to represent the generations, connected by the thread of unfolding time and event, who have experienced the story of the People to which the poem's persona is heir. For someone who identifies as Osage, the story of the People is the backbone story of the individual.

The role of the individual Poet in all this is to provide coherence and order to this polyvocalized version of the life of the People since the time of Contact. She does this by providing at least four threads of recurring imagery that run through these nine articulated moments of the collective experience.

One of these threads has to do with the bracketing image of Spider. In stanza I, Spider appears as *tse-xo-be*, an Osage word for spider. We are told that the "doorkeepers," including the presumed grandmother whose voice this first story realizes and preserves, have the figure of *tse-xo-be* "emblazoned on [their] hands." In his 1961 book *The Osages: Children of the Middle Waters*, John Joseph Mathews says that this spider is the symbol of the "original Isolated Earth People," one of the four grand divisions of the Osage people, who call themselves "The Little Ones." According to Mathews,

Only the eldest daughter of the first-class families might have the stylized spider tattooed on the back of each hand, . . . since such tattooing was highly ceremonial and took many horses and perhaps robes or blankets to the specialist tattoo artist. . . . But some of the first-class families who had many horses or many trade gadgets could afford to have the hands of the other daughters tattooed as well, if there were not too many. (325)

He goes on to say that "the women with the spider on the backs of their hands were holy guardians of the lodges and symbols of protective motherhood. Through them the Little Ones would attain old age and create warriors who would keep the medicine strong" (326).

Eight episodes later, in the final stanza of the poem, Spider reappears. This time Spider, referred to specifically as "SHE," appears as the first in a series of five images of life in motion (in company with wind, oak, armadillo,¹ and moon). As a figure of that-which-puts-life-in-motion, Spider works in this poem (as she does in Osage traditional stories) in much the same way that the traditional Keresan creatrix and helper figure, Ts'its'tsi'nako/Spider Grandmother, does at the opening of Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* and near the center of Simon Ortiz's "To Insure Survival"; further, as in Silko and Ortiz, her existence is cast in the present tense, suggesting a kind of abiding presence. That her presence seems to get submerged after stanza I but then re-emerges in the final stanza implies that she has been in existence all along, though maybe outside or "beneath" ordinary time and the events given voice to by the human beings in the previous seven stanzas. All that has been lacking in these stanzas is a human being who had the vision to see her, there. The effect of this bracketing Spider imagery is to remind us that perhaps the now-day "doorkeepers" of the Osage include in their number the Poet, who "emblazons" (by means of a visible word in her poem rather than a visible tattoo on her hand) the image of this special helper/ally of those women responsible for sustaining the earth-surface existence of the People. If this is so, then one of the functions of the several "voices" in the poem is to provide a thread of story that connects the spirit of the pre-Contact Osage grandmother of stanza I to the figure and voice of the post-Contact Poet in stanza IX.

A second thread that provides a formal element of order and coherence to the text is composed of recurring hand imagery, in particular images of hands functioning, or failing, to communicate.² Especially when the event structure of the text is read as a record of post-Contact Osage history, hand imagery functions as a sort of poetic "sign language" that helps to accentuate the steady course of transformation encoded in the voices, from a state of empowered, articulate

self-definition to a state of powerlessness, silence, and indefinite identity.

In stanza I, we are given a voice who speaks for those whose unquestioned authority is "emblazoned on [their] hands." Their medicine is strong, apparently so strong that neither "Hawk nor standard bearer," the two symbols of Osage male leadership and authority facing west and east respectively, dares interfere with the work of these Spider women.

Beginning with stanza II, however, the strong medicine of the People, and the role of hands in sustaining that medicine, begins to diminish. The voice in stanza II still has the Touch, the traditional ability of the Osage healing person to communicate through her hand with the *we-lu-schka*, the Little Mystery People who are the invisible agents of infectious diseases. But the *we-lu-schka* who are killing the horses do not respond to the prayers of the healer, any more than the sweet poisons dispensed by the Agency will go away in Stanza III. Here we hear about some of the first negative consequences of Contact, in particular the introduction into the lives of the People of the anthrax that kills their horses, thereby beginning to immobilize the People and anticipating the epidemics of smallpox and influenza that will be equally resistant to the old medicines. We also hear that the generation who are heirs to the strong medicine of the Spider women are powerless to halt or neutralize "the way things are changing."

By stanza IV, the agents of disease become the "whites [themselves, who] grew in number / and could no longer be ignored." These whites first use *their* hands to "beat their women," but by stanza VI they are using their hands to translate their capacity for violence into Osage family circles: "They came at us / pounding their fists, / breaking us apart / like they broke open the land." Embedded in these three central stanzas of the poem, IV through VI, are allusions to many of the main policies of the U.S. during what Edward Spicer has called the historical period of "coercive assimilation" (183-90), between approximately 1860 and 1930. In stanza IV, the coming of "the Book" represents the methodical attempt to impose the state religion upon the People, including the legal principles derived from that religious tradition. In stanza V, the talk of "titles" with respect to land ownership alludes to the disruptive effects of the Allotment Acts, which in concert with unilateral state and federal definitions of "legitimacy," "solvency," and "parental competency" made it possible for outsiders to separate the People not only from the land but also from one another in most Osage communities. The breaking open of the land in stanza VI alludes to the incredible turn-of-the-century violence, both ecological and cultural, wrought by the oil industry and its players.

The cumulative effects of this invasion, disruption, and destabiliza-

tion of Osage culture over three to five generations manifest in stanza VII, which alludes to the role of Christian boarding schools in the overall attempt to extinguish Native American cultural identities, and again in stanza VIII, which brings the post-Contact story of the People into the mid-Twentieth Century and the era of the "Urban Indian." In stanza VII, the hands of the oppressors get used to "cut my hair, [make] me wear funny clothes," and to "tie down" the left arm of the school-aged speaker (for what it's worth: DeClue, who attended a Catholic mission school for some time, is also left-handed). The hand that in Stanza I bore the sign of the Spider, "holy guardian of the lodges and symbol of protective motherhood," is now labelled "the sign of the Devil." And while the speaker here compliments herself on her successful tricksterism, still now she uses her "right" hand, as required by the agents of coercive assimilation, as well as the one associated in this stanza with the "original" way. And like her sister from some prior generation in stanza III, the speaker's voice like her left hand has become "tied down," "mute": "Don't talk about it anymore," she says, "Remembering hurts."

In this text, it seems, the only thing worse than remembering—and, by extension, talking about "it"—is *not* remembering / name / nor blood" (emphasis added). That, at least, seems to be the message in stanza VIII, in which the condition of the human spirit has transformed over time and experience to a point of near stasis, of motionlessness. There is in this place "silence," a silence only barely this side of "no light," "no wind," "nor breath / left" in either the "sleeping man" or the (presumably) semiconscious woman, her vision glazed over by a "haze of gin and seconal," now-day versions of those "sweets" that made it possible for her ancestral sister to stand by and watch the horses die without anger or overt resistance. In this stanza, "no hand reaches"—except, perhaps, to answer the phone, to receive the anonymous coup-de-grâce from some "she" who offers verbal Last Rites and thereby absolves herself of any responsibility. If the hand of the voices were to continue along this trajectory, it seems, its only remaining gesture would be to finish itself what the external forces have been working towards for the past seven stanzas, and perhaps for as many generations, by putting "razor / to vein." And then there would be no more generations, no one left to tell the story.

Read diachronically, then, the series of invasive diseases and the consequent sicknesses that DeClue articulates in stanzas II through VIII present a pretty gloomy picture. Gradually and inexorably, the authority, the pride in self and immediate community, even the certainties of age and gender represented in the strong voice of the grandmother of stanza I, diminish over time and event. From this perspective, the text seems to bear out the very project of coercive

assimilation, which was always to eliminate the Otherness of Native American identity, even if that meant practicing genocide as a means to the end. Sleep and death make easy metaphors for one another, and by the end of eight stanzas the voice of a wide-awake Spider grandmother (and the strongly signed "language" in the hand gesture) has transformed into something more like anonymous interior monologue, set at night in a bedroom, delivered by one whose "name" and "blood" no longer matter to others and whose capacity to sign her identity has been immobilized by too much gin and seconal.

All this is part of the story of the text; but it is not the whole story. Beyond realized history—that is, reading the events of the texts historically, on this side of time from the voice and condition of the voice of stanza VIII, is the event represented in stanza IX. It is a curious stanza: shorter than any of the others, printed all in capital letters, opening (as the poem as a whole opens) with the image of Spider and closing with three two-word lines each ending in the word "MOON." The typographical stridency suggests that this stanza is operating formally as a sort of "wake-up" call, and indeed there is much moving in the night, in contrast or contradiction to the sense of stillness and stasis presented in the previous stanza: "spider weaves," "wind plays," "oak dances," "armadillo runs," and—clearly suggesting (re-)awakening—"moon opens her eye." It is a "quarter" moon, a "slow-eyed" moon, still perhaps a little groggy, but she is waxing rather than waning now.

Much like the final stanza of Robert Conley's "We Wait," a shorter poem that also methodically presents a Native reading of the story of Contact and its effects on Native American identity over some generations, the final stanza of "Voices," with its combination of Moon and Spider imagery, invites us to recontextualize and re-evaluate the historical trajectory of the prior stanzas. In "We Wait," Conley devotes each of four stanzas to "voicing" Contact and post-Contact history, but then in a final stanza claims that the story of Contact has *already been told*, "in all the languages." These stories, the "prophec-[ies]," cast contact history as part of a longer story that is finally about how the People manage to endure by practicing a strategy of "waiting"—waiting for the dis-easers to "go away" or self-destruct. "We Wait," in Conley's text, for the trajectory of history to run its course.

In DeClue's text, however, the story is *still being* told, and therefore the outcome of the story is less certain than in Conley's poem; further, in DeClue's text the trajectory of annihilation is that of the Osage, not the invaders, and so survival for the People depends on recontextualizing the story so as to change, rather than fulfill, the prior historical trajectory of the story. When DeClue constellates the trope of Spider work with Moon imagery in her final stanza, she conjures a

sense of cyclical seasonality rather than diachronic historicity. After all, a text that proposes a human female perspective experiencing—and enduring—*nine* phases is a text that is attuned to the pattern of human conception, gestation, and birth. Herein lies another version of that paradox we mentioned earlier: taken individually and then sequenced diachronically, these "voices" sketch a story of dying out; but taken collectively and read in the context of the webwork that holds them all together, they sing a birthsong. The "crescent moon" attending the low tide of life for the People in stanza VIII has become a "quarter moon" in the last stanza, heading back perhaps towards the fullness and clarity of voice, vision, and identity that in the beginning characterized those with "*tse-xo-be* / emblazoned on [their] hands." "Spider weaves, she does"; the Poet, in her time and way still doing the work of the Osage Doorkeepers, weaves also, with her words, in a sense working to midwife the birth of a next generation of life and vision for the People. One senses that the voice being born in the poem *will* go on to "talk about it," even if "remembering hurts," and will probably talk about it in capital letters too. We'll see.

The Source of "Voices": Where Do These Voices Come From?

To summarize the drift of the preceding line of analysis: DeClue's creative vision is embedded in contemporary (which is also to say, ongoing) Osage experience. Her poem "Voices" can serve to provide an oral historical "reading," from a distinctly Washashe perspective, of more familiar accounts of contact and its consequences, a reading that preserves the character of Osage story and tradition at the same time that it engages the dominant culture's values on more contemporary, "pan-Indian" terms.

To say that Charlotte's creative vision is embedded in the Osage experience does not tell the whole story of this poem's origins, though. We have talked about the role that the constructed persona of the Poet serves in the text; we now want to differentiate between Charlotte DeClue and the persona she constructs to do her work in this text, in order to make a point about her sources and her role in preserving the story of the People who call themselves Washashe. We need to return to the issue of the life of this text, the existence of Something that "texts"—the hand motions, the motion of sounded words, the print-text versions of such motions—are about. It is a question of authorization, both in the sense of authorship and in the sense of authority: whose poem *is* this, "originally"? To whom or what is the Poet, and by extension her spokesperson persona in this polyvocalized poem, responsible: History? Imagination? Phrased this way, the question has only one answer that Charlotte DeClue would agree with: the Poet and her poem are responsible to the somehow still living, moving voices of

those People whose lives (and voices) History, Imagination, and poems like "Voices" are "about."

Many students of contemporary Native American literature are familiar with Scott Momaday's story ("The Man Made of Words") about the time his deceased grandmother Ko-sahn visited him while he was writing the end of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. What we often miss in this story is the suggestion that Ko-sahn dreams her grandson telling her story as surely as her grandson, telling her story, dreams her. Closer to Charlotte DeClue's own text, we have the word of Joy Harjo (to whom "Voices" is dedicated), who writes in an autobiographical essay of the several worlds in which her life moves, one of those worlds being the "past" world in which her ancestors imagined her becoming. "I also know," she says, "it is only an illusion that any of the worlds are separate."

It is around midnight. . . . The world is quiet except for the sound of this typewriter humming, the sometimes dash of metallic keys, and the deep breathing of my dog who is asleep nearby. And then, in the middle of working, the world gives way and I see the old, old Creek one who comes in here and watches over me. He tries to make sense of this world in which his granddaughter has come to live. . . .

I tell him that it is writing these words down, and entering the world through the structure they make, that has allowed me to see him more clearly, and to speak. And he answers that maybe his prayers, songs, and his belief in them has allowed him to create me.

We both laugh, and continue our work through many seasons. ("Ordinary Spirit" 266)

Most non-Natives, we suspect, would regard such a conversation as a product of hallucination. Still, we can easily shrug off such events when they occur in poetry—a text is, after all, a fabrication by its very nature, and every writer must invent a persona through which to speak. The source of that persona, as well as the source of the fabricated experience of that fabricated persona, is of course the author, so some say.

The hitch here is that Joy Harjo and Charlotte DeClue, and sometimes Scott Momaday along with a host of other contemporary Native American writers, are not claiming to be the authors of the voices they write about. In effect, each of these writers is claiming that the printed text in question should rightly be read as a transcription of a conversation between herself (not a created persona, but she herself) and those whose voices she heard (not invented, but heard). This premise requires a reader to accept the being, *external* to the

author of the text, of the voices the text is "about." As Harjo puts it in another interview, "sound is spirit, motion" ("The Story" 100); one may or may not be aware of that spirit/motion but it exists nevertheless, waiting to be heard, waiting to be transcribed, waiting to take form in any and every generation. Spider waits.

Read this way, Charlotte DeClue's "Voices" takes on a new and challenging dimension of significance. It becomes a text that invites the reader to become audience to an ongoing dialogue with the very spirit of the People, a dialogue that requires us to subordinate (that is, de-authorize) diachronic and "historical" models of reality to a more inclusive synchronic one. Such a text reminds us that, for some people at least, "it is only an illusion that any of the worlds are separate" (Harjo, "Ordinary Spirit" 266), that "[f]or her there was no distinction between the individual and the racial experience" (Momaday 166). And if we hear the voices in the text, then we become as surely part of that conversation as any of its authors.

NOTES

¹The word "amarillo" in line 4 of stanza IX of the poem as printed in *SAIL* 2.2, page 5, should, according to DeClue, read "armadillo."

²In 1989, at the MLA conference held that year in Washington DC, half a dozen "younger" Native American poets read from their work at a special evening session; one of them was Charlotte DeClue. We were brand new to this field then, and it was the first time we'd heard her—in fact, it was probably the first time we'd even heard *of* her. She read several of her works—well, "read" doesn't quite say it: she performed several of her poems that evening. This performance of hers was our introduction to the concept of living poetry, to the idea that the "text" of some poems involves much, much more than the words that can be printed on a page. We're not just talking about the oral dimension of performance; part of DeClue's "text" that evening was the sign language she used to engage her audience's eyes as well as ears. Part of the articulation depended on what she was doing with her hands as well as what she was doing with her vocal chords. (Anyone who has heard, and watched, her perform her poem "Oklahoma" knows what we're talking about.) "Voices" is one of the few printed texts we know of that presents itself, even in part, as a version of hand-signed art as opposed to verbal art, a text in which "voice," the life of the text, takes the form of hands-in-motion as well as sound-in-motion. This hand(i)work—pun intended—constitutes one kind of "voicing" in, one of the languages of, the poem.

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Between Heaven and Earth: The Art of Alex Jacobs

Larry Abbott

The art of Alex Jacobs (Karoniaktatie) is concerned with the ideal and the real, what could be and what is, the transcendent and the everyday, love and death, and with what it means to be Indian, and to create an Indian self, in white society. Work, identity, relationships, dreams, community, and individuality, all inform Jacobs' poetry and painting, and indeed even in his exhibition curating, Jacobs deals with borders, personal, artistic, geopolitical, "ethnic." And as with interactions at the border, transformations occur. Jacobs told me in a conversation in 1992 that

being a Mohawk, my life deals with borders. Mohawks have always tried to demonstrate to the world that borders are meaningless. This [the Akwesasne Reservation] is Mohawk territory. It's not American or Canadian. Mohawks were here before there was an America, before there was a Canada. And so what I do in my art is throw up these borders in people's faces and have them see that most borders are meaningless. So a lot of my stuff is about that, being at the crossroads, cross-cultural conflict, dealing in borders and margins.¹

Jacobs was born in 1953 in upstate New York in Hogansburg, on the St. Lawrence River, near Massena, and is an Akwesasne Mohawk of the Turtle Clan. He studied at Manitou Community College in Quebec and at Alfred University in New York; he received his Associate in Fine Arts degree in creative writing and sculpture from the Institute of American Indian Arts in 1977, and his Bachelor of Fine Arts in the same fields from Kansas City Art Institute in 1979.

His newest collection, *Loving . . . in the Reagan Era*, is Jacobs' Beat-inspired autobiographical and societal X-ray about the 1980s. In

it he weaves personal experience with cultural critique. He writes about his work at a nuclear power plant, his children, Indians, Ronald Reagan's policies, and the true nature of the American dream. As a member of the group *Tribal Dada*, Jacobs has continued to develop his poetry performances, moving his words from the fixity of the page to the dynamics of performance.

Jacobs has been a graphic artist and was the poetry editor of *Akwasasne Notes* from 1972 to 1974, was co-editor from 1983 to 1986, and was a founder and co-editor of *Akwe:kon* from 1985-86. He has also been a DJ and music programmer at CKON, Mohawk Nation radio. In 1989 he was an artist-in-residence at the State University of New York at Potsdam. Jacobs has also curated or co-curated a variety of exhibitions, most recently *500 Years Later/Present Day Realities* (1992, Everhart Museum, Scranton, Pennsylvania), *The Two-Row Wampum: Native American Arts and Identity* (1990, Richard F. Brush Art Gallery, St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York), and *Border Art: Visions from Akwasasne* (1990, American Indian Community House, New York City, New York).

I interviewed Jacobs in his studio in Santa Fe in August, 1993, a few days after his five-round "poetry slam" exhibition bout sponsored by the Taos Poetry Society, held at the Copeland-Rutherford Gallery on Canyon Road in Santa Fe.

LA: One of the projects you've been involved in since you've been in Santa Fe is *Tribal Dada*. What is that about?

AJ: *Tribal Dada* is the name of this performance band I'm into, made up of all Santa Fe artists, mostly other Indian painters and sculptors. I first did *Tribal Dada* as a performance piece when I was at the Kansas City Art Institute. It was the first performance piece I did, so it's like the energy of that first piece carried over and I just sort of resurrected it. That was 1979, and we did it again in 1992. If anything, there's not enough movements in town, in Santa Fe, or they don't have manifestos, so *Tribal Dada* tries to define some kind of a movement in Indian art. And that means performing arts, as well as visual arts and poetry performance. So I think that's where we're trying to take it. I've always been into getting together a performance band to do poetry, and that just seems to be it. Not a touring band, but just to keep it fun and do performances wherever we can.

LA: I had the sense that music is real important to you, and that a sense of performance figures in some of your writing. Do you strive for that in your poetry?

AJ: Well, yeah, that's happened because my books are like eight or nine years apart and you're not supposed to take that long. The name

of the new collection is *Loving . . . in the Reagan Era*, and that's how long ago I expected it to be published. So I've been performing these pieces all during the Bush and Clinton administrations so far. And the response has been really good. But if I did have the new book, my performance level might not be that high. I might be selling books, but it's all relative. Without the book, I've taken it upon myself to do as many performances as I can to establish a good word of mouth. I've done readings in New York City and in front of the first major conference of Native American writers in Oklahoma in '92.

LA: You've revised and in a way updated poems from '82 and '83 for the new collection. What do you try to do in the revisions?

AJ: The times and the politics change, obviously, in ten years. So they've been updated for the performances, for the rhythm and the beat. It's just made me edit some of the phrasing out, you know, and to streamline it for more of a performance.

LA: You have a diversity of style and theme in your work. In "Lost Time in Santa Fe" from *Landscape: Old and New Poems* [Blue Cloud Quarterly Press, 1984] there's a sense of being an exile, while "Child of Mine" speaks to the continuity of community. In "Black Mesa" you "become" episodes in Native history. But a lot of your recent poems seem to have a more political edge to them than some of the earlier ones.

AJ: Some people say that life is politics and you can't separate art from politics. And other people say that to make good art, you're not supposed to overtly deal with politics; it's like, art is about art, or art for art's sake. And what I tell people is that, to me, in my art or writing, the image is important. I want to leave people with an image that wasn't inside their minds. What I'm trying to do is, rather than hitting them with a guilt stick or being overtly political or going for obscenity or shock value, put the debate into their minds. If you can just give them enough images and symbology to put the debate in their minds, you know, you don't have to give them a whole program and agenda. You just sort of set them up and if they leave muttering or chanting or remembering, then the debate is in their minds. That's what I want in my art and in my writing. If they connect, that's good. You connect, then there's a reference point. Beyond that, they start thinking about what we're thinking—the images and the symbols.

LA: Some of the pieces from April '93, called "Realisms," are like staccato blasts of phrases: "THERE ARE NO MANUALS FOR PEACE/GUNS ARE SOLD BY GOVERNMENTS/JUSTICE IS CHAOS" and "MODERATION WORKS IN EXTREMES/EXTREMES WORK IN MODERATION."

AJ: Again, it's editing. I'm learning editing. I've been at this twenty

years, as far as writing goes. And the art, pretty much the same amount of time. And it's just editing—and learning. Mohawks and Iroquois are known for narrative and epic pieces because of our old tradition and the old politics and diplomacy, and the whole great law of peace. It takes three days to read it in Mohawk, our language, and it only happens like every four years or something. So there are these traditions and rituals we go through. But over the years, I've learned to edit other people's poetry, and also mine, which is even harder than other people's. I've tried to get these messages down on one page, you know, one-liners. I've always done experimental paintings with poetry in them. I'm just reclaiming that part of my creativity where I did use text. What I was doing was creating painting poems or poem paintings.

LA: Do you feel at all that your writing, whether they be the longer poems or the short pieces, are an extension of the oral tradition?

AJ: Oh, yeah, very much, very much so. Again, getting across the image or symbology is like translating. I mean, we all may be speaking English, but the word is the thought process. There's a thought process when we talk English as Americans, and there's a thought process when we're talking as artists or as Indian to Indian. The thinking is what's important to me, especially to get the essence or the politics of what's going on with Indian people today, because that's my situation. And the more I learned about my individual identity and the deeper I became internalized in my own community, I began to think more broadly that, as you learn in your own community, you, in the end, become connected with other Indian people and other communities in other but similar situations. Even though I'm a Mohawk from the East, when I do my performances, it's the experience of what I've been thinking. These are my words. Yes, but it is also their thoughts and it is also their words. I've traveled around and what I'm doing is just taking what they taught me, in a sense, and giving back to them. People may not like these realities or truths, but that's what it is being a contemporary Indian, you know, living in the late Twentieth Century.

I was trying to get back to this whole thing about the love poems and some of the soft poems, as opposed to the harder-edged political poems. You have to have that; like I was saying, three-quarters of my material may be political but that's because, to me, that's what's important, getting the message out. When I'm in love or when I'm with my family, it's like you don't ever think about disturbing that feeling to write about it. When I get an urge or a rage to write, I just get down and get into it. So I guess the love poems and soft poems come out later on. You think back about what's important, about why

you are fighting in this political fight. And it is, you know, for the love of family. So eventually that does come out.

LA: Whereas the more political poems are more spontaneous?

AJ: Yeah, it comes through the media. Again, my art is pop culture and if I see something in the media—it can be a front page, it can be something on the back pages, a little one-paragraph thing, or it can be something that’s missing that I know should be in the paper or the TV or the radio, and I know it’s not there. You can know just as much from what is not reported in the media. I think that in my work I sometimes try to supply what’s not there.

LA: You’ve worked quite a bit in radio, and your new series of paintings is entitled *Indian Radio*. Could you describe how it came about and what you’re trying to do in those pieces, and where you see the direction of the series going?

AJ: This series *Indian Radio* comes from a previous series called *Powwow Highway*, which actually comes from a series about the river back home. I stared at the river for a long time, and I started doing these horizontal river landscapes where they’re just so striped and layered that you get lost in them. But they’re very passive, very contemplative, I feel. In my desire to get to Santa Fe, and get involved in what’s happening in Indian art here, all of a sudden I turned that whole thing around and started to go into the landscape, get on the highway and head into the landscape. So now they became a powwow highway. Santa Fe is known for being a crossroads. Before the Anglos and Spanish were here, it was a crossroads. Then it became a crossroads for the Spanish and it’s a crossroads now for the Anglos and the New Agers. Now we’re hitting deep into the landscape and these symbols and images that you find on the road, on the highways, the signs and all that, you’re absorbing them, you’re part of that, hitting into the landscape. And in the movie *Powwow Highway*, there are two Indians in a car heading down the highway, heading for Santa Fe, which is a city on fire. And it’s about expectations, too. But inside that car, there’s an Indian radio. The *Powwow Highway* paintings are big. The river paintings are big, because there were a lot of images and symbols to deal with. But *Indian Radio*, it was a little bit hard for people to read so I took the radio out of the car and enlarged it. And sometimes the *Indian Radio* was very political, like after Columbus, before Columbus, naming off dates like 1680, the Pueblo Revolt; 1776, the American Revolution; a hundred years later, 1876, Custer’s Last Stand, Little Bighorn; 1890, Wounded Knee One; 1973, Wounded Knee Two; 1990, Oka, with the Mohawks; and in 1992, the 500th anniversary. And the more I do *Indian Radio*, I think I’ll be adding

more dates in Indian history that affect who we are as contemporary Indians today.

LA: You also have text in these paintings.

AJ: The words are trying to make you see Indian radio, or trying to translate what you hear or what you should be hearing on Indian radio. The first couple of *Indian Radio* pieces were very political, but I started down-scaling them. I also wanted to sell the pieces to get the message out as well, you know, but still containing a good message. But just like you're listening to the radio, it can't be political all the time. So there's a softer message in the text I'm using with them now.

LA: Just to talk about your background and training a little. You started out more as a writer than a visual artist, and came to the institute in Santa Fe for your associate's degree in creative writing and sculpture [1975-77]. Then you went on to the Kansas City Art Institute for the BFA in the same areas [1977-79]. What do you see as the connection between your verbal and visual selves? How do the two reflect one another?

AJ: Well, I think I can trace back my art to when I was 14 and 15, and I started drawing and painting. And then I started writing as well. Again, music meant a lot to me. I was doing songs and poems. When I went away to school, I had a dual major in creative writing and sculpture. It was funny because, although I did painting and drawing, I didn't feel I had to go to school to learn painting because I wasn't into the whole painterly idea of being a painter, you know? I love Kandinski and I understand Hans Hoffman, but that's not what I'm doing as a painter. I'm making images from Indian culture, from contemporary Indian life. So, to me, I didn't make that connection, that studying painting is gonna help me do this or that. I wanted to study so I ended up doing more 3-D—ceramics and sculpture. In Santa Fe, there was this thing about materials that you should be carving, like wood or stone, or doing bronze casting. When I got to Kansas City, reggae turned into punk, and things were goin' on and multi-media was happening. And that's where I learned that sculpture isn't necessarily just a physical 3-D piece. If it's not 2-D, hanging on a wall, it can be sculpture. It can be sound sculpture. It can be video performance. So that's actually why to some people it may be odd to say, "You're a poet and a writer and a sculptor or carver," but to me it's the multi-media performance and the sculpture that ties in with the creative writing.

LA: You've also curated a number of shows lately, including "Visions from Akwesasne" [American Indian Community House, New York City, New York, 1990] and "Five Hundred Years Later/Present Day

Realities" for the Everhart Museum [Scranton, Pennsylvania, 1992]. As a curator, what do you see linking the diversity of contemporary Native art?

AJ: The first ones I curated were my concept of border art. And that's just because the Mohawk people are right on the border in New York and Canada. So it takes off from that—New York, Canada—the physical border. There's also the border of traditional or Christian or longhouse, or traditional or progressive Christian. There's the border or marginal art that American Indian art is supposed to be. It's on the margins or the borders of what's accepted as art or contemporary art. So there's a lot of that going on—the physical and the spiritual and emotional, those are all the Indian concerns, as well as the relationship of Indian art with contemporary art. I curated some 1992 shows. We concentrated on the present-day realities 500 years later. So I felt that the pieces in the show—some of them were very political—didn't have to concentrate on Columbus. We tried to get to the real issues. Like every time there's a protest, people forget that the protest is about the land, but the stories that come out are about who did what to whom, you know, with their guns or arrests and stuff like that. So the debate is always about the debate. And it's not about what we fought it for in the first place. So rather than getting into guilt-bashing about Columbus and all that, we talked about what's going on now, and that includes politics, but it also includes humor and Indian pop culture. And as artists, when we push images and push politics, we can sometimes resemble the caricatures and stereotypes. But that's part of the whole irony of satire and humor.

LA: Satire and irony are very pronounced in your writing and painting, and go back to felt-tip works on paper like *Americana Self Portrait* and *Americanus Corruptus* [each 1981]. Could you talk about those two works?

AJ: They're both self-portraits. What's interesting is that this particular series was made with Crayola felt-tip markers. At the time I was teaching kids art and poetry. The kids really loved the idea that what I was doing was storytelling—using images and words but using their materials. There was also a sort of a vision happening, in that I stared at the river quite a bit. I was actually in the house that I depicted and I was in between jobs, as it were, and I got a chance to get into my art. I just stared at the river; I stared at everything, until these visions came. The vision was the same thing that I was looking at but the vision was also the connection being made—the connections being made among the river and the house and the person and the media. There's an image on the wall, the memory, and there's the TV that's supposed to be reality, but isn't. What *is* real? For about two

weeks, every day or two, another image, another picture, came out. I just kept doing them and doing them, and after the two weeks I had a couple dozen.

Any artist can relate to what I just said about how they're inspired or motivated, but an Indian artist can also get the feeling of why these connections were made and why the final image looks the way it does. I'm an image maker, whether it's painting or markers or words or video or anything else; it's the image, it's the message, it's the story. It's how you're connected to your culture, your history, your people.

LA: Your 1988 piece *Jake Sunshine by the River* also uses markers. You've called these landscape pieces "psychotic landscapes."

AJ: Well, like those rivers, the vision I had was of the colors and the striping, but it's all very passive, the way the river is. But the more I stared at the river and tried to make connections the more I knew that the pollution was out there. So, on the one hand, you have this passive landscape, passive scenery, and the passive stripes in the work. In other words, we're standing on the first stripe and every stripe is going into the distance, layer after layer.

But somewhere in there you have to make your commentary, like the beautiful sunsets after a nuclear test. It has to do with the concept of horizon between heaven and earth . . . that's my Mohawk name, Karoniaktatie. But within those layers you bring out the hidden messages—the pollution, the social problems, the political problems, the nuclear sunset.

LA: I notice in some of the poems you have a deliberate sense of reversal, of sending the nuclear sunset back to who made it. In *Loving . . . in the Reagan Era*, you write:

When I think about making art, now, back home, in all the territories . . .

we should make art, made up of all the poisons and sell it

back . . .

we should not tell them it is poison made up of bad dreams

. . .

we should say they are good dreams, american dreams . . .

and american dreams are all for sale . . .

AJ: Well, first of all, sometimes when I get into discussions and try to explain my work I say things that maybe I should have thought through. I don't mean to talk about Indians and whites and whites and

Indians, but that's what we're faced with. You're a human being, I'm a human being. But we have to relate to each other as enemies, in a sense, as an Indian and a white. When I talk about this, you might not understand it, but it's like, don't take it personally, it's business, because this is America. But people come back and say, "Well, gee, I took that personally." We get told, it's just the "Indian business." Don't take it personally that we tried to kill you off. It's only history. Don't take the tomahawk chop seriously, it's just a symbol. We get that all the time. Yet when we throw it back . . .

We're in the process of reversing people's thinking, or trying to do that, trying to rewrite history, which is not a bad thing. History is nothing but a pile of someone's thinking and if that thinking is wrong, it has to be changed. That's what stereotyping and racism are all about.

LA: For a show you curated with Catherine Smith, *Integration and Differentiation: Living Native American Expression* [St. Lawrence University, Canton, New York, 1990], you wrote:

Like a vessel holding water, the contact era broke open that vessel, and we have been changed ever since. There have been new vessels and new water poured . . . that is what art and culture and adaptability are all about. But what happened that first time—where is that first mystery, that first song of the first people, the breath of the first grandfathers and grandmothers, the cry of the first child? That is what true Indian art is all about.

Can you say some more about what true Indian art is all about in the mid-1990s?

AJ: We can be arguing for years about what Indian art is supposed to be. I mean, you get Indians saying, "Well, I'm an artist first and an Indian next." And sometimes that works, yet if you think about it, how can you be an artist and be an Indian and not have the two mean just as much to you? That may be commercialism when people say that. There's Indian art done by non-Indians about Indians. Then is it the subject matter? And then there's stuff called non-objective Indian art. And non-Indian artists who have become identified with Indian art, when they go off doing their other things, somehow they're still included. So I guess what Indian art is about, and maybe what *Tribal Dada* is about, is trying to present Indian thinking, Indian concepts, the conceptual thinking behind what you're doing. Museums and galleries can have art or artifacts hanging on the walls and people come in there and love it. And they try to imagine where it comes from. If you're a good audience, that's what you should do. Well, Indian people, when they go into galleries and museums—especially museums—they

see or they feel a connection immediately and it's like, that piece is all alone—it's very lonesome by itself and it's begging for contact. It's begging for a relationship. So, in a sense, what we're saying is that Indian art is not something out of a past or history that's cut off from the present. That's what Indians are saying, that if you cut art off from a relationship with people, it becomes profane. The sacredness was in making the object that was part of the whole village and community.

LA: So contemporary artworks can maintain that connection?

AJ: They can maintain that, but, again, they are also contemporary. What I loved about working with Rick Hill in Santa Fe at the Institute of American Indian Arts and that first show, which I'm included in, *Creativity is Our Tradition* [the 1992 inaugural exhibition at the Institute museum], is that creativity is adaptability, that culture continues and that we can't be stuck in the past. That's what the whole debate over contemporary and traditional art is about. Yet people that carve stone or people that paint in oils, is that traditional? I mean, you can say you carve with hand tools and be more traditional than somebody that carves with power tools, yet it's still not traditional. And the same thing with painting; you paint in a traditional way even with modern materials. You're using the same materials as the so-called mainstream artists, but the subject matter or the politics are something they don't want to deal with. It's too contemporary, and contemporary life is a bitch.

So our salvation is to go back to Indian thinking, and doing art and writing poetry or whatever—you're working through it. You're investigating your culture.

LA: What do you see happening in Native writing today?

AJ: We're taking contemporary language from the rez and off the street. But if you use it too much it becomes didactic and it becomes a cliché, but still the energy is there. So, "what's next?" I think that there are very traditional writers thinking in their language and writing it down in English, and eventually that's where we're gonna end up, rather than with the newest street sensation. The more you find out about Indian writing, the deeper you get. Luci Tapahonso has traditional thinking and even the traditional dialect. Yet it's very contemporary; very modern. It's not off the street but it's off the rez.

So we detail our experiences like other poets and writers do, but the more we learn about ourselves, we also learn the feelings and emotions of other Indian people who teach us. So even though we end up writing about our experiences at a powwow, that relates to other Indians across the country and their feelings at powwows, too. There's a great young writer, Sherman Alexie, a Spokane/Coeur d'Alene, just

getting a lot of press [Alexie's most recent works are *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, 1993, and *Reservation Blues*, 1995]. He's doing now what I started doing in the '70s, in terms of the energy.

LA: Are younger people being taught writing?

AJ: Some Mohawk teachers said to me, "We're trying to teach poetry to Mohawk children but we're having a hard time." I asked to look at the poetry and they were teaching Shakespeare. How can you translate? It's difficult enough translating English into an Indian language, but you're also trying to translate the feeling and meaning of poetry in English rhythm and all that, too. So it's like, forget that; the poetry you want is to get deeper into your own language and thinking. To me, that's what needs to be done if in the end you want Indian children writing creatively.

NOTE

¹Unless otherwise indicated all statements by Jacobs were from my conversations with him in 1992 and 1993.

[AD]

Discovering the Order and Structure of Things: A Conversive Approach to Contemporary Navajo Poetry

Susan B. Brill

Contemporary literary analysis provides a range of theories and methods by which critics can interpret, analyze, and evaluate diverse texts. Notwithstanding the plethora of critical approaches in current use, the oppositional linearity upon which these methods and theories are based indicates potential problems in their actual applications towards the literary works of a number of Native authors. It is true that particular strategies have proven more useful than others in critical readings of Native American literatures. The new historicism and cultural criticisms have critiqued earlier methods by which peoples and their histories and literatures have been ignored, marginalized, or even erased from scholarly analysis. Feminist criticism has directed attention to particular Native American literatures and worldviews insofar as they evidence varying degrees of matrifocality which are seen as important contrasts to the predominant phallogentricity of most non-Native cultures. And Bakhtinian informed criticisms have applied notions of dialogism and heteroglossia in explications of the oppositional vocality evident in much contemporary Native writing. However, regardless of the well-intentioned efforts of critics, critical strategies turned towards Native American literatures have all too often distorted or silenced the Native voices within and behind the literatures they intend to illuminate.

Critical methods perpetuate the institutionalization of Native peoples' silence in two serious ways. The first is through a critical privileging that gives precedence to the voice of the critics at the expense of the objectified Native voices present in the literature. To avoid this problem, a conversive critical strategy can enable the critic to work in concert, rather than in competition, with the voices of Native peoples and literatures. In noting this sort of difficulty, Elaine Jahner writes, "Critics need to be aware that conventional approaches

and vocabulary are as likely to obscure as to illuminate the ways in which a specific tribal tradition can provide a writer with a set of optional approaches to the form and content of original creative work" ("Critical Approach" 212). This necessitates that critics develop new strategies of literary analysis that will enable critical voices to intermingle with the voices in and of Indian literatures—thereby yielding criticism that is more informed by the voices of the literary works themselves than by the critical voices of scholars.

Arnold Krupat writes, "the Euramerican attempt to think a Native American 'literature' has always been marked by the problem of Identity and Difference, a problem that—as we shall see—marks as well the attempt to develop a written criticism of this 'literature'" ("Identity" 3). Krupat concludes that the substantial differences between critical and Native voices are unavoidable in our critical readings: "While we cannot avoid the explanatory categories of western culture, we can at least be aware of them and beware of them as we approach the 'literature' of other cultures" ("Identity" 10). This paper provides an explicit introduction to the development of a conversive strategy—namely a critical method (as distinct from a critical theory) that is explicitly informed by the voices of those literary texts the method intends to elucidate. Such a conversive and consultative critical strategy provides a new critical method particularly appropriate to the understanding, interpretation, and evaluation of Indian literatures—and insofar as this article is concerned, specifically for the reading of Navajo poetry.

The second way in which Native voices are silenced by contemporary criticism is in the imposition of critical strategies and theoretical approaches that force particular readings upon texts regardless of whether the particular critical orientation is appropriate for the specific text.¹ The underlying grammatical problem (using the term "grammatical" in the Wittgensteinian sense of language game rules) for such endeavors is that both modern and postmodern criticisms are based upon models of linear oppositionality. From the New Critical clashes of opposites reconciled in an eventual forced "harmony" to Marxist informed criticisms that posited the dialectical class struggles of society as manifested in literary works, the modern period explicitly sought in literature the oppositional linearity that modernists erroneously assumed and that we now understand to have been the spurious and problematic assertions of an earlier critical absolutism. As scholars and readers of American Indian literatures know all too well, all literary texts do not manifest the oppositional struggles posited by Western critical strategies—a condition that has functioned to ignore and accordingly devalue those texts that do not fit critical demands. Here I would like to note that American Indian literatures garnered scant attention by literary

critics until a number of Native writers of *mestiza/o* background produced literatures more accessible to Western critical strategies than had been the earlier narratives, stories, chants, and prayers from the oral traditions, which had been available to critics for generations.² As Carol Hunter notes, "Contemporary Indian fiction, the novel and poetry, is perhaps more popular among a general audience. It appears to some readers less complex because it conforms with contemporary literary forms and conventions" (84). Of course, the ease with which many readers and critics approach such literary works obscures the actual complexity within those texts.

Postmodern criticisms and theories have attempted to remedy some of the problematic exclusionary effects of modern criticism by offering methods that expand the literary canon through the acknowledgement and privileging of literatures by women, working class, and ethnically diverse writers. Foucault and Lacan pushed the boundaries of earlier historical and psychoanalytic interpretations of texts and of the world and shifted the notion of dialectical class struggles to the more individualized emphasis on discursive analyses that demonstrate the objectification of those individuals denied full subjectivity within the world and within texts. Such analyses also described the processes by which individuals move from subaltern positions of objectivity and into subjective placement. But both dialectical and discursive approaches are based upon a linear oppositionality that assumes inclusion necessarily at the expense of exclusion. Subjectivity, within a linear division, demands a concomitant object against which one's subjectivity is defined. Jeannie Ludlow explains that within a discursive framework, "subjectivity is defined as a (series of) position(s) into and out of which a subject can move, . . . [therefore] a critic should be able to move into and out of subjectivity in order to provide a space within the criticism for the subjectivity of the poet(s)" (26-27). While such a jockeying for and from position can make critical room for Native voices, it does not facilitate the sort of relational conversivity that is evident within the practice of storytelling and which this essay argues and demonstrates is possible within the practice of criticism.

Insofar as the recognition of multiple and diverse subjectivities is concerned, Mikhail Bakhtin's work moved narrative theory further by emphasizing the dialogic heteroglossia extant in human discourse and in the range of discursive structures evident within prose fiction; however, even the greater inclusivity of diverse voices within a Bakhtinian interpretive framework is nevertheless based upon the oppositional linearity inherent to discursive structures. As David L. Moore points out, "dialogic survival, unlike dialectic synthesis, maintains difference within the dynamics of opposition" (17). While the points of opposition are more numerous and more diverse, thereby

insuring the inclusion of more and diverse voices, this inclusion is still at the expense of those voices seen to be silent, less significant, or absent—still largely the case for Native American voices (literary and lived). Moore is quite correct in noting that "a dialogic moves toward relationality" (18). Bakhtin's work does move us closer to the relational intersubjectivity achievable through a conversive critical method.

Other Native critics have responded to the possibilities within postmodern criticisms for reading Native American literatures. While Gerald Vizenor hails the arrival of postmodernity, seeing it as a fitting critical position for contemporary mixed-blood trickster writers whom he refers to as "postindian warriors of survivance," Louis Owens points out significant distinctions between a postmodern agenda and the aims of Native writers:

Ultimately, whereas postmodernism celebrates the fragmentation and chaos of experience, literature by Native American authors tends to seek transcendence of such ephemerality and the recovery of "eternal and immutable" elements represented by a spiritual tradition that escapes historical fixation, that places humanity within a carefully, cyclically ordered cosmos and gives humankind irreducible responsibility for the maintenance of that delicate equilibrium. (20)

Owens' point is well taken, even though a number of contemporary Native writers such as Gerald Vizenor have experimented with avant-garde postmodern literary styles and aims in order to convey their own mixed backgrounds and multiplicitous perspectives. Vizenor's recent volume, *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*, ostensibly postmodern and poststructural, nevertheless demonstrates conversive literary structures in his fluid movements between creative fiction, literary essay, and literary criticism. Throughout the work, diverse voices are interwoven (sometimes comfortably; at other times startlingly, and thereby effectively) in a remarkable postindian trickster discourse.

In a discussion of philosophical method, Ludwig Wittgenstein writes, "In philosophy it is not enough to learn in every case, *what* is to be said about a subject, but also *how* one must speak about it" (*Remarks on Colour* 23e). In other words, rather than focusing on the content of our analyses, often the problem is more deeply rooted within our methods of analysis. Wittgenstein goes on to point out, "One must always be prepared to learn something *totally* new" (23e). In this essay, I provide a brief introduction to a categorically new critical approach that illuminates conversive literary structures in texts and applies a conversive literary critical method. The notion of conver-

sivity emphasizes both the orality of Native American Indian literatures (and which I believe is a part of all literatures, albeit to varying degrees) and the transformative power of language (in the very real sense of conversion, change, a turning from and towards). What is notably new here is that this method is developed through a conversation with the Native texts and traditions themselves. The development and the practice of this method is inherently consultative in that its origins are to be found in a conjoint effort of Western and Native voices—not the forced imposition of Western critical strategies upon Native literatures. The method is directly informed by the method and practice of the oral storytelling tradition.

Points of emphasis include: (1) an intersubjective relationality that privileges relationality and thereby problematizes the self-focused individual, (2) the realization that signs and objects are not divorced from one another (or in other words, a recognition of the presence of signifying objects and objective signifiers), (3) the recognition of subjects and objects in relation to various centering forces (a fact that shifts geometric descriptions away from Euclidean linearity, as in the case of semiotic triangles, and towards non-Euclidean elliptic geometries), (4) the written as an extension of the oral (with varying degrees of orality or conversiveness reflected in any [Native or non-Native] text), (5) the very real transformative power of conversivity, (6) the recognition of individuality and that significance as manifested in varying degrees of relationality, (7) authorial presence asserted through an intentional marginalization that emphasizes the center and privileges self in relation to that center, and (8) the presence and importance of a participatory [audience]—placed in brackets by virtue of the listeners' /readers' active participation.

The necessary brevity of an article necessitates that each of these descriptive elements of a conversive method cannot be discussed in length. Instead, the remainder of this essay will demonstrate the ways in which literary critics can move to work with texts through a conversive method that shifts the critic away from a critical hegemony over literary texts and toward the humbler role of a guide who enables other readers to find their ways to, into, and within the literatures discussed.³ The literary critic serves very much the same role as a storyteller who relates a story which s/he feels is significant for her or his audience. With each telling, the story changes to maintain its significance for the listener(s). Certain basics, however, do not change. This could be described through Wittgenstein's language game image in which fundamental grammatical rules cannot be changed without altering the game itself; however, on the surface level of play, one can move quite freely and flexibly (albeit within the bounds of the base rules). Insofar as literary criticism is concerned, what this

signifies is that one does not alter the essential story, the literature, one does not lie about the text, but rather one must tell the story accurately, honestly and completely. But how we tell that critical story can take many forms based on our audiences, our intentions behind telling our critical stories, and our own interactions with the literatures (interactions that reflect our intersubjective relations with the voices and subjects of the texts).

The conversiveness of Native texts reflects the oral traditions of the writers' particular tribal backgrounds. Anna Lee Walters points out that "the points of reference in oral tradition from which [Navajo writers write] . . . are not recently contrived inventions or devices incorporated into the works here simply for literary purposes or effects" (viii). An example Walters notes is from Della Frank's poem "T'aa Diné Nishli." While a literal translation of the title and ending line of the poem would read, "I am Navajo," the English translation cannot even begin to convey the depth and history signified in the Navajo statement, "T'aa Diné nishli." First of all, the prioritized subjectivity in the English sentence that begins with the first person referent "I" is absent in the Navajo sentence. Rather than first emphasizing herself and then describing herself in terms of her tribal affiliation, Frank's Navajo sentence emphasizes the reality of the tribe and *then* identifies her in terms of the tribe. Within the Navajo sentence, there is no independent first person singular pronoun that refers to the speaker. The reality of the speaker of the sentence is contingent upon her relationship to the tribe, the "sh" first person marker being evident only within the connective relationship noted in the verb. Even in this simple, yet profound, statement, we see the conversive interaction between individual and tribe—the individual speaking her reality as a Navajo, yet that very speech being informed by the reality of the tribe, a reality that in turn is realized and informed through Frank's utterance and inscription. Elaine Jahner comments on this intertwining of individual and tribe, "most of [today's Native American] writers have established and depend on an especially close relation between the writer, the work, and the traditional community—a relation that determines the contextual semantics of the work and therefore shapes the author's options regarding text structure" ("Indian Literature" 7).

A closer look at several poems by Navajo women writers will demonstrate how they convey within the bounds of the English language (at times switching to the Navajo language where there is no adequate English equivalent) their own worldviews and realities. These writers do not present their perspectives to their readers as outsiders reading and critiquing the poems as poetic objects. Instead, through a conversive engagement between and across events, times, and persons

(including the writers of the poems, the persons in the poems, and the readers of the poems), these writers invite their readers into the Navajo worlds of their poems much as a friend would be invited into one's home. And the conversive reading of these poems involves a responsibility on the part of the reader much as any person would have certain responsibilities as a guest in someone else's home (and analogously as the listener of a story would have responsibilities as a participant in a storytelling event).

Conversive structures are evident not only within literary texts. Conversive structural relationships also exist between the different literary works of one writer, between a literary text and its writer, audience, and/or critic, and between different writers and their literary texts. This last conversive relationship can be seen through a pairing of Nia Francisco's poem "Naabeeho Women with Blue Horses" and Luci Tapahonso's poem "Blue Horses Rush In." Tapahonso and Francisco grew up together in Shiprock, New Mexico and were friends. They are both familiar with each other's work, and it was Tapahonso who gave the introduction for Francisco when she gave a reading of her poetry at the University of New Mexico in 1988. But regardless of the interpersonal history of Tapahonso and Francisco, the interliterary historicity of their writing is evident within the conversive structures of these two poems. Francisco's poem is the earlier of the two, having appeared in her 1988 volume, *Blue Horses for Navajo Women*.

In the poem, "Naabeeho Women with Blue Horses" (27-29), the image and reality of blue horses are inextricably linked to the capacity of Navajo women to successfully traverse the changes of the world and of their own lives. As Francisco writes, "Devotees of Holy Ones [say] . . . that we Naabeeho women with blue horses must be ready / for the great storms to pass thru our lives during our middle ages / . . . to be the protectors of the younger generations." The blue horses signify the Navajo women's connection with the sacred, their connection with older ways ("the great secret of old women / medicinal ways of knowing") as a means of preparing and empowering them to live in the present and into the future worlds. The second stanza of the poem focuses on the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual destruction of alcohol. Francisco immediately responds to this stanza with a direct question to other Navajo women and to herself (and, as well, directly to her readers) as she asks, "Are we preparing? getting decorated dressing up young Naabeeho women / for the passing of age no one warned us of . . ." And as in the oral tradition of storytelling, Francisco's question invites her reader into an imagined listener's vocalized response, "Yes, yes," "Ah yaa ah." Here we see not only Francisco's openly engaging conversive style that speaks directly to her

reader, but further, in the open-ended and inclusive first-person plural pronoun "we," Francisco graciously includes her readers with herself and with other Navajo women—not in the sense that a non-Navajo or male reader can read herself or himself into the category "Navajo women," but in the sense that Francisco offers and expects the same responsibility for the future and for future generations—not only of herself and other Navajo women, but also of any reader of this poem. As Leslie Silko reminds us, it is not an omniscient storyteller-narrator who relates the story, but rather the storyteller who serves "to draw the story out of the listeners" or, in a written domain, the readers (57).

The fourth stanza continues the conversive structure of the poem in its direct parallel with the previous stanza's beginning query: "Are we preparing?" The fourth stanza begins, "Must we talk about our tasks or our fastings. . . ." Here, the poem, as in the earlier stanza, responds and converses with itself, with Francisco, with the reader: "let's talk about the tiny piñon nuts [mythically and historically significant for the Navajo with important roles in a number of stories] . . . tell our stories until White Dawn yellow corn meal for female / white corn meal for male in prayer." Traditional oral stories and ceremony conversively engage with the complexities of contemporary poetry and the real world concerns of alcoholism, sexual relationships, Indian religious conflicts with Christian doctrine, and the changing needs of the younger generations. For Francisco, the changes of the world need not be seen in an inevitably discursive, or at the least an unharmonious, relationship. The difficulties and complexities of the world are one-half of a reality that necessarily involves both good *and* evil, both health and disease. The balance of these elements, like the balance between day and night, is crucial to the functioning of societies, peoples, and persons. Francisco notes the non-Navajo oppositionality in her contrast between "fleshy desires or christian woes." But "Naabeeho women with blue horses," women who straddle worlds and who work to conversively interweave those worlds through telling their stories, are those who sleep a "sleep that rested."

Throughout the final stanza, Francisco conversively interweaves these worlds, referring to the mythical and traditional blue horses in the first line, then referring to a woman birthing a new life (her own or that of her child or both)—an image and reality that equally apply to all time (knitting past, present, and future together through a reference that also points to mythic births and mother figures). The third line of this stanza refers to "every woman who selfishly took from her lover's hand . . ."; the reference and diction ("lover's") plant us firmly in the present, but this clause is conversively continued in the subsequent and final line that clarifies that what is taken from the lover's hand is a "brand new / turquoise necklace." In the poem's ending, we've come

full circle, with the traditional and mythical significance of turquoise interwoven with a contemporary (and/or mythical) lover and his necklace—an image and story that equally applies today, yesterday, and tomorrow. And in the woman's desire for the turquoise necklace, we see her misplaced longing for the turquoise or blue horses of myth transferred to the materiality of a necklace—the necklace serving as the divorced object of her desire and the sign of her discursive longing for subjective status in relation to the objectified turquoise. While it is not clear that the woman locates her desire for the necklace within the realm of myth, Francisco, however, does so for her readers by conversively intertwining the material desire with the larger and more profound lack of blue horses.

Francisco's conversive tone and structure make it clear that the domain of the sacred which is foundational to the traditional and everyday empowerment of the Navajo (and, insofar as the Navajo are concerned, of any human being) is as real and concrete as a turquoise necklace and blue horses. And as one would expect in a conversational style, the ending is not the linear conclusion of a narrative that begins with a title and first line and extends directly towards its concluding statement or image. Instead the last line of this poem continually points beyond its literary boundaries to a reality and worldview that posits the essential connections between the future and past, both of which necessarily inform the present, and which, for the Navajo, are as real as the present is for Western linear narratives. The poem circles back on itself, showing us the nonlinearity, holism, and welcoming inclusivity of Francisco's Navajo worldview.

Tapahonso's poem, "Blue Horses Rush In," the first poem in her recent volume *Sáanii Dahataal: The Women Are Singing*, demonstrates this conversive style in her poem's continuation of the themes, images, and hopes raised in Francisco's poem and in other nonliterary oral stories. Both Tapahonso and Francisco emphasize the interwoven images of blue horses and women: Francisco in entitling her book *Blue Horses for Navajo Women*, and Tapahonso in beginning her book of singing women with the poem "Blue Horses Rush In" (1-2). The poem is dedicated to a very young Navajo woman, "Chamisa Bah Edmo who was born March 6, 1991." Throughout the poem, the image of "horses running: / the thundering of hooves on the desert floor" represents the power and strength of women as they travel through their lives. The "thundering of hooves" and the "sound of horses running" are the prenatal sounds of the little girl's "heart pound[ing] quickly" as "she moved and pushed inside her mother." In a discussion of the conflict between "Christianity and tribal religious practices," Kimberly M. Blaeser points out that Native writers "appropriate" Western practices, thereby "investing [them] with a new interpretation" (13, 14). While

I do not believe that the term "appropriate" conveys the adaptive *and*, at times, welcoming conversive realities of Native transformations of Western traditions, the interpretive newness of the Native semiotics Blaeser alludes to is paramount. We see this sort of transformation as Tapahonso takes the mechanical sounds of a fetal monitor and transforms the sounds into the "thundering of hooves" heralding the arrival of Chamisa Bah Edmo into this world—the world of a hospital room transformed into a world of mythic significance.

The "thundering of hooves," immediately followed by the lines, "Her mother clenched her fists and gasped. / She moans ageless pain and pushes: This is it!," also emphasize that the image of blue horses also represents the power and strength of the mother birthing her baby. The reference to her pain as "ageless" communicates to the reader that this pain is real *and* mythic—a conjunction that serves to underscore the profound significance of her pain, her strength as she pushes through pain, and her/their success, mother, baby daughter, family, tribal community. Tapahonso's conversive style shares this success and joy with her readers. Leslie Silko points out that in storytelling, there is a "kind of shared experience [that] grows out of a strong community base" (57). While the community base within the Navajo tribal community is understandable, storyteller-poets like Luci Tapahonso speak and write to a broader audience, with no less commitment to the storytellers' responsibilities towards their readers' accessibility in/to their poems and stories. As the mother pushes, we read, "This is it!," as the excitement of success is communicated by Tapahonso and directly shared with us all.

In the next stanza, "Chamisa slips out, glistening wet and takes her first breath." This first breath, for the Navajo, signifies the beginnings of her spirit in this world, entering the baby as she inhales for the first time. Tapahonso shares this very personal and sacred experience with her readers in the conversive style of a sharing between friends:

Her father's eyes are wet with gratitude.
He prays and watches both mother and baby—stunned.

This baby arrived amid a herd of horses,
horses of different colors.

Tapahonso shares with her readers a father's tears, concerns, and thanks, and also his responsibilities to his wife and daughter as he prays—assisting and watching Chamisa's arrival into this world. This "herd of horses, / horses of different colors" represents the power of all the individuals involved, including the good wishes of family and friends. The different colors point to the different directions, and each color is connected with a particular gender. East and yellow represent woman (as evidenced in Francisco's poem, "yellow corn meal for female");

west and white represent man ("white corn meal for male in prayer"). In Tapahonso's poem, we see the father in prayer, read about different horses "thundering" assistance (mechanical, medical, human, familial, mythic, sacred) for the birth. From the father and other men, "White horses ride in on the breath of the wind"—this breath that brings life and spirit to Chamisa.

Tapahonso tells us that horses arrive from each of the four sacred directions, demonstrating the wholeness and sacredness of this birth—a sacredness that is the domain of any birth, but here we see the circle complete with horses arriving from each direction. Each of the directions represents one gender. South and the color blue represent the female: "Blue horses rush in, snorting from the desert in the south. / . . . Bah, from here your grandmothers went to war long ago." Nia Francisco asks in her poem, "Are we preparing?" Tapahonso answers Francisco's question in this poem in which we see the preparations and tasks performed for the baby's first change of life in this world; we hear the baby's pounding heart, her mother's moans and father's prayers; we watch their efforts to insure the strength of Chamisa's beginning. After describing the arrival of the horses from each direction, Tapahonso ends the poem:

Chamisa, Chamisa Bah. It is all this that you are.

You will grow: laughing, crying,
and we will celebrate each change you live.

You will grow strong like the horses of your past.

You will grow strong like the horses of your birth.

And this strength that is and will be Chamisa's comes not only from the efforts of those in her present world, but also from those who came before, her "grandmothers [who] went to war long ago"—the blue horses of her past, those "Naabeeho women with blue horses." The conversation of life continues across generations and even beyond temporality and into the domain of myth where real historical grandmothers rode mythical blue horses through the journeys of their long lives.

Gertrude Walters notes in her short poem "Shimásání (Grandmother)": "Shimásání, you have traveled a long way— . . . Giving / Love / Protection / Understanding" (Anna Lee Walters 110). And these long travels, carried by the blue horses of myth, faith, and lived history are those which serve to guide and protect the younger and future generations: "Shimásání, . . . / Here I sit / Watching you / . . . / Trying hard to taste your life / Shimásání. . . ." Walters' poem joins the continuing intergenerational conversation of Navajo women explicitly framed in the form of a granddaughter's direct address to her grandmother. While the conversive structures of American Indian, and

in this case Navajo, poetry need not take the overt forms of a second person direct address, in "Shimásání" this is the case. The reader is "other" to this poem, overhearing the granddaughter's words (or thoughts) directed to her grandmother and to herself, but shared with the reader, much as a private and personal conversation might be shared with a friend, relative, or trusted acquaintance who happens to be present. Thereby, Walters invites her reader to identify with her and the granddaughter of the poem in their love of, respect for, and gratefulness to *bimásání* (their grandmother).

The poem begins and ends with the same line, "Shimásání, you have traveled a long way—." The dashes that end each of these lines provide a longer pause, much as the storyteller pauses on occasion to allow time for the listeners' responses (vocalized and silent). In an analysis of the interactive aspects of the storytelling process, Susan Pierce Lamb writes, "The interaction between teller and listener is simultaneous, thus reliant on right brain processing" (15). Through the openness and inclusivity of Walters' conversive style, the reader joins the granddaughter in "Trying hard to taste" the long life of "Shimásání." Of course, if the reader happens to be an old woman, then the poem is, as well, conversively directed to her as recipient of the younger woman's descriptive and actual respect and gratitude.

Two other poems focusing on childbirth, by Tapahonso and Esther G. Belin respectively, join in the conversation of these earlier poems, developing and deepening the thoughts, words, and experiences of all the poems. Unlike a discursive or dialogic structure in which each poem or individual asserts its or her own subjectivity and primacy at the expense of others, within a conversive style (both literary and critical), the poems and writers comment upon each other, developing conversations within and beyond the written bounds of each poem. Navajo writers like Tapahonso, Francisco, Walters, and Belin write from and of their own lived experiences, which are informed by their cultural heritages which in turn assume a very real connection with the sacred. For these writers, this connection is manifested in a conversive writing style that points beyond the narrow limits of the writers' lived experiences in this world. The worlds of their poems conversively conjoin the worlds of their lives, the worlds of their people (the tribal reality of the Diné) today, historically, and into the future, and within the timeless world of the sacred. In contrast to the Navajo perception of the interdependency of these worlds, a Western orientation posits sharply delineated distinctions between these worlds, often seen in a competitively fearful framework that opposes individual and group against each other, the temporal material world against a transcendent spiritual world, and a chronological delimitation that either focuses on the present without the recognition of the present's integral interrela-

tionship with both past and future, or recognizes such an interrelationship but privileges the present as the strong vanquisher of a weaker past. Conversely, these poems speak and depict worlds that interact and overlap, not in competition, but in an open engagement unthreatened by the diversity inherent within conversive relations (be those between and among individuals, poems, or worlds). This intermingling of worlds can be seen in Belin's "Bringing Hannah Home" (Anna Lee Walters 18-19).

In the poem, Belin shares with her reader the very private and cultural experience of the burial of a child's placenta. Navajos believe and know that a child will always return to this place that contains the initial source of the child's lifeblood. Belin begins her poem in a very personal conversive style, as if she is sharing the poem and story with a close friend: "we brought hannah home today." Instead of referring to the baby in the objective tone more familiar within Western discourse (e.g., "We brought the baby home today"), Belin personalizes and subjectifies the baby in naming her. And in this naming, and in the first person plural pronoun "we," Belin brings the reader into the personal world of the poem. The reader is expected to know to whom the "we" refers and to know who Hannah is. And even if the reader, by chance and in all likelihood, is not familiar with Hannah nor with those who have brought her home, Belin does not leave the reader in the dark as outsider. After a short first stanza, the very next stanza begins with the needed clarification, "two women with a child and a shovel and a frozen placenta . . . hannah was brought into this world / some say fourth others say fifth / five days before. / before we brought her home." Within Belin's conversive style, reader, speaker, and subjects of the poem are interwoven in a conversation that traverses diverse worlds, times, realities (literary and lived), and persons.

As the two women dig into the ground, the speaker of the poem shares her thoughts and prayers with the reader. In the digging, this woman (aunt, friend, other relative?) remembers another and more difficult digging—that of her father's grave dug into and from the frozen ground of a reservation winter. Within the poem, Belin interweaves the two changes of worlds, Hannah's entry into and a father's departure from this world:

i thought good thoughts for hannah and her mother
and prayed for us all
remembering those who have passed on and those to be born
and i thought of my children to be born
and i thought of my father who has passed on.

Even in the immediacy of the burial of Hannah's placenta and her return home (from a hospital or other place of birth), the speaker's

prayers (prayers offered by Belin, Hannah's relatives and friends, the poem's persona, and the reader) for Hannah and her mother are also for us all, here now, here before, and here to come. Prayers rooted in the concrete here and now also transcend the limitations of time and space and conversively bespeak an inclusivity inherent within the worldview of the poem. Even in Belin's lack of capitalization, especially in the lower case "i," we see the conversive focus and privileging of the other rather than of oneself.

We converse with, not to, some other person or persons, and within the bounds of a conversation, we speak with the expectation and hope of the "other's" assertion of her or his subjectivity as manifested in a response which in turn points beyond the individual speaking self and to the importance and reality of the listener. This is categorically different from the dialectic, discursive, or dialogic structures that privilege the subjectivity of a speaker with the passive objectivity of the listener who only gains subjectivity through his or her own speech. For the Navajo, activity is acknowledged both within speech and within thought. And within a Navajo conversive style as evidenced in these poems, writers and speakers write and speak in a manner that serves to privilege themselves and their words through the primacy given to their readers and listeners. However, such a conversive style involves the responsibility of the reader or listener to respond in turn and in kind. This is not a reader-response critical approach in which the reader completes the poem (and thereby gains a position of privilege), but a conversive response in which reader/listener continues a conversation that began generations and ages before the actual writing and that will continue into the future—as in the case of the thoughts and prayers "for us all / remembering those who have passed on and those to be born." As Rodney Frey points out, "When a story is being told it is being relived, participated in by those assembled. History unfolds anew" (129). Through the conversive structures present in Belin's poem, her readers actually enter the world and the story of Hannah's homecoming.

Belin ends the poem with Hannah's mother taking "the frozen mass of tissue and blood and life" out of its plastic bag and aluminum foil and placing it in the hole. The poem concludes, "and i felt her heat of tissue and blood and life / squatting with bloodied hands and cold earth / bringing hannah home." The pronoun "her," whose syntactical antecedent is "hannah's mother" but whose "heat of tissue" as well refers to Hannah and also to the female speaker's physical response to the ceremony, presents a conversive ambiguity that in one word, "her," brings the three females together in a homecoming profoundly significant for each: Hannah's arrival in this world and homecoming from the hospital, a mother's new life with her baby daughter ceremo-

nially brought home, the speaker's homecoming with Hannah, Hannah's mother, and her deceased father. This intergenerational and interpersonal homecoming demonstrates the dynamism, fluidity, and inclusivity possible within conversively structured poems.

Tapahonso's "It Has Always Been This Way" (17-18) contributes to this conversation, adding her perspective on a Navajo birth. "Being born is not the beginning. / Life begins months before the time of birth"—not only during the baby's life in the mother's womb but also in the lives and generations that precede the baby's life and that inform the lives of both baby and mother. This is explained in the Beck, Walters, and Francisco volume, *The Sacred*:

In the days before pick-ups, cars and hospitals, the whole process of having a baby was a ritual—with the help of a Hataali (singer or medicine man) and a midwife—there were songs sung, spreading of fresh soil, sprinkling of corn pollen, stretching of the sash belt, and untying of tied knots, and letting hair down. Long ago, childbirth was considered a beautiful real life struggle and it was a ritual with the sacred beings watching on. (272)

And yet, in the worlds of these poems, the sacredness of new life is respected even within the domain of contemporary hospital rooms. The weight given to the importance of new life also signifies particular responsibilities given to the mother before and after the actual birth, and these responsibilities for the Navajo are neither privatized nor individualistic but involve the participation of extended family and even the larger tribal community, both of which are expected to insure that the mother is enabled to fulfill her responsibilities—which might mean other individuals taking on some of her other chores or jobs.

Tapahonso also explains the burial of the placenta: "It is buried near the house so the child / will always return home and help the mother. / It has been this way for centuries among us." In this burial, we see the significant conjunction of the personal and private with the communal and public, the specific and material with the sacred and the symbolic, and one baby's spatial connection with her mother's home and the love and care of parents and other relatives for a new child. Even the beginnings of life define the circular domain of the converse for this particular Navajo baby: "Much care is taken . . . to talk and sing to the baby softly in the right way." And the importance of vocalization is emphasized from a child's earliest sounds. The first laugh of the child is conversively responded to by the family members and their celebratory "give-away":

The baby laughs aloud and it is celebrated with rock salt,
lots of food, and relatives laughing.

Everyone passes the baby around.
 This is so the child will always be generous,
 will always be surrounded by happiness,
 and will always be surrounded by lots of relatives.
 It has been this way for centuries among us. (17)

The child's happy vocalized laugh is framed within a conversive engagement in which the emphasis is not on the subjective vocalizing or laughing individual as an objective end; rather, the speech and laughter are viewed as a gift from the child which is offered to those whose response is, in turn, one of giving rock salt and food as gifts to others. With the circularity of a conversive structure, one can only return to one's own point on the circle by going via the other points.

The subjective and self-referential privileging possible within linear oppositions (in which an objective world is defined and understood solely in terms of a subjective and privileged point of orientation) is in sharp contrast to a conversive circularity in which each point is privileged always but never at the expense of any other point. From a Navajo perspective, the devaluation, marginalization, absence, or silence of any person or point on the circle would indicate an incomplete circle and an unfinished and partial conversation. As Robin Melting Tallow, a Native Canadian writer, points out, "the circle has neither beginning nor ending. It has always been. The circle represents the journey of human existence. It connects us to our past and to our future. . . . We are writing the circle" (288). Analogously, a criticism that is not conversively informed by the reality of the text it approaches is, as well, incomplete and partial—a writing that bespeaks more the structure of a monologue than of a multiply voiced conversive critical engagement between text and critic. Dennis and Barbara Tedlock have stressed the importance of "learning directly from the Indian." While their focus is ostensibly on the scholarship of anthropologists, their concerns are well taken in regards to literary criticism as well:

It is true that anthropologists sometimes describe themselves as students of the Indian; they may indeed appear to be his students while they are in the field, but by the time they publish their 'results,' it is usually clear that the Indian is primarily an *object* of study. (xiii)

A conversive critical strategy places the critic within a conversation that includes critic, writer, text, and the larger context in which the text exists—without the individualized privileging of discursive or dialogic approaches. This involves a very direct interactive engagement between critic and text that in no wise privileges the assumed priority of the critic.

Wittgenstein taught us that a language game is a "form of life" (*Philosophical Investigations* 11). And Paula Gunn Allen echoes Wittgenstein's point when she writes, "Literature is one facet of a culture. The significance of a literature can be best understood in terms of the culture from which it springs" (54). Tapahonso makes this explicitly clear as she begins the final stanza of "It Has Always Been This Way": "It is all this: the care, the prayers, songs, / and our own lives as Navajos we carry with us all the time" (18). The sacred, the communal, the tribal, the personal, the lived, and the living. Blue horses for Navajo women. As Tapahonso ends her poem, "It has been this way for centuries among us." For centuries, and even beyond into the atemporal and nonlinear domain of the timeless and the sacred.

If our aims are to read these poems and to accept the gracious invitations offered by these women poets, then we need to recognize that different words, languages, and worlds require different critical responses. As Jeanne Perreault and Sylvia Vance note in the "Foreword" to *Writing the Circle: Native Women of Western Canada*, "Conventional standards of literary excellence in no way prepare a reader for the complexity of responses the writing contained here will evoke. Readers will discover the limitations of their own reading practices" (xi). Paula Gunn Allen also comments on such difficulties: "The study of non-Western literature poses a problem for Western readers, who naturally tend to see alien literature in terms that are familiar to them, however irrelevant those terms may be to the literature under consideration" (54). Specifically in relation to Navajo poetry, the importance Navajos give to the use of language exhorts the critic to approach the poems and her or his criticism with an analogous degree of respect. As Gary Witherspoon points out, "It is through language that the world of the Navajo was created, and it is through language that the Navajos control, classify, and beautify their world" (7).

For the Navajo, language represents and affects the world—a fact that invites critics to conversively approach the writing of Navajo poets through an intersubjective relationality in which the texts are understood as speaking and, thereby, creative, signifying objects. Arnold Krupat argues for the importance of "an 'indigenous' criticism for Indian literatures" (*Ethnocriticism* 44). One step in that direction is a critical strategy in which Indian literatures are enabled to speak for themselves through a conversive method of criticism. The poems of Nia Francisco, Luci Tapahonso, Gertrude Walters, and Esther G. Belin suggest the value of such alternative critical strategies which enable readers and critics in consciously interactive and intersubjective engagements with the poems—thereby allowing the poems a critical space otherwise denied.⁴ As Barney Blackhorse Mitchell says, "The greatest sacred

thing is knowing the order and the structure of things" (qtd. in Beck, Walters, and Francisco, 11, 95, 107). Through a conversive criticism, we can come closer to discovering the order and the structures of and within Native literatures.⁵

NOTES

¹For a developed discussion of the concept of critical fit or the appropriateness of particular critical approaches towards particular texts, see my volume, *Wittgenstein and Critical Theory*. While this volume specifically addresses the implications and applications of Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy for critical theory, the majority of the critical explications refer to Native American literatures.

²Joseph Bruchac discusses the preponderance of mestizo/a Indian writers in an interview with Navajo poet Luci Tapahonso: "Many of the people in the 'first generation' of American Indian writers in this part of the century who have become well known are people of mixed blood" (Bruchac 278). Both Bruchac and Tapahonso comment on this as a necessary stage for fullblood and more traditionally raised Indians to begin writing and publishing.

³I discuss this shifting role of the critic at greater length in my book, *Wittgenstein and Critical Theory*.

⁴Although this essay specifically focuses on conversive strategies within several poems, the conversive nature of Navajo and other Native American Indian literatures tends to affect the critical process as well. Much of the literary criticism of Native American Indian texts demonstrates the critics' conversive responsiveness to the texts, rather than the critics' extraneous impositions of particular critical theories or methods upon those texts. Here I would suggest that there is much to be learned by the larger audience of critical theorists and literary critics from the actual methods and practice of scholars of Native literatures.

As a final note, I would like to add that a colleague, Jim Sullivan, pointed out the extent to which the tone of this critical essay changes as it begins to converse with the poems. Such shifts, albeit unintentional, are what we would expect and desire within a conversive critical practice.

⁵I want to clarify that the reference to the concept of "structures" in no wise signifies the sorts of modernist constructs that poststructuralism rejects. The structures that Navajo elder Barney Blackhorse Mitchell notes are those relational structures that, in fact, exist in the world within and between peoples, other life forms, and things. For Mitchell, there are *real* connections in the world (as opposed to those connections artificially constructed) that can be learned and communicated through life and through stories.

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FORUM

Upcoming Sessions at MLA (Chicago, December 1995)

The following are MLA sessions that have been scheduled by both the MLA Division on American Indian Literatures (Ken Roemer, Chair, Division Executive Committee) and ASAIL. Special thanks to Kim Blaeser, Jim Ruppert, LaVonne Ruoff, and Betty Bell for organizing these sessions.

Native American Literature: Seeking a Critical Center. Presider, Kimberly Blaeser, U of Wisconsin—Milwaukee.

1. "Heart Metaphors in American Indian Thought and Literature," Kathryn Shanley, Cornell U.
2. "The Idea of the Center in the American Indian Literary Canon," Michael Wilson, U of Wisconsin—Milwaukee.
3. "American Indian Centers: The Unacknowledged Requisite for Concentric American Literatures," Gordon Henry, Michigan State U.
4. "Rooting Around the Past: Sovereignty, Criticism, and Native Intellectual History," Robert Warrior, Stanford U.

Teaching Native American Texts in Introductory Literature Courses. Presider, James Ruppert, U of Alaska, Fairbanks.

1. "Breaking Our Necks: Incorporating Native American Texts in American Literature Surveys," Chris LaLonde, North Carolina Wesleyan.
2. "Ants in the System: Beginning to Think Strongly about Stories," Robert Gregory, U of Miami.
3. "The Multicultural Canon, *The Sacred Hoop*, and *Ceremony*:"

- Teaching the Native American Novel," Lou Caton, U of Oregon.
4. "Chona and Thoreau: The View from Another Culture," Cheryl Brown, U of Texas at Arlington.

Native American Voices of the Midwest: Readings. Presider, A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, U of Illinois at Chicago (emerita)

1. Betty Louise Bell, U of Michigan.
2. Kimberly M. Blaeser, U of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.
3. William Penn, Michigan State U.
4. Roberta Hill Whiteman, U of Wisconsin-Eau Claire.
5. Carter Revard, Washington U.

(This session should be longer than the usual MLA session.)

Joint Business Meeting: American Indian Literature Division & Assn. for the Study of American Indian Literatures. Presiders, Kathryn Shanley, Cornell U and Kenneth Roemer, U of Texas at Arlington.

Call for Papers

ASAIL SESSIONS AT 1996 ALA CONFERENCE, SAN DIEGO

Catherine Rainwater is organizing ASAIL sessions for the 1996 meeting of the American Literature Association in late May, early June in San Diego, California. If you would like to propose a paper or put together and chair a panel, please submit all materials no later than NOVEMBER 15, 1995. For single paper proposals, send an abstract; for panel proposals, send complete data on panel topic, participants, and abstracts of the papers to:

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1995 Native Writers' Circle Awards

Muscogee poet Joy Harjo received the 1995 Lifetime Achievement Award at the fourth annual awards banquet of the Native Writers' Circle of the Americas July 22, 1995, at the University of Oklahoma. The award includes a cash prize of \$1,000. Harjo was also presented with a proclamation by Chief Fife of the Muscogee Nation honoring her for her work. The Lifetime Achievement Award was inaugurated in 1992 at the Returning the Gift festival of Native writers at the University of Oklahoma, where the Native Writers' Circle was founded. Past recipients have been N. Scott Momaday in 1992, Simon J. Ortiz in 1993, and Leslie Marmon Silko in 1994. The award is decided by mailed ballots from Native literary writers from throughout the upper Western hemisphere who are members of the Native Writers' Circle.

The 1995 First Book Awards in poetry and prose were also presented at the banquet. These are publication prize competitions, with publication of the winning manuscripts by a participating press, and a cash prize of \$500. The First Book Awards were also inaugurated at the 1992 Returning the Gift festival.

The 1995 First Book Award for poetry, the Diane Decorah Memorial Award, was presented to Denise H. Sweet (White Earth Anishinabe) for her manuscript *Songs For Discharming*. Sweet is an assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin/Green Bay. Past recipients have been Joe Dale Tate Nevaquaya and Gloria Bird in 1992, Kimberly Blaeser in 1993, and Tiffany Midge in 1994.

The 1995 First Book Award for prose, the Louis Littlecoon Oliver Memorial Award, was presented to Glenn J. Twist (Cherokee/Muscogee) for his manuscript *Boston Mountain Tales*. Twist, age 78, is an elder who has been an inspiration to many younger writers in the Wordcraft Circle mentoring program, which was also founded at the 1992 Returning the Gift festival. Past recipients have been Robert Perea in 1992, Philip H. Red Eagle in 1993, and Gus Palmer, Jr. in 1994.

In 1992 First Book Awards were also given in creative non-fiction (to Melissa Fawcett Sayett) and in drama (to William S. Yellow Robe, Jr.), but in 1993 the awards were reorganized into two categories, poetry and prose.

REVIEWS

Multicultural Voices: Literature from the United States.
Foreword by Rita Dove. Glenview IL: ScottForesman,
1995. \$14.95 cloth, ISBN 0-673-29427-7. 484 pages.

Certainly we are all aware how generations of Americans have grown up playing Cowboys and Indians, with the predominant version of the game reduced to a simplistic good guys (the former) versus bad guys (the latter). By extension, when schoolchildren have turned to literature for knowledge of Native Americans in the past, all too often the stories they have encountered have been mediated and filtered through voices representing and speaking for the dominant culture—the Hiawatha of Longfellow, the submissive and obedient versions of Pocohantas and Sacajawea (women portrayed as wise for knowing which men to rescue and serve), the Squanto to be revered for learning English and rescuing Calvinists. How refreshing to discover the voices of contemporary Native Americans, sharing their messages in short stories and poems, included in the diverse sampling making up this excellent new reader for eighth grade literature classes.

Those wishing to design a complete junior high school course of study solely around Native American literature would be better advised to seek other sources. However, this is an ideal text for those looking for an inclusive, multicultural reader. It provides vibrant, stimulating selections representing a wide range of American cultural experiences. Excerpts from established writers such as Denise Levertov, Maya Angelou, Frank Chin, Tomas Rivera, and John Okada are joined by such newer voices as Mark Mathabane, Amy Tan, Gregory Orfalea, and Brent Staples.

Among the 53 selections comprising the anthology, a respectable

eight are by self-identified Native Americans, another by an Okie who boasts a Cherokee heritage. Rita Dove, the young African American woman who was appointed Poet Laureate of the United States in 1993, not only contributes a selection from her 1992 novel *Through the Ivory Gate* but also provides in a five page foreward an eloquent explanation of and call for multicultural education in a language that nicely addresses the target audience's perceptions and concerns. She uses the metaphor of a mosaic to describe American society: "Each piece has its unique colors and shape; each piece is essential to the whole which, when viewed from afar, forms one piece of art" (xi).

The reader is divided into eight thematic units considering, in turn, community, self-image, education, crosscultural communication, family, childhood, love, and dreams. Each individual selection is followed by discussion questions (always covering the three areas of personal response, literary analysis, and multicultural awareness), a language workshop, and a writer's portfolio. Each unit is followed by suggested class projects and a brief bibliography for further reading. The range of terms covered in the glossary—arpeggio, insouciant, Papago, and shoyu are entries—indicates the two-pronged thrust to develop not only vocabulary but also a more diverse cultural knowledge.

Young readers first address Native American concerns in Louise Erdrich's "Dear John Wayne," a poem powerful in its contrast of Hollywood Indians viewed by Native Americans at the drive-in, haunting in the metaphor of cancer that resounds in its closing lines. Jack Forbes's "Only Approved Indians Can Play: Made in USA" satirizes contemporary debates over who can claim to be "real" Indians, raising the important issue of what can happen when members of an oppressed group don't recognize the similarities they share, opting instead for internicene strife. This marvelous little piece, my personal favorite in the anthology, should quickly spark debate for a contemporary junior high audience, a cohort greatly concerned with clashes between perceived identity and cultural norms.

A poem from Navajo Luci Tapahonso explores how a four-year-old must begin to integrate Native religion with education in the dominant culture's schools. Simon Ortiz, an Acoma from New Mexico, conveys respect for the force of nature in his poem, while Wendy Rose celebrates her Hopi ancestors in hers. N. Scott Momaday is inadequately represented by a one-page poem entitled "Four Notions of Love and Marriage," certainly not the best selection from his considerable writings to deal with the issue of love, especially for a target audience of eighth graders dealing (I suspect) with some raging hormones. Leslie Marmon Silko fares better, represented by the short story that launched her career in 1969, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds." This

tale's central focus on death and burial will provide young students an opportunity to discuss how and why these realities are handled differently by different cultural groups, no doubt expanding their understanding of Laguna Pueblo people.

Along with these Native American poems and short stories, *Multicultural Voices* includes "Proclamation of the Indians of Alcatraz," giving the counterhegemonic position on the November 1969 take-over of this famous island in San Francisco Bay. Eighth graders are certainly old enough to confront the issues of this newsworthy protest by indigenous peoples, to appreciate its historical context, and to then assess through outside research what has been happening to Native Americans in the quarter century since this event occurred. I would have overlooked including such a document in an integrated language arts anthology; I commend and applaud its inclusion.

This multicultural reader, brand new in the ScottForesman "Points of Departure" series, shows careful editing and organization. A wide balance of ethnic, racial, and cultural groups are given voice here, with attention to issues of gender and class perspective as well. If there is any group underrepresented, it might be European Americans, but since authors one could include in this category have traditionally dominated such readers (indeed, often they were the only Americans considered "American") this is not a crucial complaint. In responding to the debate raging around multiculturalism, it is worth noting, however, that the approach is not about retribution or vengeance, it is about inclusion and crosscultural respect.

I heartily recommend this book to junior high school instructors. Parents might also see the merit in finding a place for it on the family library shelf at home. Such an educational tool has a special pertinence in a cultural climate where conservative talk radio hosts and aspiring politicians zealously but erroneously attack multiculturalism. *Multicultural Voices* celebrates the diversity of America as an unrealized strength, acknowledging the singular beauty and necessity of each tile in the mosaic.

Scot Guenter

Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris.
Ed. Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin. Jackson:
U P of Mississippi, 1994. \$35.00 cloth, ISBN 0-87805-
651-3; \$14.95 paper, ISBN 0-87805-652-1. 262 pages.

For over ten years Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris have been successfully collaborating on novels, poetry, short fiction, and non-fiction. During this time their work has received much critical and popular attention. Numerous interviews with them have appeared in print and have been broadcast on radio and television. In addition, there have been numerous critical articles on their work; yet until now there have been no books about them published. Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin have edited the first book about the pair, *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris*.

The book is a collection of interviews with the two authors, which will be a valuable resource for researchers. The Chavkins provide a chronology for each of the two writers, and, more importantly, they index the book, making it "user-friendly" for researchers with a particular topic in mind.

The interviews, arranged in chronological order, span the eight-year period from 1985 through 1993. The editors have chosen twenty-one interviews from the more than 140 conducted in the United States alone. They also include two previously unpublished interviews, which comprise nearly one-third of the text. More than half the interviews are with both Erdrich and Dorris. They come from such sources as *The New York Times Magazine*, *The Washington Post*, Bill Moyers's *A World of Ideas*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Writer's Digest*, and *Publisher's Weekly*. Readers may be familiar with some of these interviews, since they are readily accessible. Others, however, are not so accessible, such as two interviews from *Valley News* of White River Junction, Vermont and one from the *Dartmouth Alumni Magazine*.

Some of the interviews are presented in question and answer format, while others are in essay form with an analysis of whatever

work prompted the interview. Much of the information is repetitive, but, as the editors point out, comparing the responses can be enlightening. Reading these interviews reveals the changes in the authors' vision of their works, as well as the unchanging commitment to their method of writing and their attitude toward their work. Especially interesting are the changes in the development of Erdrich's "quartet" over the years. In early interviews Erdrich and Dorris discuss plans for the novels, which, over time, changed. Also interesting are the discussions of character development.

Each of the books published by Erdrich and Dorris during this time span, including *Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, *Tracks*, *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, *Crown of Columbus*, and *The Broken Cord*, is discussed, as well as plans for later works, such as Erdrich's *The Blue Jay's Dance* and Dorris's *The Cloud Chamber*. The most frequent topic of discussion, however, is the unique collaboration between the two writers. Much of the discussion is biographical, since a discussion of their collaboration cannot be removed from the discussion of their marriage and home life.

While much of the book is repetitious, just as the reader may begin to believe that there is nothing new to be learned about Erdrich and Dorris, the Chavkins treat their readers to the two previously unpublished interviews, which they conducted themselves. One is an interview by phone with Dorris, and the other is an interview with Erdrich conducted by mail over a five-month period. In their own interviews, the Chavkins seem to be testing for changes in the authors' attitudes by asking some of the same questions asked years before. Also, they fill in gaps by asking questions not previously asked in other interviews. For instance, the Chavkins ask Erdrich about her early experimental story, "The True Story of Mustache Maude." Erdrich discusses how elements from the story later appear in "Saint Marie" and muses that parts of it may yet appear in other works.

This final interview with Erdrich reveals the writer's humor and humility. She avoids many issues, frustrating on the one hand but revealing on the other. When asked about the difficulties of fame, she answers, simply, "I'm not famous" (235). Although Erdrich may not consider herself famous, the Chavkins rightfully describe her and her husband as being among America's most important living writers.

The Chavkins have broken the ice with this first book about Erdrich and Dorris—a book which will prove an invaluable resource for the researchers who will, I am sure, produce more.

Sarah Bennett

The Sioux. Peter Hicks. New York: Thomson Learning, 1994. \$14.95 cloth, ISBN 1-56847-172-6. 32 pages (with color and black and white illustrations).

This book strives to make the Sioux world accessible to children, ages nine to 11, and is part of Thomson Learning's "Look Into the Past" series of cultural studies books (along with such titles as *The Greeks*, *The Aztecs*, and *The Ancient Chinese*). The book is organized into eight sections that interweave material and spiritual aspects of Sioux culture and history, with each section headed by a paragraph in large boldfaced type that introduces and summarizes the section to follow. The written content of the sections follows closely the illustrations selected, both explaining and supplementing the visual images.

The written text, of which I will have more to say below, is clear and informative, but the collection of visuals is the conspicuous strength of *The Sioux*. The large, colorful images portray traditional artifacts—buffalo robes, moccasins, a war club, a war bonnet, et cetera—and pictographic scenes of daily life, and several old black and white photos provide glimpses into an older era of Sioux life. The illustrations are varied, vivid, and well chosen. Many images are shown against the white background of the page, without any limiting borders, so the colors and shapes of the objects are boldly articulated. Another visual effect of the design, however, is that the white background makes the items seem to float in space, without any clear connection to the world in which they presumably belong. The style of presentation represents a trade-off: the objects stand out, but in standing out so extremely and discretely they seem more like museum pieces lost in the abstract space of a collection rather than integral parts of a vital cultural system. (It should be said that some of the artifacts are displayed against a neutral or black background, which partakes of the same effect, but not so extremely.)

Fortunately, the visual sense of detachment is bridged by the information in the carefully matched written sections. To a large

extent, the text of *The Sioux* replays the familiar script—the centrality of buffalo, the importance of the warriors, tepees, Little Big Horn—and stars the usual figures: Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Red Cloud. This book may not be interesting for its general adherence to the time-honored pattern of representing the Sioux, and Native Americans generally (who, in our national imagination, almost always seem to be Plains people, and then usually Sioux); but this particular book can be praised for attending to the details and for grounding the better known highlights in a narrative that goes beyond the standard grade school script for talking about "Indians."

From the beginning, *The Sioux* makes important distinctions and proceeds with careful specificity, consistently putting the information in a larger context, thus giving a young audience a deeper, richer understanding of the culture. For example, this text does well to recognize the diversity of the Sioux and to focus its topical scope rather than attempt to treat the nation as a monolithic cultural group. In the first section ("Who Are the Sioux?"), we are informed that the Sioux Nation is composed of different groups—Santee, Nakota, Lakota—and that this work concentrates on the Lakota tribe (4), which is further distinguished as encompassing seven distinct bands, with the Oglala singled out (6). The problematic issue of Native American nomenclature is also taken up early on, which is laudable in a book for children. We are informed, for example, that the word "Sioux" is in fact an insulting name that was given to them by their enemies.

Throughout the book an attempt is made to approach the richness of the subject by informing the narrative with a vocabulary that does justice to the complexity of the culture and the specificity of its ways. Consequently, the written text challenges the child reader with a precise, detailed treatment of the ideas presented. The negotiation of specialized or generally sophisticated terminology is handled by selected glossing in the narrative itself and with a separate glossary at the end of the main text. Words defined in the glossary are printed in bold typeface, in the main text. The glossary sometimes repeats an explanation already given in the main text, or defines a word that is not glossed in the narrative, but which may be clear from its context. Some other entries in the glossary, however, provide additional information: for example, with "tepee" a brief etymology is given, while "pemmican" is glossed simply in the main text but given fuller treatment in the glossary. The glossing seems particularly apt for words drawn specifically from Sioux life, like tepee and pemmican, but makes less sense when more commonplace terms are used, such as "stampede" and "death rate." To err on the side of clarity is a fault easily overlooked, however, for the written text is carefully composed and organized, and should challenge the young audience without

making the meaning inaccessible.

The written text is also notable for doing a fine job of linking causally the cross-cultural tensions, difficulties, and inequities that accompanied the European conquest with the current conditions facing the Sioux. Specifically, the move from a discussion of forced reservation life and status beginning in the late Nineteenth Century to the contemporary reservation-based problems is subtle and effective. The description of the problems facing contemporary Sioux follows immediately from the discussion of the European American colonization and some of its implications: Native response and resistance, the hateful assignment to reservations, the poor quality of the reservation land, and the brutality of the colonization, exemplified by the massacre at Wounded Knee (25-26). The connections made between history and current problems and concerns rightly inform the young readership that the issues confronting the Sioux today are not isolated circumstances but result from a history of complex power relations—a lesson many adults would do well to learn.

The generally powerful and effective collaboration between written and visual texts breaks down a bit at the end, however, resulting in an unfortunate parting impression. The ending is problematic because it leaves us with no concrete image of the Sioux's survival. In the last section ("The Sioux Today"), no people are shown, although the text refers to cultural survival and revival: the current attempts to earn a living in urban centers and in the tourist industry, and the affirmation of traditional culture through a Sioux school curriculum. The illustrations, which are employed so effectively at bringing the material to life earlier in the text, leave us with lifeless images at the end: a log wood cabin to show reservation poverty, a display of a full suit of traditional regalia to show the tourism industry, and three modern tepees to show the Sioux curriculum—but no contemporary Sioux themselves. (In a ghostly apparition, at the feet of the clothing display, there is a small, framed picture of Chief Red Cloud—so the only representation of a Sioux in the contemporary section is one over a hundred years old!) The last prominent image of a Sioux person we are left with is the disfigured, frozen corpse of Chief Big Foot, at Wounded Knee (1890), in the previous section ("War and Defeat"). Young readers are thus as likely to think of the Sioux as moribundly frozen in time, the victims of a massacre, as they are to think of them as survivors who still attempt to affirm a vital culture through such means as the Sioux curriculum. This omission, whether intended or not, represents a powerful absence that partially undermines the attempt to leave the reader with images of survival.

Would it not have been fitting and more effective to include an actual representation of "the Sioux today"—say, a photograph of a

grade school classroom enacting the curriculum described in the text? Such an image would leave an important lasting impression of survival in general; and showing children to a child audience would have provided an even more tangible, powerful point of contact between the reader and the subject of the text. As it is, in the last section of *The Sioux*, it is as if the Indians are once again vanishing.

Despite its problems, *The Sioux* has plenty to offer and many strengths to recommend it. While it follows a general path already well traveled, in presenting the Sioux, it excels in communicating relevant details and, more generally, the relationship between history and cultural formation. In all, this book does an admirable job of situating the Sioux in their traditional culture and contextualizing the historical implications of intercultural contact and conflict with European Americans, although the attempt to end in a forward-looking way is overshadowed by an image of a people frozen in time.

Donovan Gwinner

Dirt Road Home. Cheryl Savageau. Intr. Joseph Bruchac. Willimantic CT: Curbstone Press, 1995. \$11.00 paper, ISBN 1-880684-30-6. 92 pages.

Cheryl Savageau's work focuses on those small moments that define and delineate an individual's place in his or her family, community, culture, and universe. Savageau does not sugarcoat or avoid the unpleasant facts one discovers as he or she grows up in an environment where being different or alien is a repressive device used by a stronger majority; instead Savageau views this obstacle as a minor impediment on the way to self-definition and continuous self-discovery, similar to the ideas found in the work of Leslie Marmon Silko, Joy Harjo, and N. Scott Momaday.

As Joseph Bruchac notes in his introduction, "*Dirt Road Home* is a chronicle of returning . . . [and] 'seeing,' the physical act of vision which becomes a spiritual experience" (7). These two interlinked

activities are "at the center of her poems" (7) and help Savageau "shape that kind of necessary double vision" (7) needed for an individual of mixed blood (Abenaki and French Canadian, in Savageau's case) "to maintain . . . and shape her into a healthy and educated citizen" (7).

Seeing, as defined above, is a major factor in the motivations of an individual, especially when they reveal the interactions they have with the prejudicial and unfeeling side of human nature. Savageau returns to childhood experiences that exacerbate this sort of vision and lets the reader discover, in the tradition of all good poetry, how this seeing affected her on the emotional and spiritual level.

In "French Girls Are Fast" (37-38), Savageau illustrates the pain of being of mixed blood, especially when that co-mingling is used as a weapon by children and adults alike:

Two days in the Irish-Catholic school . . .
 Frenchie, hey Frenchie,
 ooh la la
 the Irish boys leer
 staring at the roundness
 I am not ashamed of

. . .
 Years later it is a grandmother . . .
 and I hear it again
 French girls are fast
 who am I to say otherwise
 my belly pushing upward
 with her grandson's child

The unstated prejudice many whites have towards Native Americans is expertly caught in the guise of the same grandmother, who

. . . digs out a blanket
 she bought at Niagara Falls
 from these Indians, you know,
 she tells me, shaking her head

From these painful experiences, the narrator has learned not to tell people like the grandmother, who can't listen anyway, that "my father's family is Indian / that the blood was mixed in me" but to persevere and hope the future is a more equal and accepting one for "the child . . . getting ready for the long push ahead."

The struggle for equality is an arduous one and the small victories such as pride in one's self, family, and the future will lead to greater ones in that future. This poem ends on a note of triumph since the narrator accepts her mixed birth, symbolized by the "white wool" [French Canadian] and "stripes / of red, yellow, black, green" [Abenaki] and will "draw it over me [her]" to be passed along to her child.

Savageau's fine eye for detail and use of imagery are emphasized in those poems where the small events of life help define her sense of self as a person and woman of mixed blood. She returns to her childhood and adolescence to pinpoint who, and what memories, made her who she is today. This "seeing" into the past helps her understand her Abenaki heritage and its equal place alongside her French Canadian background as well. This duality is best captured in the evocative "Too'kay" (73) where simple everyday images and language breathtakingly come together:

This is the pie
that defines our Frenchness
in the winter season

the Christmas Eve pie

The narrator's "Uncle Raymond won't eat our pie / missing the spices his tongue demands." He calls the pie "*tourtiere*," the French term, while Savageau's paternal side of the family says it "as *too'kay*" because:

written in Memere's [grandmother's] book
the Indian *k* replacing the *r*
as foreign to Algonkin tongues

Savageau has ingeniously illustrated through the use of ambiguity that her world is formed equally by both tongues/cultures she is exposed to: Algonkin and French.

Another poem employing ambiguity in the pronunciation of a word occurs in "Genealogy" (80) where Savageau's great-grandmother's last name is in dispute: "Laforte, the strong," vs. "Lafford, / as in a place to cross rivers." Here the Anglicized and the French versions are seen as being a confluence, the joining together of two parts into a stronger whole: "as in having to pay the price / of crossing." These last two lines show how one must be resolute in order to stand up to the rigors of life (pay the price) so one can grow and cross over to a better, integrated life. Once again, Savageau has returned to her family's past to see who she was, is, and aspires to become.

Savageau's best poetry deals with her family and how they directly shaped her into the individual she's become and is becoming. Once more, the return to, and seeing into, the past is presented with vivid imagery, heartfelt passion, gentle irony, and perfect poetic insight. The nuclear family is important to Savageau, and poems like the slyly cynical "At the Pow Wow" (89), where the poet's mother, "who buried my grandparents, / whose skin was brown," observes "feathered dancers" and then ironically states "so that's / what real Indians look like," are neatly juxtaposed to the pain of recognizing prejudice at an

early age described in "Just His Eyes" (25-26), where Savageau recalls her cousin saying "They thought I was Chinese" where "he might have heard Tonto." This bittersweet taste of harsh irony is then illustrated when this same cousin says:

*. . . who cares
if some grandfather
slept with a squaw . . .
when I say
"that squaw
was your grandmother"*

Two poems written about Savageau's relationship with her father—"Looking For Indians" and "To Human Skin"—encapsulate how her return to and re-viewing of the past helps form and mold the poet into the person she has become. In "Looking for Indians" (19-20), the young Savageau asks her dad, "what kind of Indian, are we, anyway" since her images of "Indians" are formed by the mass media. Her father responds by saying "Abenaki" and Savageau thinks "I know that's not Indian." The next three stanzas show or let the reader see what spiritually makes up the Abenaki experience by illustrating the daily actions of the father, activities shared by the daughter: "I follow behind him like this . . . dropping seeds into the ground" and:

*. . . He tests
the corn for ripeness
with a fingernail, . . .
We watch the winter squash grow hips.*

The father is instructing the daughter in the lifestyle of her ancestors as a way of answering her question: "What kind of Indian are we?" She learns to her disappointment that:

*no buffalo
roamed the thick new england forest
. . . mostly
they were farmers
and fishermen*

Savageau brilliantly shows how youthful perspectives are formed by the expectations imposed by society through television and the majority culture. Simultaneously, in returning and seeing the past again, the mature Savageau realizes that what we are is determined not by "words I know from television" but by the daily activities of life.

In "To Human Skin" (87-88), the book's duality of seeing and returning to the past to define and clarify the future comes to fruition. Here the daughter realizes her father will die soon: he will go to the "old home country, Abenaki country" or to his death, as emphasized

in the lines "Through the long days of mourning, / I see my father's spirit." The daughter then knows she is:

. . . rooted, like him,
in the soil of this land
called Ndakinna.

This has been defined earlier as "this place you [Father] call in English / the home country." Savageau discovers that the past forms who we are and our family forms us into the being we are always becoming: "You who taught me to see no borders" from the poem "Like the Trails of Ndakinna" (90-91).

Savageau's poetry, like Harjo's and Silko's best work, is quietly brilliant and radiates with the joys and ironies of daily living as experienced by a poet always aiming towards becoming. This state is achieved by Savageau's return and spiritual re-viewing of her past in order for her to better understand herself as a person, woman, family member, and Abenaki-French Canadian writer. Her work fits perfectly into the post-Romantic poetic tradition of either looking to the "historical" past, as in Yeats' "The Second Coming" or Shelley's "Ozymandias," or the "personal" past of the narrator, as in Edgar Arlington Robinson's "Richard Cory," Sylvia Plath's "Daddy," Linda Pastan's "Marks," and Bart Edelman's "Crossing the Hackensack" and "Passages" from his 1993 collection *Crossing the Hackensack*, to discover who we are now as individuals, cultures, and a unified people, and what possibilities lie in front of us in the future.

Michael Cluff

Crazywater: Native Voices on Addiction and Recovery.
Brian Maracle. Toronto: Penguin Books, 1993.
\$10.95 paper, ISBN 0-14-017287-4. 224 pages.

Native American alcoholism is a problem of epidemic proportions that robs families of their stability, spouses of their loved ones, children of their parents, and communities of their health, both physical and

spiritual. Brian Maracle, author of *Crazywater: Native Voices on Addiction and Recovery*, informs us that in his lifetime 100,000 native people from North America "have gone to an early grave with alcohol in their blood" (9). Mainstream awareness of the severity of alcoholism's toll on native communities seems to be limited, and the attention it has received so far has not done enough to curb high levels of drug and alcohol abuse among native people. Why haven't answers produced so far had results? Maracle responds, "The non-native academics, social scientists, government experts and medical authorities have all had their say. Now it's our turn" (2). He clearly states his purpose in *Crazywater* by beginning the book with a hypothetical scenario, from a white Canadian's perspective, of an encounter with a "drunken Indian" in a busy urban street. By first exploring common stereotypes regarding native alcohol use and then offering the stories of native peoples' personal battles with alcohol and drugs, Maracle hopes "to round out the stereotype—to provide a more complete and accurate understanding of our people's relationship with alcohol" (8). He defines the "drunken Indian" stereotype as "a symbol of the holocaust that has wreaked destruction on the Onkwehonwe of Great Turtle Island for the past 300 years, and the results have been horrifying" (9).

In order to achieve his purpose, Maracle interviewed over 75 native people in different parts of Canada and asked them about their experiences with alcohol and their opinions about causes of and solutions to the blight of alcoholism that continues to take its toll on vast numbers of native people. By offering sometimes lengthy excerpts of the individual stories of those interviewed, he attempts to "focus attention on stories and experiences shared by all native people" (front matter, n. pag.). Included in the collection are both tales of unimaginable suffering of people who either battle their own addiction or suffer its consequences from family members or spouses and the tales of inspirational bravery of those who have overcome addictions that brought many of their closest loved ones to early graves. About the survivors he interviewed Maracle concludes, "They are my heroes" (285), and truly no one will finish reading *Crazywater* unimpressed by the indescribable bravery of those who have fought and survived despite the ravages of alcohol and drug addiction. By telling their stories, these survivors become the role models whom many native people claim are essential to the fight to conquer substance abuse. There are ways, however, that Maracle could have presented these heroes' stories and the issues so many of them raise more clearly than he has, and the collection's organization becomes the major flaw of *Crazywater*.

In the introduction, Maracle explains his approach to compiling the book:

My idea for the book is rooted in the fact that native wit and wisdom is largely unknown and unappreciated—so I have used the oral history format to let the people tell their own stories and bring their talents to light. . . . I can't think of a better way to get the reader to share our shame, pain, anger, joy and celebration. (n.pag.)

Unfortunately, those stories are presented in such a way that they are often neither complete enough for the reader to understand fully the individual's experience with alcohol, nor are the various stories synthesized thematically to offer focused comments on the many important issues and factors raised in the text. *Crazywater* is organized thematically by chapters so that one interviewee's comments may turn up in various chapters, but the synthesis is incomplete, and this sometimes serves to inhibit the reader's understanding of one character's personal journey through alcoholism, especially because the complete cast of characters is so large. The result is such passages as "Lazarus is the husky, smiling seventy-four-year-old elder from the Stoney reserve in southern Alberta who said in Chapter 1 that the word for alcohol in his language meant 'crazywater'" (59). Because Maracle interviewed roughly 75 native people for the book, it is often difficult to remember the names and situations of those who give only brief commentary, so such a connection as Maracle expects his reader to make here is nearly impossible without turning back and rereading Chapter 1. The exception, of course, is in the cases of those who have lengthy narratives affording the reader a truly developed understanding of that person's individual struggles with addiction and recovery.

It seems Maracle had two choices in compiling his field notes. First, he could have chosen thematic groupings, as his chapter headings suggest to some extent, and synthesized the experiences of his many sources using the particularly telling comments and questions which nearly all those interviewed have offered as illustrations of the trends and issues that are clearly central to native peoples' struggle with alcoholism. Or, he could have chosen from the stories collected a representative sample which, when presented as longer narratives in a collection, would illustrate these same issues. Johann's story of suffering and triumph, with which Maracle ends the collection, is an example of the power of a longer narrative.

Instead, the collection is somewhere between these two choices. Maracle's early chapters sometimes combine various issues rather awkwardly; for example, in Chapter 4 "Bingeing, Bootlegging and Racism," Maracle fails to connect these three distinct issues clearly—they are just factors that make native drinking "different" from white drinking. Maracle keeps his own comments brief, presumably in an

attempt to let his interviewees' voices remain the focus of *Crazywater*, but the reader finds herself wanting more connections and conclusions drawn by him. Instead, the reader must work to draw connections between the various stories, to step back and try to make sense of the suffering—a daunting task.

Additionally, the introduction to *Crazywater*, intended to introduce the issue of native substance abuse and clarify Maracle's stance, is somewhat inconsistent with the rest of the collection. After establishing that "alcohol abuse effects everyone in the native community" (10), Maracle criticizes the government and media's failure to focus adequate attention on the deadliness of alcohol and deplores the subsequent "invisibility" (11) of native alcoholism's pervasiveness. But next, in seeming contradiction, he goes on to describe the Canadian government's National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (which spent more than \$53 million "on the treatment and prevention of native alcoholism and substance abuse" [11]) as a "slap in the face" (11). "The very existence of this program," he argues, "diminishes our self-esteem by contributing to the misperception that 'all native people are drunks'" (11). While the government's record in policies affecting native people is far from clean, it is difficult to understand Maracle's logic here because many of the native people interviewed for *Crazywater* describe their experiences with public treatment programs as life-changing and even life-saving.

Maracle's contempt for mainstream media is clear and quite understandable. A list of terminology preceding the introduction suggests a white audience and also suggests Maracle's stance through his use of loaded language; he specifies the correct use of "aboriginal" and "native," which the media often use "wrongly" as nouns rather than adjectives. What is clear in this three-page glossary is that Maracle will not tolerate from his readers a lack of proper respect and understanding; also revealed is a good deal of resentment towards the media and their insensitivity to the details of language use when referring to native people. Interestingly, some of his native interviewees refer to themselves or their people as "natives." Still, Maracle's criticism of the media is valid. He notes, "they occasionally report on native alcoholism, but usually only when the story involves gory or sensational incidents" (11). The alternative that Maracle seems to suggest is that the media should use their influence to encourage the native spiritual and cultural revival that is a necessary prerequisite to ending alcohol and drug abuse.

Despite these flaws, *Crazywater* represents a valuable step in the attempt to understand and combat native substance abuse and addiction. One woman describes her attempts to help others get sober: she believes she can make a difference by "sharing [her] story and not

leaving any part out of it" (214). Indeed many of the successfully recovering interviewees describe the value of learning that others were experiencing the same kind of pain that they were and that others had won the battle against addiction. The collected comments and stories together suggest numerous causes of alcoholism and drug abuse. Among these is prohibition, which made drinking alcohol into a "privilege" not allowed to Indians—only increasing its allure—and forced native people to learn dangerous drinking habits from fear of being caught and arrested: they resorted to guzzling hard liquor in order to throw away the evidence as quickly as possible.

In addition, Maracle and many of those interviewed blame the government and Christian churches for the great numbers of native people who have been alienated from their cultural and spiritual beliefs and practices. One hundred years ago, traditional ceremonies were outlawed, and even today the predominance of Christianity in North America has meant that many native children are raised without the traditions of their families. If a spiritual and cultural revival among native peoples is essential to recovery, then any attempt to distance native people from their traditions is deadly. Alcohol is an escape turned to as a result of uncontrollable anger, frustration, or suffering, and the causes of those emotions are described by many of the interviewees: discrimination and disenfranchisement; physical, emotional, and sexual abuse and the far-reaching repercussions of such suffering; the separation of children and parents due both to alcohol abuse and government intervention; and the lack of progress in self-government.

The solution to alcoholism and drug abuse is part of a larger task that Maracle describes: *Crazywater* is "a part of my overall effort—which in turn is part of many people's overall efforts—to rejuvenate our people, to make ourselves whole once again, to heal our pain, to create social justice and strengthen our language, culture and traditions" (4). If native people, young and old, who are struggling to help themselves or to learn how to break this deadly cycle, need role models to guide them, it is certainly people like Johann who can fill that role. Because it presents her stories and others, *Crazywater* is invaluable. It will be a tool for native people who are dealing with addiction themselves or in those close to them. It will also achieve Maracle's purpose in rounding out the stereotype of the "drunken Indian." The book is part of a movement that Maracle demands we pay attention to: "The ultimate resolution of native alcoholism will require a combination of spiritual, cultural, social, economic and political action. In a sense, it means that we, as native people, have to become reborn" (2).

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