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The Moon Is So Far Away: An Interview with Luci Tapahonso

Andrea M. Penner

I first became interested in Luci Tapahonso's work in 1988. At that time, she had three books of poetry to her credit: One More Shiprock Night, Seasonal Woman, and A Breeze Swept Through. In 1993, when I was writing my thesis on her work, "At Once, Gentle and Powerful: Voices of the Landscape in the Poetry of Luci Tapahonso," the University of Arizona Press had just published Sáanii Dahataal: The Women are Singing, a collection of Tapahonso's poetry and prose. That same year, I heard Luci read from that volume at Arizona State University. She was warmly received by the large audience that included many friends and family members. I was impressed by how deeply her words seemed to touch people's emotions; we were moved alternately to tears and laughter as we listened to her poems, songs, and stories. At the two readings I have attended since then, she has had a similar effect on her listeners, although the works read were quite different. Tapahonso's versatility as a poet and writer of short prose, both fiction and non-fiction, is part of what makes her so accessible to a wide audience. Yet she maintains, in all her work, a connection to all that is Navajo: the people, the land, and the stories.

Currently living away from the Navajo reservation where she grew up and still has family, Tapahonso is Associate Professor at the University of Kansas, in Lawrence, where she teaches poetry, both theory and writing, and literature. For the past couple of years, in the spring, Tapahonso has conducted poetry workshops for women in the community, their registration fees benefiting the local Indian Center. This spring she plans to volunteer her time leading poetry workshops at a women's shelter and at a home for troubled adolescents.

Her current writing projects include Hayoolkaal (Dawn): An

Anthology of Navajo Writers, soon to be published by the University of Arizona Press. She is also working on a new volume of poetry and an autobiography.

I recently visited Luci Tapahonso at her home in Lawrence, Kansas. Tapahonso's home is warm and comfortable. There is evidence of "family" everywhere: there are two walls full of family photographs (one in the kitchen, one in the living room) and her grandchildren's art work adorns the refrigerator. As we sat in the kitchen talking, just after I arrived, chicken and dumplings simmered on the stove, country tunes spilled softly from a radio in the corner, and red chile-shaped lights glowed on their cord around the kitchen window. We talked about the University of New Mexico and University of Kansas English departments, people we both know, classes, students, and our families. We told stories, laughed, and made plans for our brief time together.

The interview recorded here took place the following day, November 4, 1995, after we had spent the morning leisurely breakfasting at the Paradise Cafe (so leisurely, in fact, that we forgot to turn on the tape recorder) and then driving around Lawrence. The driving tour included a visit to Haskell Indian Nations University (formerly, Haskell Indian Junior College). For the actual interview, we sat at her kitchen table and filled up a sixty-minute tape. In transcribing the tape, I deleted most of the conversational and unnecessary additives, such as "you know" and "really." What remains is, for the most part, verbatim.

The University of New Mexico Office of Graduate Studies, through a Research, Project and Travel Grant, provided the funds for my trip, enabling me to conduct this interview as part of my graduate study of Native American literature. I am grateful for their support.

AP: I am particularly interested in the women in your poetry. What is the role of women in matrilineal/matrilocal culture? Do they participate in storytelling any differently than men?

LT: The roles of men and women in Navajo culture, in terms of sharing stories, or talking, seem to me to be the same; they're not really different. One way in which the roles might be different would be in ritual or ceremonial contexts in which the man, the *hataalii*, is the central medicine person. There are women who have those roles, too, but it seems like there are more men than women, depending on where you're at. I know on our part of the reservation there are mostly men. Every time we need a medicine person we go to a man. So in that context it might be a little different because they re-enact, or they retell, different parts of the creation story. They are very structured, and very strict about it; there are fixed texts that are never changed.

But that's different from when people are just talking and sitting around.

AP: That reminds me of what you were telling me this morning, about how you used to go with your parents for a walk and they would tell stories. Both of them told you stories as you walked at night, under the stars.

LT: Yes, it's valued, equally; like when you're sitting around the table, or going for a long drive. And I think the role of women in matrilineal/matrilocal cultures doesn't mean that women necessarily have a higher status. I think the status is higher than in American society, but I think it's equal to men's roles; both have equal weight. There's a saying in Navajo, on the other hand, that says the home revolves around the woman; beauty extends from the woman. And there's a whole song, there's a whole story, that goes with that in which they say the fire is the center of the home. Everything comes out of the fire. But they also refer to the fire as the woman; from the woman, everything comes. Everything that has to do with the home and the house revolves around her and everybody, the children as well as men, all respect that and hold the woman in high esteem.

In traditional culture, or even like with my own family, my mother is the person who keeps everything together. She's the oldest female, and everybody respects her. Whatever she says goes, and she is in charge of everything. You can go to her for advice, or ask her for help if you need help. On the other hand, you can help her, too. There are people who, the older they get, are seen in these really esteemed and respected roles. My father is very much the same way, but my father, as I was growing up, didn't ever contradict my mother. Everything was always up to my mother. He always said, "Ask your mother. Whatever your mother thinks is okay with me." He went along with whatever my mother said. My brothers are the same way in their marriages, too. And I think, in a sense, with Bob and me it's like that. There are not any major decisions made—I don't think Bob would think of that—without me! If I have to make a decision on my own, he pretty much goes along with what I say. So the roles are equal in that way. Men, I think, in Navajo culture, are much more expected to take part in household, domestic chores than men in American society. It's really looked down upon to have a man sitting watching television while around him people are really working, or doing things; the relatives always say, "Make yourself useful." The man should go outside and find something to do; go chop wood, or rake the yard, or do something, but don't just sit around like you're the king of the house, 'cause you're not! [We both laugh!] That's the case, too, that men are more active in cooking, cleaning, and being really involved in taking care of children. I've seen that with my

brothers, my father, and with my marriage, too; it seems natural that the men are really good cooks, and the boys are taught the same way, too. Those are some differences that over the years I've become aware of from talking with friends. I realize that the way we do things is different.

AP: What about relationships between men and women? I am thinking, in particular, of poems like "Raisin Eyes," in which you talk about single women dealing with relationships. That seems to me to be a recurring theme in your work.

LT: I don't know if there's really a comment or statement that is being made. Maybe it's just more recognizing the relationships, saying, this is the way things are. There are a lot of women, I mean people who are my own friends, my own relatives, my sisters, that are involved in relationships. The relationships are somehow different than other people's. In some sense they are unique in that they're Indian, and for that reason they're somehow different. It's not really pointing out how that is, or why that is, just that these relationships exist.

AP: Your poetry and fiction often present life the way it is. You seem interested in everyday life.

LT: As for the daily lives of characters, those are probably drawn from my own life, and my sisters'. A lot of my work is really based on and embodied in a whole network of relationships I have.

AP: Are the characters that appear in your work originally someone you know, or knew, and give a different name to?

LT: Sometimes that happens. I always change names. But sometimes the characters evolve on their own. I might notice something, or hear something, and I just begin with that and it turns into something else I'm not aware of at the beginning. I just know there's this idea I want to play with. I remember one time, a long time ago, we were at the Window Rock Fair. It was really crowded, and we were standing in line at the Civic Center, waiting to see George Strait. As we were waiting to go in, everyone was talking to each other, and I remember there were these women in front of us. They were talking about another woman that was with them, and for some reason I was half-listening to them, and half-listening to my sisters. They were mostly talking in Navajo, but every once-in-a-while they would say things in English. One of the things they said in English really struck me, and I took it and began writing about it. They were talking about this girl; her name was something like Sheila, or Shirley, or Sheryl. They were saying, "Oh, that Shirley, she's just like that." Another one said, "Yeah, you got to really be careful what you say around her because she's from Shonto." And then one said, "She's real shy, and you really got to watch yourself around her." Immediately they all agreed and then they turned to something else; and I just thought, for some

reason, that alliteration was so neat. "She . . . Shonto . . . Shirley . . . shy . . .," and so I started with that and then it just evolved into something else completely.

So you hear things, and for some reason you think, "that's really good." That's how I know. I'm really aware of the fact that, just in ordinary language, Navajo people have a real gift for language. They move back and forth between languages, in some cases, not knowing a lot of English, but knowing enough to pick the precise word that they need; knowing enough so it's not all cluttered, they just say exactly what they need to say.

AP: When you hear or see something that strikes you in a particular way, do you say to yourself, "Oh, I need to remember that"? Do you quickly write it down before you forget, or is it the kind of thing you can mentally hold on to?

LT: I remember it, but I do write a lot. I have a journal I write in every day, usually at night, sometimes in the morning, but like this [she shows me her journal] was last night; I write before I go to sleep. Last night I was writing about the moon. Did you see the moon? It was really far away. I thought, the moon is so far away. How come it seems far? At home I remember it closer. I was looking at it thinking, it's really far away from us. I was writing about how it seems far, and I was writing about how at home I remember seeing the Yé'ii Bicheii dance, and the moon was just right there. It seems closer there. But last night it was really far away; it's sad. And sometime early this morning I woke up and it was shining into the room; and I was thinking, it's not really that far!

AP: Do you deliberately choose to write "about" certain things?

LT: I don't think I do. If I do it doesn't work. Like this story I was telling you about? [At breakfast that morning, Luci had told me a long story, a composite of another woman's experience and her own; she has been trying to write the story for months.] I wanted to do it; it's not working, so I'm just going to let it go. It's better if I just have a sense of it and go with it. It works out better if I don't know what's going to happen.

AP: Is there a relationship between the stories and the songs that appear in your work?

LT: Do you mean the actual song, or do you mean the mention of songs?

AP: I hadn't considered the distinction. I suppose I am thinking, for example, about "The Motion of Songs Rising"—there are both old stories, and stories that are sung right there.

LT: Have you heard that, orally? There is a song that goes with that. It's about the Yé'ii Bicheii. It's really about the way that I see the whole concept of ceremony relating to me as an individual. But it's

also a mutual outpouring of gratitude from myself for this, but I realize, also, on the other hand, that the Yé'iiis, the holy ones, are really old, they're just ageless, so they return and they're happy to see us even though we're real different than the way we were 200 years ago; we're very different, but the essence of who we are, the essence of ourselves, is really still Navajo. And then I understand that—I feel like crying when I think about it—it makes you think about everything that's happened to Indian people, and specifically to Navajo people, everything that they tried didn't work. . . . Every time we go home, probably every three or four months, we always have prayers done for us, or some kind of ceremony, because we've been over here around non-Navajos all the time. So when we go back we always have something done for us. That's what the medicine man always tells us: "the main thing you have to remember is that you're Navajo," he says. "Some people when they get old, sometimes when they're elderly, they don't know why, but they just don't feel right; there's something missing. They can't understand why, but something's not right. So they get mean, they get grouchy, they just strike out and say things to people; something's not settled for them. They know they're at the end of their life and something's gone wrong, but they don't know what it is." He said, "that's what happens, that can happen to a person when they stray away from their original religion. . . . When every person is born, they're given a belief system and a religion to believe in; those two should go together throughout their lives. It makes your life complete to have something to believe in. Everybody," he said, "every person that's born is given that at the beginning of their lives. . . . At the end of your life, if you have stayed to that—you might stray, you might go away for awhile and come back—but as long as you have that," he said, "at the end of your life, whenever it is that you die, you're complete. You don't have any misgivings." He said that's why a lot of old Navajo people and elderly Indian people are always real cheerful; they play jokes, they're real humorous, they're happy, so they have a real good sense of humor. . . . "That's how you want to be," he said. "You were born a Navajo; the path is already there. Everything's there for you; all you have to do is follow it and know about it. . . . Then, that way, no matter what you do, no matter where you go, you always know, you're always clear on who you are."

So they always tell us things like that; we go back for that. But even if I was there I would do the same thing; that's the way my brothers and sisters are. That's really important, that feeling, when something happens that's jarring. Once my sister was driving and all of a sudden something ran out in front of her—she thought maybe it was a dog, a St. Bernard or something—but it ran in front of her and she had an accident. Right away she had something done for her. So

when things like that happen, someone breaks into your house, you have something done right away. The ceremony puts your life back into place. So even if I was there I would be doing the same thing. It's because of that sense of the order, the sense of the way things are supposed to be, the right way of doing things, the way life is supposed to be—you know when it's not right—we have a whole myriad of things that can be done about it. You just have to be aware and know how to go about doing it and getting help. I think that of course, then, in doing that, there are certain songs, prayers. So those come into my work, because they are part of my ordinary life, not a separate kind of thing. That's why, I'm sure, all these things are really important. I feel real fortunate to have that, but at the same time know that I can function in an academic atmosphere, which is really different! It helps to have a base to operate from.

AP: That shows how strong those stories and songs are, to sustain you, even this far away, in such a different environment.

LT: I am really dependent on prayer for everything. I don't do anything without really praying about it first; that's a constant state for me, to always be prayerful. It's really important. And I think I would be like that in another field, too, if I was a writer or not; it's just being immersed. I don't know how it would be not to have that.

AP: Just as the songs and stories you grew up with are woven into the fabric of your life, so the language of oral storytelling, singing, and praying is integral to your poetry. You use certain rhetorical strategies to create the effect of oral language, to replicate not only conversations, but storytelling. Please talk about these strategies—if you can identify them—and how you use them in your work.

LT: It seems that most of my work begins in Navajo; the original ideas are in Navajo. Sometimes they aren't, but most of the time they begin in Navajo. Then, when I write them down, I write them in English. Where it's going to go from there, I'm not clear. Maybe it has to do with the material. I have some work . . . they all kind of begin at the same place, yet as they evolve and as they're being written, one might stay on a certain colloquial level, using ordinary, everyday Navajo syntax. . . . On the other hand, it might move to use English, but a heightened level of English.

AP: More formal?

LT: More formal, but at the same time it's still in a Navajo context. So, how that happens I'm not really sure. Maybe it depends on what I'm writing about, or the emotional quality behind it. I know that in the prose pieces that I've written, they're very much immersed—well maybe except for one or two—in intense emotion. They deal with emotional things that are mostly very painful, and yet they're bounded by order. Even though they're painful, they're redeemed; even though

they're painful, they're brought back by extreme love. Those are pieces that can't be poems because the form doesn't allow it; I mean there is too much there to handle. When I begin to write, a lot of times I don't know if it's going to be a poem or prose; it just depends on what happens. Sometimes, when I read them aloud, depending on my audience, I get really involved, too; I relive the whole experience, even though it might not have been mine. But I have—I think, part of what is really important, is to be able to have—empathy for people, to understand the pain of another person, even if you haven't experienced what they have.

So, a lot of my work is clearly not my experience; the act of having written it is not the whole thing, but I have some sense of it. In those instances, it's important that people know about these stories because the person to whom it happened can't, that is, is not in a position to, tell, and so then I realize that part of why people are always telling me stories is because in a sense I have a capacity to tell. It's not that I'm a better story teller, or a better writer than they; it's that I have access that they don't.

AP: The more of those kinds of stories you tell, the more people feel compelled to tell you, because you've entered into their world through what you have already told, through other people's stories. And they know you tell those stories with empathy, so they want to share with you, too, and it keeps going.

LT: Yes. So, the way I see that, I understand that role, and I really have a lot of respect for the stories people tell me; in a way it's sort of odd, wherever I go, I always meet people who are telling me stories, who just tell me all kinds of things. It's amazing to me; and yet, it seems natural. I'll get someone I hardly know who just pours their heart out to me. I kind of know why; I mean, I sort of think there's something behind it, and maybe I'm not clear right now on what it is, but it will become clear to me. It also shows that a lot of people are in pain.

AP: Yes. I find that with my students. They come into my office and tell me these things that are happening in their lives; it's really amazing what they're going through—a lot of pain. That reminds me of something you say in the introduction to *Sáanii Dahataal* about retaining "the first person narrative voice because it is the stronger voice." Do you still subscribe to that?

LT: Yes, I do. I have this story—I don't know if you've heard it—it's about a woman who is a grandmother and she loses her grandchild, and the story obviously wasn't mine. But because my mother was from that area and because the woman was a little older, maybe two or three years older than I, I found it really quite easy to move into her voice and tell the story. And I was real familiar with where she lived, the

place and everything. But she would never have been able to—she actually didn't even tell me the story herself; it was her niece who told me the story. But I do think using first person is easier, in a sense, and more believable. Because a lot of times when people tell stories they say, "Well, let me tell you what she told me. This is what she said. She said, 'Last Saturday, when I was in town. . . .'" They assume the voice of that person, so that's really natural. It seems that in my work it's easier to do that than to write in the third person, and to say "Carrie went to town and when she was there she saw this. . . ." There seems to be a distance there. So, it is easier to write in the first person, for me.

AP: How do you bring traditional stories into written text? That is, traditional stories have an original context—a time, place, and circumstance in which they are usually told. What are the effects of separating those stories from their contexts?

LT: What kind of stories?

AP: Stories associated with the Yé'ii Bicheii, or with a ceremony, that somehow become part of your work.

LT: I don't do that. I can write about the ceremony, like the Yé'ii Bicheii, but it's just surface; I won't go beyond that. I think that there are clearly lines; for me, I'm very aware of the boundaries. I would never take like a creation story and rewrite it or re-tell it; I don't think that's my place to do that. A lot of people have done that, but I really don't fool with traditional texts, even though that's very much a part of my experience, now. I think that those are given to us for a particular reason. . . . I think that because of the way I've grown up a lot of things are alluded to, but that's the extent of it. I don't go beyond that.

AP: So, for example, in your poem "Blue Horses Rush In" you speak of the four directions and the colors, but it's not a story that is being retold or appropriated in any way. It's just an allusion, an element.

LT: Mm hmm. It's like an acknowledgment of certain aspects, it's not a retelling because I wouldn't be able to do that.

AP: Do you see, in your writing, parallels to other contemporary twentieth century work, in general? And to Native American work, in particular?

LT: Mmmm. I think there probably is, but I'm not sure. I don't know if there are parallels, but I know that writers I really like I read over and over. Tillie Olsen? I really like her work. Flannery O'Connor, and James Wright. Scott Momaday, I really like his work, and Linda Hogan. I don't know; there are probably influences but I am not conscious of them, but those are writers I really like. Also, Li-Young Lee, a wonderful Chinese writer, a poet. But I don't know if there are parallels; it's hard for me to make that distinction. In the

literary context, there probably are, in the technical aspects, maybe. I see my work as really having begun in Navajo and ending in English; it's hard for me to see how, just on a structural level, someone else's work might be the same. Somebody else might see that, who doesn't have the same kind of baggage that I have; someone who just saw the work by itself. I'm too close to it to see.

AP: Taking a step back from your own work, then, how has the Native American literature "canon" evolved since you first began studying and writing?

LT: I think it has evolved, and it has really been tremendous what has happened in the last, gosh, fifteen years. There's just been an explosion of all kinds of writers. I think one of the really positive things that has happened is that there is more recognition of writers who are writing from their own cultures, who know their own culture, who know their own language, and who are full blood. It seems like, initially, the writing scene was dominated by writers of Native descent, but who weren't full blood, who did not really speak their own languages, did not grow up in their own communities. Maybe a majority of writers are still like that, but, I think it's really good to see writers like Sherman Alexie and Adrian Lewis, Roberta Hill Whiteman, who are full bloods.

AP: Do you know Evelina Lucero?

LT: Yes (smiling); yes, writers like her . . . I think that's been a real important part of what has been happening, to recognize writers like her. That is not to make disparaging remarks about other writers; I think it's been very positive. It's important that people who grew up in the communities, you know, naturally they would have a sense of what those communities are like and not be writing from the outside. So I think in that sense the canon has evolved, and there is just a lot more writing now than there has ever been.

AP: Louis Owens says he used to think he knew of every novel being written by a Native American, but now there are so many.

LT: It is really hard to keep up; you couldn't have said that a few years ago, but now it is really hard to keep current. Especially if you are teaching Native literature and you have to keep on top of things, it is really hard to find the time to do that!

AP: Do you think your own work has influenced younger writers, such as the writers who will be featured in the Navajo writers' anthology you are editing? Have they been influenced by you in any way?

LT: I don't know. I think they would know that. I mean, they would be able to answer that, rather than me. I do a lot of things in schools when I go home, on the reservation. Mostly to show the students that the way they talk is unique; it's really important to have them value

themselves. We are inundated by American society; everybody wants to be like everybody else. I think it is really critical that Navajo young people understand they are okay. So I go to the schools and talk to the students about the value of their education, of their culture.

AP: How does writing by Navajo authors differ from literature of other tribes? Do you see a difference in the work that has been submitted for the anthology?

LT: Yes, I do. There's a real strong emphasis on heritage, on clan; people are real aware of their clan.

AP: That's something you don't find in Alexie, for example.

LT: Yes. They are really aware of place, and of clan and family. They are really conscious of their relatives, their grandparents, their aunts. They are conscious of kinship; they are different in that way. They see everyone as somehow being related; there is a sense of heritage in Navajo that I see in this anthology, as well as a sense of history. In a lot of the stories they talk about how different parts of the creation story refer to them. They see themselves as part of the stories, which I think is really neat. I know that in this part of the country [the Midwest] there is not that sense of history.

AP: Are most of these writers living on the reservation?

LT: Yes, most of them are. There are a few that aren't: some people in graduate school, some people teaching, some people in college. So some of them are not, but most of them, including some high school students, are from the reservation. We got a good response, quite varied.

AP: How did you advertise for submissions?

LT: Mostly in the *Navajo Times* and local newspapers. . . . We just kind of plastered the whole reservation with fliers! We sent them out to all the schools, but then a teacher sent in her whole class' work, fourth graders; so I did another call to make it more specific to adults rather than children. I felt bad about that, but it was my own fault for not being clear.

AP: So when you say "we," who else is working on it with you?

LT: Well, actually, it's just me! But I consult a lot with Ofelia Zepeda, because she has done this before, and with my editor, Joanne O'Hare at Arizona, but in the end it's just me. It's like I have all these different hats, so I think of myself as "we"!

AP: So you have mythic proportions, like some of your characters! I am thinking of characters like Lena, Leona, Seasonal Woman, that seem to take on mythic dimensions, or a greater significance than each one's own individual life. Where does that come from?

LT: I think that's the way people talk, the way they say things. Hmmm. Let me think of an example. Like, people might be together at some kind of gathering, and maybe there's a man there, a guy who

is kind of tall, and for some reason he is real grouchy, he's in a bad mood, and people say: "How come that guy is getting mad at everybody?" And someone else might say something like, "Didn't you know he was born up there on the mountain, and there's a lot of bears around? One of his clans is bear." They say, "It's real early in the spring; he's not supposed to be awake yet; that's why he's like that." Everybody just sort of laughs, knowingly, and says, "Oh. Well, we'll just let him be the way he is." So they say things like that.

AP: I have just one more question before we conclude. What do you see yourself doing in the future? What shape is your work taking? (I guess that was two questions!)

LT: I would like to continue what I'm doing—publishing, writing. I am not undertaking anything new. I don't really foresee myself doing a lot of new and different things. I want to keep on writing poetry and prose.

We concluded the interview so Luci could get ready for her reading at the Terra Nova bookstore in downtown Lawrence. I had more questions I wanted to ask, and more stories I wanted to hear, but those will have to wait for another time.

The reading at Terra Nova went differently than Luci had planned. She had carefully chosen several selections from her books of poetry, but warned me that if there were a lot of children there, she would probably tell a story, instead. Because the store was promoting her new children's book, Navajo ABC (illustrated by Eleanor Schick), several parents brought their children. With them in mind, Luci told a long story about a little Navajo girl named Emma who finds a nickel in the dirt at her Auntie's house and decides to keep it safe in her belly button. Parents, children, and the rest of the audience enjoyed Luci's variety of sound effects and voices. After telling Emma's story, Luci explained the illustrations and words in Navajo ABC. Each page prompted a brief story to explain the significance of velvet and quarters, the land and the moon.

From alphabet books to anthologies, from poetry to prose, Tapahonso's work promotes an appreciation and understanding of Navajo culture, in both its traditional and contemporary manifestations. Tapahonso has made a significant contribution to the growing body of Native American literature. She continues to experiment in her writing, no longer confining herself to the free verse of her early work. We have much to look forward to.

Storied Dialogues: Exchanges of Meaning Between Storyteller and Anthropologist

Blanca Chester

This writing arises from one particular struggle in the arena of cross-cultural communication. An essay of sorts, it is constructed in the form of a dialogue between several different texts and illustrates some of the difficulties of cross-cultural communication. The text now exists primarily as a visual recording; it is a splicing together of two separate tape-recorded dialogues that I have transcribed into writing. The first is a dialogue between Wendy Wickwire, an ethnographer, and Harry Robinson, an Okanagan storyteller from the interior of British Columbia. Wickwire is also editor of Robinson's two books, *Write It On Your Heart* and *Nature Power*. These two collections of Robinson's stories are unusual because he told the stories to Wendy in English, thus translating them himself. The recordings were then transcribed, almost verbatim, into poetic texts that follow Harry's speech patterns as closely as possible. The dialogue that I work from in this essay is not in either of these books, though it follows the same model. It is previously unpublished and I have transcribed it from Wendy Wickwire's tape-recorded field notes; the dialogue takes place early on in Wendy's relationship with Harry.

In the first dialogue Wendy tries to understand what the Okanagan word *ha-HA* means, and she attempts to translate both the word and the concept into terms that exist in her understanding. The precise meaning of this concept never becomes clear; after ten years of working with Harry, Wendy still does not understand the full meaning of *ha-HA*. I document some of the processes of that misunderstanding between Wendy and Harry and, later, between Wendy and myself. Harry responds to Wendy's questions indirectly, answering her queries with anecdotes and, especially, stories. For Harry, stories are a

familiar way of explaining and teaching. To Wendy, however, the stories often appear unrelated to the questions she asks, and they are confusing.

The second dialogue, which is spliced into the first one, comes from an interview that I created with Wendy ten years later. I try to comprehend what Wendy has understood from Harry during her years of working with him. The dialogues, and my interpretation, end up illustrating a discourse of mis-understanding more than providing solutions to the confusion. *Ha-HA*, like many words about the supernatural, seems to lack a straightforward or concrete meaning. It is particularly problematic to translate such a term into English, where no corresponding words come close to matching its meaning. The taped sessions recorded here are creatively edited, or storied, accounts of the experience of trying to understand an other wor(l)d view through (its) stories. In creating such a dialogic understanding, one is nevertheless limited by the parameters of one's own cultural knowledge. Such understanding, if it is to make any headway at all, thus needs always to remain open-ended and recursive.

The use of the tape recorder as a source of fieldnotes is not always popular in ethnographic practice, largely because transcribing tapes is so labour-intensive. Taping texts and stories, however, is a widespread practice. The contextual information in such taped recordings provides richer information than that gleaned from written notes, as critics have noted (Sanjek 115). The translation of these recordings into written texts enables one to play with form. Indeed, form manifests itself as an integral component of the dialogue. Meanings change depending on the form and style that is used in framing an oral narrative. Should these stories be presented as prose narratives, or as poetry? Is the prose form more objective than the poetic? What is objectivity? Is the poetic form an imposition on Harry's text, implying that his speech is, somehow, more natural than Wendy's? Can the reverse also be true? Like Wendy, I have chosen to translate Harry's stories as "dramatic poetry," to borrow Dennis Tedlock's phrase. Any patterning that is revealed I heard, or thought I heard, in Harry's voice.

The literary critic, as well as the anthropologist, faces the problem of how to supply missing cultural context to make these stories meaningful. When stories are performed or written in English, what appears on the surface as transparent meaning is frequently illusory. Harry's stories are often Coyote tales, which does not make them any less real. Moreover, my manipulation of these texts creates another voice of authority, in addition to Wendy's and Harry's, in an explicit and textualized way. By juxtaposing Harry's words with the prose text of Wendy's speech, attention is drawn to the differences between their discourses, even as they communicate or mediate between each other.

Differences between their two worlds of experience are assumed. It is up to the reader to think about the nature of those differences. What is Harry telling Wendy? What is Wendy telling me?

Following the dialogues I discuss some of my own views and interpretations of the recorded speech performances. I try to explain what the experience of trying to understand both Harry's and Wendy's words means to me. This analysis may be read as part of the previous dialogue, even though it stands apart from it. Just as an audience interacts with the storyteller and the storytelling event, a reader interacts with a text to create new meanings and new dialogues, either implicitly or explicitly. Here these dialogues are also explicitly cross-cultural. I chose to leave my reading of the storytelling events more or less separate from the stories themselves for two reasons. First, I wanted to play with the ethnographic format of writing up an experience where the ethnographer remains explicitly part of both the experience and the writing. Secondly, by inserting written interpretation into the spoken dialogues, the format could have become so unwieldy that the words would have lost their sense of oral performance. I have referred to Wendy and Harry by their first names to emphasize their close sense of relationship, and the relating of one voice to another in a dialogic format.

Because this dialogue is a continuing and continual process, the ethnographic experience cannot be used to translate the concept of *ha-HA* into some unified and unitary meaning that defines *ha-HA* as either this or that. Such an interpretation of Harry's stories would suggest the cohesion and closure of a culture frozen through transcription and translation. Instead, interpretation is drafted into the dialogue itself in a kind of linguistic and storied recursivity. This essay may then be read as a self-interpreting dialogue.¹ Readers may, to use Harry's and Wendy's words, "Come up with what they think" about *ha-HA* and about Harry's, Wendy's, and my stories. Moreover, the reader continues the process of interpretation not only during the process of reading but also afterwards, in thinking about the text and the connections it makes to the world "out there." To follow Harry's instructions, "To think about the stories for a while," suggests that they may be self-interpreting in this way. It also means that these stories, these dialogues, then become part of other, newer dialogues in the endlessly recursive process of structuring meaning.

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Exchanges of Meaning

Wendy: What does that word mean?

Harry: *Sumix*? Is the thing—some of them Indian word—that I can't turn into English.
Seems to be they got no mate.

Wendy: No word in English?

Harry: Yeah.
And should be.
That *ha-HA*, that should be because the priest,
they learn the Indian word.
And the priest, they mention that.
And we know what it is.
We must've heard in English.
But that's something I don't know.

Wendy: So if you were going to talk about that word,
how would you talk about it?

Harry: *ha-Ha*. Well, it could be . . .

Wendy: Does it mean a person?

Harry: No. No person. *ha-HA*.
Well, in other way, God the *ha-HA*.
God was a *ha-HA*.
He nothing else.

Wendy: Could a sweathouse—could that be that?

Harry: A sweathouse.
No, no sweathouse.
Is the steambath, the sweathouse.

Wendy: But what about that *Shoo-mish*?

Harry: That's one of 'em.
See, we didn't get to this yet.
I was going to tell you.
But we going by the number.

Wendy: But Harry, a person who has that—
If a person has that, then is he this?

Harry: *ha-HA*? Yeah.
That would be the *ha-HA*.

Wendy: That's what I wanted to know.

Harry: Yeah, that's the *ha-HA*.

When you have that, then they had 'em.

I don't know what they do.

But they have 'em, you know.

They must alone—in the writing.

No paper those days, you know.

They might've wrote 'em in,

in something so they could keep 'em.

I think they could sew the buckskin thin,

the thin of the buckskin, you know.

In the edge, like in here.

They really thin, almost like the paper.

They thin.

Then I think they cut them and they make it very small,

kind of narrow, you know, like that.

And they sew that.

They sew that, and then they put the *ha-HA* in

when they just kill 'em, you know.

When they fresh.

Put 'em in and then they sew.

Then they can stay in there and dry 'em

and they turn into powder, like.

But still in there.

And he must've had 'em in his pocket

or sitting somewhere.

So they need 'em,

so they can take 'em out on his hand.

Once they had 'em on his hand,

you can never see 'em.

It just disappearing.

You could see 'em walking from here.

Maybe two, three man is standing and himself make it four.

But the other three, they standing here still.

Then whoever the power man,

they walked a couple hundred yards away from the others.

And these others still want 'em,

still looking at 'em.

Then they get there,

then his hand—don't see no more.

Even in open place.

We didn't get there yet.

But we will.
That's the way he got away.
See, this the Blackfoot . . .
This is a bunch of bushes.
That was in the prairie.
I see them because I went on a trail and I could see everything.
And the bushes over there, in the prairie,
they're not like this.
This is a tall and big one around here.
But over there, this too high.
Oh, about the highest, six feet or seven feet.
And small.
That's all. They natural.
They stay that way all the time.

Then, in the bushes, in the ground, you know,
some of 'em kind of long, but mostly they kind of round,
something like this, you know.
Then, some of 'em, it might be a little long.
These bushes.
But it's kind of thick.

I seen 'em.
And that's the kind of bushes that these two man,
three, four man went in there, hiding.
But the Blackfoot Indian watching 'em go in the bushes.
And they don't go out.
They stay and they wiggle the bushes.
And a bunch of Blackfoot Indians.
Then the chief says,

"They're there.
They never go through before.
They just stop there in the middle, and hide there.
We leave 'em then, til tomorrow.
Then you can make a fire clean around the brush."

So far, the fire so far—
Like from here to that table maybe.
The fire clean it out.
They keep that dry wood from the bushes
and they used the buffalo manure.
The old, old manure, DRY.
They used that for fire.
And they built the fire.

See, at this little ridge top.
That could be the fire.
And they make a fire clean around there.
And then a bunch of Shuswap,
the some of 'em, they go that away.
And the other one, they go this way.
And they meet, you know.
They going around all time.

The other went this way.
And the other one this way.
And the fire—
They seems to go on the side of the fire.
And the other one thataway.
So they could never get out.
If they come out, they grab 'em and kill 'em.
They just leave 'em there.
That's what the chief thought.

They could leave 'em there til the sun comes up.
So high.
And then they can—
The whole bunch, they can go in there.
In the bushes.
And grab 'em and kill 'em.
There.
That's what the chief thought.

And he do that.
They build the fire clean around.
And they walked this way and that way, all night.
Til the sun comes up.
But this mans in there, the one that's hiding,
the four of them, before morning,
just about two o'clock in the morning,
before it gets daylight—
And they use that.
One of them they got the *Shoo-mish*, this one.
And he got 'em on his hand.
And then they go right through the bush.

And then they go right through the fire.
And then they go right through the people, they want 'em.
They go right out and they go away.
Nobody seen them.

See, now, we'll call that *ha-HA*.
That's his power.
That little—just about that size.

Wendy: So you call it two things. You call it *Shoo-mish* and *ha-HA*.
You call it the both things?

Harry: Well, that's his power.
And that's his *Shoo-mish*.
Now, that's in English.
We say that's his power.
But in the Indian, we'll say his *Shoo-mish*.

Wendy: And also, what about that *ha-HA*?

Harry: Well, because his *Shoo-mish* was a *ha-HA*.
ha-HA his *Shoo-mish*.

Wendy: *Well, it's interesting that you pick that one, because I pride myself on the fact that I wasn't trying to shove Harry into any particular box, but that was the one box—I went through a period of being very interested in that, so that discussion came out of something I was interested in. And I knew it meant a lot to him, and at that stage I'd been reading the ethnographies too, and we got Boas talking about power concepts, and I had read that. And yet, I felt that the way Harry talked about the Shoo-mish, it wasn't the quality, it was the being. So I wanted to define it. As you could see from the discussion.*

Harry, however, responds to Wendy's query by launching into a story about an insect whose name he does not know.

Harry: This is the full power.
Is about the best power there is.
Because no other animal can be that way.

Wendy: What animal is that in English?

Harry: I don't know.
But I seen 'em.
But nowadays I don't think I can see
because my eyes is not very good.
And then there's a lot of these little animals and things,
they're not here no more.
I don't know why, they go away.
No more.
And I used to see this—
They more like a little snake.

And the colour like a snake.
 Kind of green.
 Oh, no hair.
 They look like snake.
 But they got little legs.
 I think the legs were six.
 And they got the tails, sharp.
 It's about that size, or maybe a little bigger than this.
 And they can jump.
 And I put my finger there, you know.
 I could see 'em laying on the dirt, on the ground.
 And I put my finger in there.
 I thought, you know, I'm going to catch 'em that way.
 But no.
 That fast, and they were over there already.
 They can jump.
 They can jump all across—
 They can jump about like from here to there.
 That's about all.
 They don't jump too far, just little ways.
 But you can't catch 'em.

Wendy: *It never got defined really. I don't think I ever really did get it totally clear, from that discussion. And I don't know if we had pursued it further we could have. And part of it was his inability to hear. And he got very upset—he had to understand something. If he looked at me and felt that he wasn't explaining himself, he got this very tormented look. He sort of would lapse into a story as his way of trying to explain it.*

And then I would be trying to think: Now what's the point of this story? What is this little teeny insect he's talking about, and how does this insect have anything to do with this ha-HA?

Blanca: *So you found the stories actually made it harder instead of easier to understand what he was trying to get at?*

Wendy: *I would say so. As they were going by. Because we are used to having something explained. We have dictionaries. We have the word. It's explained. But with Harry, there wasn't that kind of dictionary definition . . . about him, about his way of seeing the world. And yet it is with us. And so we want it explained. And I think that—This is Boas on the religion of the American Indians:*

The fundamental concept bearing on the religious life of the individual is the belief in the existence of magic power, which may influence the life of man, and which in

turn may be influenced by human activity. In this sense magic power must be understood as the wonderful qualities which are believed to exist in objects, animals, men, spirits, or deities, and which are superior to the natural qualities of man. . . . This idea seems adequately expressed by our term "wonderful." (259)

That's what I was reading at the time. And quite interested in seeing what Harry was talking about. How it related to that. I remember linguists, especially the ones who work on dictionaries and grammars, have a very narrow vision of the whole picture. I flipped through the dictionary to see what they had down there for the word "power" and how they defined ha-HA. They were strange meanings. Not "wonderful," but "scary." The meanings that the linguists got seemed off-the-wall types of meanings that didn't fit with what Harry was talking about.

Wendy: Well, how is God *ha-HA*?

Harry: Well, God *ha-HA*.

We could see it was sure *ha-HA*.

He is the one that makes this whole world.

He didn't make 'em,

but he thought it would be that way.

Then it was that way.

So that was *ha-HA*.

Who can do that besides him?

Wendy: Who else is *ha-HA*? Can a person be *ha-HA*?

Harry: Well, if he got the *Shoo-mish* like that,
it could be *ha-HA*.

Wendy: Maybe he's got the bear for his *Shoo-mish*.

If he's got the bear or a bird or a tree or something,
can he still be *ha-HA*?

Harry: Oh yeah.

But it's not his *ha-HA*.

It's this.

It was *ha-HA*.

Wendy: So a plant can be *ha-HA*?

Harry: Yeah. But this one is *ha-HA* than anything.

Wendy: That's the strongest one?

Harry: That's the strongest one and that's the end.
That's all.

Because if you get a hold of 'em,
and nobody would see you,
you disappearing.
But the other animal,
they got *Shoo-mish* with some other animal,
grizzly bear or whatever there is,
they *ha-HA* all right.
But not like this.
This is the only one.
That's the end of that way.
You understand?

Wendy: Yeah. I understand.
I think I understand.

Wendy: *And yet Harry couldn't really describe it. But then he did tell me, at the same time that we were working on that, you know, "Listen to these a few times. Not just once. And you know, it'll teach you something. You'll learn something from it. You'll see what I'm trying to mean. You know, it'll tell you something."*

My reading of Nature Power is that the big motive there, in those stories, was that the whites, the "Shamas," and the Indians are different. What is Shama? And what is Indian? And he's explaining in those stories. He's explaining essential stuff there. A concept like this, even if we don't get at it, even if I don't totally understand—I think I've gotten it, as I thought about it. It's not at once. It comes slowly and it takes a lot of thinking about it. With Aimee, even though I don't speak Shuswap, I've just loved it. And I can tell that she has too, when she's realized that I'm homing in on a word or a concept which she's never been asked about before, but which she knows. Like "respect" means dynamite to her. Well, no one has ever asked her, why is it so important? I kind of understand what it means. And she really knows what respect means. And we are treating each other respectfully. We have a relationship. Like Harry, I've known her since 1977. When I ask her about respect, she knows I mean I understand respect, and I really try to treat her respectfully. Bringing gifts is really important. And that's something she's always done her whole life. Part of it is respect. And that the way you sit, the way you relate, and the affection that you show is very much a part of the concept. So when we're talking about the concept, there's the relationship and understanding that's gone before. So to me, it's a wonderful thing to be talking about the meaning, when we have the friendship to go with it. And I think we can only do that from coming from my world, and coming from her world, and discussing it. It brings in this whole amazing level of meaning.

Harry: Some people, they had the *Shoo-mish* ant, you know.
 This is not an ant.
 I don't know the name of this in Indian.
 Don't seems to have a name.
 I don't know but I seen 'em.

Wendy: So this *ha-HA* can also be God?

Harry: Yeah. That's about the only ways I could see his *ha-HA*.
 It's *ha-HA* all right, if it wasn't for this.

Wendy: If it wasn't for the animal?

Harry: Yeah. Because if you hold this one, and nobody could see
 you,
 nobody could see you.
 You could keep the doors open.
 They can come in and stand there but we cannot—

Wendy: You can be invisible?

Harry: Yeah. More like a ghost.
 Some people, sometimes, they can see the ghost.
 But sometimes they can hear only.
 Hear 'em walking.

Wendy: So *ha-HA* means that they can disappear?
 That's what this means? Or just this?

Harry: No. Now this man, that was his *Shoo-mish*.
 This one.
 When you hold this one, and nobody can see 'em,
 they just disappearing.
 This is the one that help him to be that way.
 Just this one.
 But no animal can do it the same as he does.

Wendy: But say, if it was a flower, a plant, say that's his *Shoo-mish*,
 then he's *ha-HA*, because of the plant?

Harry: Oh yeah.
 And that would be *Plax*.

Blanca: *Would you say you almost need these kind of dialogues to show respect?*

Wendy: *I think so. I don't know if we'd have to make it explicit. I think that is respectful. The fact that she has another world view and another way of seeing it, and that I am really making the effort to get*

to know that. But I don't think to her it feels extractive. I think it doesn't work if you're just bombarding questions and you seem to be taking away something. I know with Aimee that wouldn't work.

Blanca: Is that what happened with the dialogue on ha-HA?

Wendy: With Harry I was at the stage where I was trying to fill in the spaces and ask the questions and get the answers. So it's more forced. And he was hard of hearing. I was being very academic. I was pursuing something that I had read a lot about and I was trying to get it answered. I wanted to figure out what it was. But I have to say, I don't know how I would write this up if I were asked to write what ha-HA really means.

Blanca: About the footnote, the concept being untranslatable—?

Wendy: It was kind of neat, the way he said that. "I don't think there is any mate for this word." When he got talking, though, I got to thinking about it. And for a while when he was explaining, I thought, what is this insect that he's talking about? And what is the point of this teeny little insect? But in the years thinking about that—and I thought about that a lot, and the fact that God is really powerful. God is the most powerful, one of the most powerful people, because he can make himself invisible. But in Harry's world, he was making the point that this teeny insect that you can't even see is more powerful than God. I think he even says that, or next to God. As powerful.

They're powerful because they have the same ability. If you have that little insect in your pouch, then you could disappear too. That was the point he was making. ha-HA was this ability. It's an essence. A quality. I don't know.

Harry: So that's why they call that ha-HA.
There's no other thing ha-HA than this one.
But it's very small.
Now I wonder if you can understand.

Wendy: Yeah.

Harry: There's none of this in my word, in my language,
that I couldn't tell in English.
And that kind of thing,
they don't seem to have a word in English for that.
I can only guess, that's all.
So we could say, that in English, ha-HA or power,
it's about the highest power there is.
But still we don't know the name, even in the Indian.
Might be coyote, might be skunk, might be grizzly.

Might be bird—anything.
One person, they got lots of *Shoo-mish*.
Some of 'em, they got lots of 'em.
But some, maybe only one or two.
And some, they might have only one.

Wendy: Can a Shama have *ha-HA*?

Harry: I don't know.
Not supposed to.

Not supposed to because God give this *Shoo-mish* to the
Indian.

Not to the Shama.

And what they give to the Shama, the power like *ha-HA*.
So that's why there's the Indian
and they got a different way than the Shama.

But the Shama, they could never have this,
this kind of power.

That's not their way.

That's the Indians' way.

So they got to be that way from the time they enter the world.
But nowadays, the Shama was trying to make the things all in
one.

On his side, on his way.

But it should not.

But the Indians is got to have his own way.

That's what God says.

So, finally we can go that way.

Now, again.

Wendy: I think I understand.

Wendy: *This has made me really think about what linguists do. To me, you should have all of this back and forth understanding before you start. Every word is so loaded. With this—you could have fifty pages on it. And that's why when I started my songs research, well, it's like you've got to get a corpus of so many songs. You've got to transcribe them and see what their structure looks like. And yet I went out there and sometimes it would be five or six days and maybe five songs. A lot of times. And the songs were special items associated with the person's whole life or the whole community. I couldn't separate them.*

Blanca: Did both Aimee and Harry not like answering direct questions?

Wendy: *Direct questioning is just not something that is part of their culture. Back and forth bombarding with questions. They accept it*

because that's where we're coming from. And Harry, I never bombarded him with questions. That's one of the few instances where I bombarded him with questions. I just sat there and let it go by. And with Aimee I just let it go by. Whatever she just wants to tell. And sometimes I follow up and say, well, what do you mean by it?

And when I did this thing last spring with the Trail of Songs, where we were having these round table things and I was being very much white, organizing it. They were all there. I was the only white person there. And we were doing these workshops, getting everybody to sing and do texts and everything. And I was constantly saying, "Well, you know that song. Sing it for everybody." And that was hard for me to do. And they would laugh and everything, and finally I would say to my two friends who were my age, who were organizing it, who really wanted this to happen, I'd say, "You guys ask the questions because I feel so uncomfortable just firing out all these questions and running the show." And they said, "We can't. It's just not appropriate. But you can. We want you to. And we like the answers that are coming out. We want that information. But we can't do it."

There has been a lot of [ethnography] where people have gone and they've paid money and they've taken off and they never come back. So when you go as an ethnographer, that's what it is. And linguists have been there, dominating the space, word after word after word. A type of research which has not often been pleasant for the people who have been going through it. So when you go into the community, you're dealing with all that baggage. And now . . . you shouldn't be there because you're white. And you shouldn't be asking those questions. And that was really intimidating for me at first.

Blanca: And it doesn't bother you any more?

Wendy: It doesn't bother me any more because I do feel it is important. There is a level of communication that is really important. What Aimee is saying to me, she's desperate to say. I think if the right person from her family or culture were there she would be doing it perhaps more beautifully than she's doing it for me. But she's ninety and she really wants to say it. And for some reason, there's trust. And it's going on and on. And I think that Harry was desperate to say what he wanted to say. I think that really comes out. I feel like I was kind of a vehicle for some of the stuff that he felt was really wearing on him.

And this was a case, this ha-HA business, where I thought, this is something where I want to find out. And I wanted to go to some of the dances where they were dancing. They were expressing their Shoomish in the context of these dances. So we went. But that was another thing. I said I'd really like to go. And he said, "Well, I'd like to go.

And you could be my driver and you could take me." So we went to those things too. So, some of the things were prompted by me.

Harry: Anybody have this, well that seems to be they have the special power.

And that's the best power there is in the world.

But it's not over God.

But God is not here.

Up in heaven.

But this one here, right in earth.

I wonder if you see that.

Did you ever see that?

Wendy: I don't know.

Can God be a Shoo-mish?

Harry: Why, God is God only.

See, just because God is God,

when there was no earth, no world, no nothing but water —

Wendy: *And there is this whole spirituality stuff that we keep hearing associated with the native. There's a lot of depth in Harry's. So often, when we read Boas, he's gotten notes from people like Teit and he's tried to understand what it means, and he tries to distill it and objectify it into a little paragraph. He's tried to take the equivalent of what he's heard from Harry and tried to get a handle on it. And that twists it around a bit. To make it into his kind of writing. Somehow, it works better with Harry when you read the whole thing. And do what he says, think about it for a while.*

Not that you even have to define ha-HA clearly in Western terms. You get a feeling for it. Not that I could give you a definition for it now. You're not too sure, though?

Blanca: No. *I don't think I have as much of a feel for it as you do. But I know what you're saying.*

Wendy: *Yeah. There's another part in there, which I put in the introduction [of Nature Power], where he was trying to explain Shoo-mish and ha-HA. He was talking about Shoo-mish as if it were an electric light and you turned it on. He gives you a very visual feeling about that power. It's going right through you. It's like the equivalent of that. And yet a lot of people have gone into the field with that [Boas].*

Blanca: *Like you did.*

Wendy: *Like I did. Thinking that this is the gospel. I do remember*

feeling sort of uncomfortable. You start to wonder whether Boas had the same experience and this is what he's done with it. Boas wasn't into voice. He wasn't into the individual behind the voice either. So I would like to think that you answer the question just by doing what Harry does, which seemed to be told to illustrate it. And let people come up with what they think.

I feel that the only way we can come together is to make the connections. Or understand the disconnections. And that would seem to be the really important thing to understand.

Harry: I told you that before.

That's all I can tell you about that because I tell
you that before.

Well, I wrote it down but I didn't finish.

I wrote it down, all that, right from the start.

I write it down, but because I can't do it right—
as good as you—

But I do what I can.

But I didn't finish.

About halfway

I got to finish that.

Then when I finish, I got to read it.

And reading and reading, til I make sure IS right.

If not, I might change.

Some, I think, is not right.

I got to make sure they IS right.

And then I can copy that.

And I can make so many copies, you know.

Then I can send one copy to one person

and send the other copy to another one.

Send 'em to whoever I think I should send 'em.

See who's going to say something about it.

That's what I'm going to do.

But I didn't finish yet.

Changes of Meaning

Ultimately, my voice structures and controls what is presented to the reader in the preceding pages. I have transcribed and edited the tape-recorded dialogues, and, while words have not been changed or added, breaks in the dialogues have been selectively chosen. I chose where to cut the dialogues short (and they have been shortened considerably) and where to juxtapose the different sections. These are all arbitrary decisions. Through this process, however, ethnographic

interpretation and analysis has been reinserted into the dialogue. The text presents one with a dialogue within a dialogue, where the different voices influence and contextualize each other. I still cannot attempt to present or clarify the meaning of *ha-HA*. I do not understand it myself. Wendy describes the Okanagan word *ha-HA* in a footnote to the book *Nature Power*. She says, "Harry found this a difficult word to define in English. It seems to connote a magic power inherent in the objects of nature. This power is more potent than the natural power of humans" (53).

In the story "Getting to Be a Power Man" in *Nature Power*, Harry also discusses the nature of *ha-HA* and a related concept, *shoo-MISH*, with Wendy. He refers to a boy who gets to be a power man through a whirlwind. The dialogue between Harry and Wendy reads like this:

Another boy come to be a power man.
He become to be a power man when he gets to be middle-aged,
something like that.
And by the whirlwind.

Wendy: *So the whirlwind was his shoo-MISH?*

Right.

Wendy: *And that made him ha-HA?*

Yeah.

That the whirlwind, that become his *shoo-MISH*.
He found that.

Wendy: *That made him ha-HA?*

Yeah.

Well, it's not the *shoo-MISH*.
That is another *shoo-MISH*.

At this point Harry launches into the story, which he ends by saying, "So that's all about that" (59). Harry could be evading Wendy's direct questions on the nature of *ha-HA*. But it is also possible that he is providing Wendy with enough context, enough information, that, when she is ready, when she understands enough of Okanagan worldview, she will understand. But she may never be ready enough.

The effort to understand some of the disconnections in the dialogues between Wendy, Harry, and myself means examining the various contexts in which it means *something* to know or have *ha-HA*. It is a difficult and complex effort. The discursive running to and fro of the dialogues reveals how individual cultural knowledge is not merely a small part of a larger whole. It is simultaneously and paradoxically both partial *and* complete. Once something is transcribed and written down, the words tend to freeze into static units of meaning.

But Harry's and Wendy's and my knowledges of each other remain dialogic and dynamic. Each understands something different in what it means to have *ha-HA* and, for Wendy and me at least, that understanding is incomplete. Through our dialogues, each person becomes a character in the other person's story.² Harry uses Okanagan myths and stories to explain *ha-HA* to Wendy. The stories function as instructions for Wendy on how to interpret Harry's conceptualization of *ha-HA*, illustrating Harry's world. But these stories require cultural knowledge. One needs that knowledge in order to be able to create meaning from out of the stories. Harry instructs Wendy by telling her to listen to the stories and think about them a little while. Thus, cultural knowledge comes from the stories themselves. Paradoxically, Wendy needs the knowledge given by the story to understand the story itself.

After transcribing and going over my interview with Wendy, I was struck by how much the structure of our dialogue repeats Wendy's experiences with Harry. Wendy does not synthesize or define her experiences for me. She uses anecdotes from some of what she has learned, her own experiences to explain things to me. I must think about the *process* of cross-cultural understanding and not just the meaning of one word, *ha-HA*, in order to understand anything at all from the story. When Wendy talks about the respect that exists between her and Aimee August, a Sushwap elder with whom she was working at the time of the interview, the word *respect* cannot be separated from its concept, its reality. In order to learn what respect means to Aimee (or *ha-HA* to Harry) Wendy needs to treat Aimee with the respect, the knowledge, that *she* knows. This realization suggests the impossibility of doing what I initially set out to do. One cannot reduce Harry's conceptualization of *ha-HA* to a textuality which excludes the world of Harry's reality. But to what extent can I understand, and then translate, that reality? My own reality marks the conditions of my questions.

The writing of these spoken dialogues reveals some of the conditions of their telling as a part of that telling. As James Clifford observes, the ethnographer loses a certain amount of privilege when transcription and indigenous forms of writing are moved towards the center of ethnography. Harry's reality, the *context* of *his* world, is foregrounded in the dialogue between him and Wendy. The polyphony of voices does not necessarily make this kind of ethnographic writing superior or non-authoritative to other sorts of ethnographic writing, but it does distribute authority differently (Clifford 57). In contrast, Boas, whom Wendy initially draws on for her study, operates within the context of a distinctly Western form of anthropological discourse. Boasian discourse relies heavily on specific forms of categorization and

classification to structure its meaning. Some *thing* is defined on the basis of its classification. Its meaning is based on oppositions and the categorization of what it is not, as well as whatever inherent or essential qualities "it" is seen to contain. In order to fit concepts like *ha-HA* into such a system, the meaning of the word must be carved out, reduced, to fit into a pre-existing slot in the English language which most closely fits. This process is inherently one-sided and reductive.

Boas, however, was the first anthropologist who made the recording of texts the keystone of ethnographic style (Stocking 85). But Stocking observes that Boas directed his study at the past, rather than the present, in his analysis of Indian stories and "myths" (86). In "The Religion of American Indians," Boas takes the concepts of the great spirit, of the Native *wakanda*, *orenda*, *sulia*, and others, and relates them to the Semitic Western religions (Stocking 259). When he contrasts these concepts with parallel concepts in Western religions, Boas sets up a dichotomy. But dichotomies, or oppositions, result in hierarchies. One member of a pair becomes normative. Boas imports culturally different concepts into categories which make them easy for us, as Westerners, to understand. But what, exactly, do we understand? The Boasian approach typifies the universalism that dominates many early twentieth-century ethnographies and that now has often been replaced by the current, and equally rigid, notion of cultural relativity. The extreme view of cultural relativity insists that "we" are all so different that all comparison and communication is, finally, impossible.

Paradoxically, such antithetical approaches validate a unitary (*my*) experience of culture—whatever that may be. Other cultures are either possible to understand only in one's own terms or are absolutely unknowable. In neither case is one required to shift one's own categories of experience. Dialogue, and dialogic writing, presents the reader with an alternative—different voices, different experiences, and the ongoing existence of the past *in* the present. Communication and understanding become ever present and simultaneously ever absent. Since speech is by nature dynamic rather than static, Harry's, Wendy's, and my interwoven dialogues suggest an intertextuality that includes the cultural contexts and backgrounds of all of the speakers. To speak to each other and communicate, Wendy and I must change our ways of reading, our ways of understanding. We must allow Harry's categories of experience to express themselves in their own terms. The process of working towards an affinity between such different speaking subjects suggests the potential for making connections between them by exploring some of the disconnections.

The disconnections in the written text are often arbitrary, however, and carry with them other sorts of meanings. My decision to render

Harry's dialogue with Wendy in poetic form, creating the line breaks from Harry's speech rhythms, while transcribing the interview with Wendy as prose, for example, carries with it certain implications. Poetic text restores the sense of orality and of dramatic performance to the words of the dialogue. It emphasizes Harry's role as storyteller and hints at the metaphoric quality of the world behind the text. But ethnographers tell stories too. Wendy's stories hint at some of the ways in which her world is structured through metaphors different from Harry's.

Storytelling remains central to Harry's concept of knowledge and learning. One might describe his life as *storied* in the way that Angela Sidney of the Yukon says that to live life "right" is to "live it like a story" (qtd. in Cruikshank 20). Cruikshank describes what she calls the "critical intelligence embedded in narrative" and notes that "[s]ocial structure and literature share a common ground" (354). The use of narrative can be either explicit or implicit. Sometimes the storyteller tells a story that appears unrelated to the ethnographer's questions and comes from a different period of time. But the storyteller's point is often a reconnecting with the community, a linking of the old and the new (Cruikshank 355). Harry too foregrounds his connections with community, particularly in his insistence on formulating the differences between the Indian and the "Shama." Dialogue ultimately creates multiple perspectives on what, for Harry, remains a singular reality. Specific differences between cultures cannot be reduced to word play.

Like Harry, Wendy uses terms and examples to explain experiences I have only read about or heard on tape. Her story about Aimee and the nature of respect, like her telling about her ethnomusical research on songs, at first appears unrelated to the dialogue with Harry about what *ha-HA* means. Why is she talking about Aimee August all of a sudden? Only after the tape was transcribed did I realize that Wendy herself was answering questions in the way that Harry did. She was "Doing what Harry does, which seemed to be told to illustrate." Still, despite their points of connection, communicative difficulties between Harry and Wendy, and between Wendy and me, reinforce the impossibility of neutral communication. Language is never neutral. David Murray observes that frequently, "Absences of translation are displaced into fictive records of communication" (6). He says, "The constitution of a stance of objectivity in the writing of ethnography has been shown to be a rhetorical strategy, which involves the turning of the personal into the impersonal, the erratic and discontinuous dialogue of fieldwork into the smooth, monologic written text" (132). The use of tape-recorded interviews as fieldnotes within the context of written analysis, and their writing up as competing, interwoven discourses, provide potential for dialogic written texts. The personal, as subject, may then

be reconstituted explicitly as a part of the competing discourses of culture.³ Rather than re-presenting other realities, ethnography has the potential to create dialogues between cultures. Each telling, each story which explains *ha-HA*, refuses to reconcile itself into one singular meaning which is transferable, in the manner of a template, onto the English language and (Western) North American culture. The differences between Wendy, Harry, and myself maintain their points of disconnection. Or, as Harry said:

Because the Indian always talked about
between the Indian and the white.

If anybody had a power.
We don't know.
Maybe some of these Indians.
We seen 'em,
maybe we didn't expect 'em to have a power.
But he might.
We cannot tell.
We—we'll see later on.
Do you understand about that?
See, that's the difference, some,
between the white people and the Indian.
The white people, could they do that?
They can't.
They cannot do.
That shows,
that's the difference between the white and the Indian.
The difference.
The Indians got a different way.
And the white people,
they got a different way.
Not in all.
They gets together sometimes.

NOTES

¹The term "self-interpreting text" is one that Robin Ridington used in a graduate course on anthropological poetics at the University of British Columbia in 1993.

²Robin Ridington discusses how stories and characters may be layered, each within the other ("Notes" 3). This layering is a form of recursivity at the level of the narrative itself.

³See Asad 141-65, where he argues that cultures are not coherent languages or texts; they are composed of competing discourses.

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Cross-Dressing as Appropriation in the Short Stories of Emma Lee Warrior

Petra Fachinger

The Wish to Be a Red Indian

If one were only an Indian, instantly alert, and on a racing horse, leaning against the wind, kept on quivering jerkily over the quivering ground, until one shed one's spurs, for there needed no spurs, threw away the reins, for there needed no reins, and hardly saw that the land before one was smoothly shorn heath when horse's neck and head would be already gone.

Franz Kafka (translated by Willa and Edwin Muir)

"Using the word ghost is good because that's what the old people say when they talk about white people in this country: 'Ghosts trying to find their clothes.'"

Maria Campbell/Linda Griffiths, *The Book of Jessica*

"I am automatically on guard whenever the white man enters 'Indian' country. What does he want this time? I ask. What is he looking for—adventure, danger, material wealth, spiritual wealth (perhaps shamanistic power), a cause, a book, or maybe just a story?"

Lenore Keeshig-Tobias, "White Lies?"

"I don't think I could turn into a white man if I tried all my life. They wouldn't let me, so how does that German think he can be an Indian. White people think they can do anything—turn into Chinese or Indian—they're crazy!"

Emma Lee Warrior, "Compatriots"

In this essay¹ I will discuss three different kinds and degrees of cultural transvestism and appropriation in Emma Lee Warrior's²

stories: "going Indian," "going squaw," and "going shaman." The four epigraphs address some of the issues involved in cultural cross-dressing and, more specifically, "white" appropriation of Native culture. While the first quotation expresses "white" longing for authenticity and escape from cultural constraints and the second points at its flip side, that is, loss of cultural roots and identity, the last two criticize cultural encroachment and theft and draw attention to the imbalances of power that exist between cross-dressing and "passing."

In my discussion, I treat cultural transvestism as a special form of appropriation. A cultural transvestite, as I am using the term in this paper, crosses the line of race or culture for personal gain and empowerment. The cross-dressers use the cultural accoutrements of a racial, cultural, or national group with which they prefer to be associated, in an attempt to lend their voice more authenticity, allow them more personal freedom, and, in the extreme case, enable them to exert power over others. These cross-dressers are usually neither interested in revealing the act of cross-dressing nor in returning to their prior "ethnic" positions; they do not cross-dress to undress. My definition of cross-dressing differs therefore from that of Marjorie Garber for whom a transvestite figure indicates a "'category crisis,' [a] failure of definitional distinction, a borderline that becomes permeable, that permits of border crossings from one (apparently distinct) category to another" (16). Garber here defines what has become a trademark of postcolonial discourse and minority discourses all over the world, namely, the dissolution of fixed ethnic, racial, and sexual identities and the fascination with crossing the borders of nation, race, ethnicity, and gender in an attempt to reconceptualize the self in terms of hybridity, creolization, métissage, androgyny, and bisexuality. Such cross-dressing dissociates itself from all forms of essentialism and is self-reflexive and playful; cross-dressing as appropriation, in contrast, is often reactionary and essentialist.

Crossing the culture line can, for example, take the form of linguistic transvestism, that is, putting on a specific accent. I have known North Americans who adopted Australian or British accents in order to deflect anti-American sentiments when they decided to live in these countries. German-born Canadian writer Frederick Philip Grove hid behind the English language pretending to be Swedish to elude the hostility against Germans in the early decades of this century, and English-born Australian writer Helen Demidenko pretended to be Ukrainian to promote her novel *The Hand That Signed the Paper* (1994). Grove went to great lengths to re-create a "Swedish" childhood for himself in his autobiography *In Search of Myself* (1946), and Demidenko dyed her hair, took up Ukrainian folkdancing, and appeared in public dressed in traditional Ukrainian costume to capture the

essence of "Ukrainianness."

While crossing the culture line usually only involves changing learned behaviours and habits, crossing what is constructed as the "race" line usually requires certain changes in physical appearance. For example, in Armistead Maupin's *Tales of the City*, which deals with various kinds of transvestism and people's attempts to recreate themselves in a different image, an unemployed white model takes pigmentation pills that turn her into a successful "black" model. This attempt "to turn black" with the help of pigmentation pills is reminiscent of the "racial" transformation that John Howard Griffin underwent to experience oppression in the American South, as described in *Black Like Me* (1960). From his account, it is obvious that a significant power disequilibrium exists between white-to-black and black-to-white cross-dressing similar to that between male-to-female and female-to-male cross-dressing. While the "white" person can reverse the transformation that he or she underwent for commercial or professional reasons and re-assume the more privileged position without serious consequences, the African who wants to "pass" as white faces different issues of power and identity.³

The debate around cultural appropriation over the last decade has mainly focused on "white" adoption of the Native voice, lifestyle, and appearance as a form of self-empowerment. Terry Goldie in *Fear and Temptation* refers to "the impossible necessity" for "white" Canadians, Australians, and New Zealanders "of becoming indigenous" as indigenization (13). Goldie points out that "the first felt need for indigenization came when a person moved to a new place and recognized an Other as having greater roots in that place" (14). Although the phenomenon I want to discuss within the context of Warrior's stories is related to indigenization, most of the famous cross-dressers in "Indian garb" (and at least one of the cross-dressers in Warrior's stories) were self-imported "Natives" from Europe and therefore would not have felt the pressure to legitimize their presence as settlers in the "New World" and satisfy their need to belong there.

Historical examples of famous cross-dressers are English-born Ernest Thompson Seton (Black Wolf), author of the novel *Two Little Savages: Being the Adventures of Two Boys Who Lived as Indians and What They Learned* (1903), and Seton's compatriot Archie Belaney, alias Grey Owl. Archie Belaney claimed to be an adopted Ojibway trapper from Northern Ontario who had given up trapping under the influence of his Iroquois wife to become a conservationist. As Daniel Francis points out, white people believed in Grey Owl's Indian identity since he looked so much like what they thought an Indian should look like: "[w]ith his long braids (which he died [sic] to keep black), dark skin (which he coloured with henna), and glowering stare (which he

practised in front of a mirror), he seemed to have stepped right out of the pages of Fenimore Cooper" (Francis 137).⁴ The cross-dresser's success in these cases was guaranteed when his appearance closely matched the stereotype of what an "Indian" should look like. The cross-dressers in Warrior's stories, furthermore, engage in the act for purely selfish reasons with the intention to deceive and gain power; they are not in search for a more authentic life. Cross-dressing then becomes a form of masquerade.

In the context of self-exoticizing masquerade through putting on an "ethnic" costume, one may also think of the German carnival in which the crossing of cultural and especially racial boundaries is the most popular form of masquerade. For example, it is common for children to turn not only into little Gypsy girls over the carnival weekend but also into pirates and sheiks, and, most often, cowboys and Indians. While the carnival contextualizes masquerading as such—everybody is aware that the mask is a mask—Native culture is being appropriated at other festivals in Germany, England, the former Soviet Union and other western and northern European countries in a less innocent fashion. For a few days of the year, adults don Native regalia, live in tepees, and re-enact their own versions of Native ceremonies and rituals. These members of so-called Indian Clubs also produce bead and quill work that often is exhibited in museums of anthropology, giving these artisans an undeserved legitimacy. Joel Monture describes his encounter with one of these masquerades during the 1991 Brighton Festival of Literature in England:

My hosts, sensing my homesickness, took me to a Pow-wow in Uckfield, a small town surrounded by rolling fields of yellow mustard, country pubs, and history. It was a scene, however, transported from America—a sprawling brick elementary school, linoleum hallways, a gymnasium for the dancers, traders with booths, a fry bread concession and the sound of drums reverberating through the corridors. There was beadwork for sale, and the songs were high northern style (Lakota), and women in traditional Plains dresses were making a tremolo as they ringed the host dance drum in the center of the arena. The dancers wore outstanding regalia, including full eagle-feather war bonnets and antique moccasins, and they carried sacred pipebags. In every aspect I might have been in Bismarck or Anadarko or Calgary, but this was England, and beneath the painted faces were sunless complexions and cockney accents. (114)

Needless to say, Monture found this performance to be in bad taste. But more important, he points out that use of sacred objects "outside

of their traditional environments" is an "affront to Native people" (114). While the white cross-dresser who "goes Indian" gains freedom and power, he (in most cases) or she is guilty not only of cultural appropriation but also of theft and desecration.

The masquerading of a German as a Native healer in Warrior's story "Compatriots"⁵ is reminiscent of Monture's experience in Uckfield. The story opens with Hilda Afflerbach's arrival on an unnamed reserve somewhere in Alberta. Hilda is a young woman from Germany who wants to learn, as she puts it, about Native culture. Flora met Hilda at the Calgary Stampede and invited her to have a look at the reserve. It is early morning and Flora's niece Lucy is embarrassed to be caught in the outhouse by the two women. Flora ironically anticipates the effect that the discrepancy between the reality of Native life and that of the "Imaginary Indian"⁶ must have on Hilda. When Lucy apologizes to Hilda for not having running water in the house, Flora replies: "She's studying about Indians, anyway. Might as well get the true picture, right?" (160).

However, as the story progresses, it becomes clear that Hilda is not as interested in the "true picture" as in the cultural cross-dresser Helmut Walking Eagle.⁷ When Hilda asks if she has heard about him, Lucy replies: "'Yeah, well I really don't know him to talk to him, but I know what he looks like. He's from Germany, too. I always see him at Indian dances. He dresses up like an Indian.' She had an urge to tell her that most of the Indians wished Helmut would disappear" (161). Hilda, who is very excited about the prospect of meeting a compatriot who "seems to know a lot about the Indians" (161), is not aware of the cultural distance between herself and her surroundings. She is oblivious to issues of cultural appropriation and "hopes" that the German in Indian clothes can teach her things she "can take home" (161).

When Lucy admits that she does not know much about sun dances, Hilda is shocked: "But why? Don't you believe in it? It's your culture!" (161). Lucy realizes that "she was telling [Hilda] things she didn't want to hear" when she explains that "Indian religion" only recently returned to the reserve and that it is mostly "mixed-up people" who take part in the sun dance "quarrel[ing] over which way to practise it" (162). Although Lucy does not tell Hilda what she really thinks about Helmut Walking Eagle, her true thoughts are revealed in a comment she makes to her uncle: "Hilda wants to meet that German guy, Helmut Walking Eagle. You know, that guy who turned Indian?" The uncle is less reluctant to be frank:

"Shit, that guy's just a phony. How could anybody turn into something else? Huh? I don't think I could turn into a white man if I tried all my life. They wouldn't let me,

so how does that German think he can be an Indian.
White people think they can do anything—turn into
Chinese or Indian—they're crazy!" (163)

Although Warrior has Hilda's uncle speak about "white people" in general, it is significant that both Hilda and Helmut Walking Eagle are Germans and not European-Canadians. As much as Hilda's image of the Native is that of the "Imaginary Indian" and Helmut Walking Eagle's impersonation of a tribal medicine man is based on this "Imaginary Indian," Hilda and Helmut are also stereotyped members of a people who are depicted as having lost their spirituality and not having any scruples about looking for it somewhere else.

Apart from the search for a more authentic and spiritual life, "Going Native" is often motivated by the longing to shed one's ethnic skin and relieve oneself of cultural baggage. Franz Kafka, for example, whom I quote above, was obsessed with the longing for physical and spiritual transformation, a longing that emanated from his sense of being entrapped in both his Jewish body and Jewish culture. Some European nations seem to be more prone than others to cultural discontent and the concomitant longing to change identity, a phenomenon that can be partly explained by particular national political legacies. While the English, for example, are in many ways still trying to come to terms with the legacy of colonialism, the Germans are struggling to come to terms with the legacy of World War II. The "Imaginary German" is "whiter" than other "whites," with all the ideological and political implications that the colour white has. A Jacques or Giovanni Walking Eagle would trigger completely different reader responses, and the story would be less effective.

The scene at the sun dance resembles Joel Monture's description of the pow-wow in Uckfield, with the exception that Helmut Walking Eagle is the only non-Native participant. Lucy admits that she has learned what she knows about sun dances from books and suggests that Hilda buy a copy of Helmut Walking Eagle's *Indian Medicine: A Revival of Ancient Cures and Ceremonies*, which he sells "cheaper to Indians" (165). The meeting between Hilda and Helmut is farcical. He refuses to speak German and has his wife translate his Blackfoot into English. His jaw "twitched with resentment" and "his anger seemed to be tangibly reaching out to them" (167). Warrior does not explain why the visit of a "compatriot" upsets Helmut so much. Evidently, by addressing him as a fellow "German," Hilda "undresses" the man whom Lucy "had never seen . . . in anything other than Indian regalia" and who reminded her of "the Plains Indian Museum across the line" (166). More important, through his hostile behaviour and his refusal to speak German with his compatriot he inadvertently "undresses" himself by behaving more German than "Native." Flora promises

the disappointed Hilda to take her "up north" (167) to meet a friend who is a medicine woman. Flora tells her that she needs to buy four square yards of cotton for the sweat lodge. By taking off her German clothes and wrapping herself in cotton, Hilda will become another cultural transvestite. The story concludes with Hilda's response: "Now, a sweat, she thought, would be real Indian" (167). Hilda obviously does not learn her lesson about cultural difference.

Although Warrior's tone in "Compatriots" is sympathetic and humorous, the criticism of Native people for being alienated from tradition and sharing their culture with non-Natives is obvious. In this story, Warrior exposes two forms of appropriation and colonization. Hilda's naive, insensitive, and uninformed attitude perpetuates the romantic and exotic stereotype of the "Imaginary Indian" while Helmut Walking Eagle's aggressive and imperialistic transgression of cultural boundaries is presented as ultimate appropriation of Native cultural heritage.

While Helmut Walking Eagle is the German fictional counterpart of Grey Owl and Black Wolf, in "A Place of Her Own," Warrior rewrites the experience of the white woman "going Native" as depicted in mainstream Canadian fiction. Unlike Margaret Atwood's heroine in *Surfacing* and Marian Engel's in *Bear*, Warrior's protagonist is not interested in Native spirituality. Belle Jones, a white Torontonion, in an attempt at rebirth, names herself after Belle Star [sic], "the legendary moll in Wyatt Earp's day," to escape "a life she was afraid would ensnare her into the confines of Bathurst Street"(60).⁸ "Curiosity and boredom" (61) make her drop into an Indian Centre where she watches a film about "the Indians in Alberta and their sundance" narrated by an "Indian cowboy" (65). The images of the prairie, horses, and snowtipped mountains contrast with the dreary reality of Belle's everyday urban life and make her long for change: "it seemed the film was an invitation" (61). She becomes a volunteer at the Centre and makes friends with a Native activist who draws her attention to the injustices of the Indian Act. According to the Act Native women used to lose their Indian status when marrying a non-Native, while white women were permitted to keep their Indian status and live on reserve land after divorcing their Native husbands.

This information, as casually as it seems to be given in the text, foreshadows the events to come. Belle takes her first step at "going squaw" when she finds out that train fare is cheaper for Natives with a status card. Belle asks Nellie, one of her new Native friends at the Centre, to buy a ticket for her to the Calgary Stampede with her status card. Nellie observes that the card carries her photograph, which does not bear any resemblance to Belle. Ironically, she lost her status card years ago and never bothered to have it replaced. To help Belle, Nellie

writes to the agency for a replacement, but the agency does not respond. In this episode, Warrior not only exposes the racist stereotype of the Native as receiver of government handouts, but she also criticizes The Indian Act and its construction of the "Status Indian" by ironizing its differentiation between Natives who meet government criteria as persons and those who do not as non-persons.

At the beginning of the story, Belle has the (white)⁹ reader's sympathies although Warrior's subtle irony makes it clear how manipulative she is. After all, Belle is deprived and does not seem to hurt anybody with her scheming, and the people at the Centre are willing enough to help her. Emboldened by her success, Belle takes her impersonation a step further upon her arrival in Calgary. She claims that her mother is "part Montagnais from Quebec" (67) and that she worked at the Indian Centre in Toronto because she "feels Indian" although she "might not look it" (67). None of the Native people whom she meets ever doubt her honesty or suspect ulterior motives, although they are obviously not fooled by her pretense to be Native and keep referring to her as "the white woman." When Belle lies to her first Native suitor, Wallace, about having lost her luggage on the train, he introduces her to his relatives from whom Belle "borrows" (70) some clothes. When Wallace appears not to live up to the image of the "Indian cowboy" in the movie, Belle turns her attention to his cousin Gerald, who has "a recklessness about him that Belle associated with the West" (71). Soon after, Belle and Gerald get married and decide that "having a baby was necessary for them to get a house of their own" (76). Pursuing the white dream of success, Belle helps Gerald win election to the band council and have "the timberland which the tribe had held off to settlement" (77) opened. Gerald, who comes to be completely dominated by Belle, eventually dies in a car accident driving drunk after an attempt to "reclaim" his former "reckless" self.

Having "recovered quickly from Gerald's death," (79) Belle meets a man from a neighbouring reserve. Sidney Night Singer challenges her impersonation as a Native cowgirl: "He was curious to find out who this white woman was who strutted around in cowboy boots and snug Levis" (80). Offering her a piece of raw kidney, he tells her that "if [she] wants to be Indian, [she] better like what the Indians like" (81) knowing full well that raw meat makes Belle's stomach turn. After Sidney moves in with Belle, Gerald's relatives attempt to make him leave the reserve. When Sidney suggests that Belle give the house to somebody else and they move to his own reserve, Belle decides not to part without a twenty-thousand-dollar check. The council, however, refuses to comply, a decision that infuriates Belle. She "couldn't stand the thought of all those uneducated Indians in council lording it over her" (83). Belle decides to retaliate by getting an education:

She'd get so educated none of them would be able to talk to her on her own level. She'd go and see the education counselor at Indian Affairs and set the wheels of her education in motion. There was a new tribal management program at the university and she was going to enroll in it. She had her Indian rights and that's one thing the council couldn't take away from her. This was her place and nobody was going to take it away from her. She worked hard to get it and she was going to keep it. (84)

This is how the story ends.

Apart from contrasting two different economies, that of a tribal society based on trusting and sharing and that of western society based on control and material success, the story makes clear that Native society is no safer from "white" intrusion and manipulation today than it has ever been. Warrior tells the old story of "from rags to riches" with a twist. The only way for Belle to fulfill the white middle-class-dream of living in one's own place is to find a Native husband. One of the story's many ironies is that in white society, the white woman's marriage to a Native man has hardly ever been viewed as a privilege and a sign of social success. By choosing a protagonist who is deprived in white society, Warrior demonstrates in this story how potent white encroachment on Native rights still is. In "A Place of Her Own," it is not those in power who appropriate Native land and culture but a woman who cannot afford a train ticket from Toronto to Calgary.

Furthermore, education, the means with which Belle intends to make up for the loss of "her place" (84), is one of the concepts with the most positive connotations in westernized society. A university education offers nothing but advantages and privileges for a white woman in Belle's position. In contrast, Native women, who are finally gaining access to post-secondary education, often do not find it easy to negotiate between two cultures, a struggle that Emma LaRocque expresses in her poem "Long Way From Home." While education has served Native women in their attempt to become part of the dominant society, Belle ironically sees education as her "tribal" right to success and domination. At the same time, Warrior also tricks the white reader. While Belle studies the Indian Act and makes herself familiar with reserve bylaws, the white reader of Warrior's stories is not likely to have done so.

In "Dancing Spirits," Warrior describes colonization and appropriation from within the aboriginal community itself. The story is told from the point of view of Amy who is concerned about her daughter's involvement with a Cree woman pretending to be a medicine woman. Lucy "joined the cult" (117) at the invitation of Dinah, her mother's

friend. Amy herself had at one point been the Cree woman's student and received her medicine. In retrospect, Amy regrets her involvement with Minnie, who claims that "one day she had had a vision of Blue Hair, a Sioux medicine man from ages past" (123) that changed her life. Amy interprets a dream in which she finds herself together with Dinah in her grandparents' old log house as a message from her grandparents "that the Cree woman and her religion were wrong" (120). In her dream, all of a sudden "it was dark as if something was pressed over the house, against the windows and door, shutting out all light" (118). And with the darkness "a roar engulfed the house; it was a mixture of Nature and a being, something awful and evil" (118-19). Dinah's "eyes glittered as she sneered: 'And now do you believe in Indian medicine?'" (119). Dinah represents a Native person who is alienated from her culture and has to look for religious fulfillment elsewhere because she has no spiritual bond with her ancestors. It is no coincidence that as children, Amy took Dinah's mother for a "white woman" whose "face didn't look at all like an Indian's and she spoke in a high white woman's voice" (121). Warrior prefaces this story with a poem called "A Second Language" in which she talks about the missionaries' various strategies to prevent Native cultures and languages from surviving: "Those missionaries were diabolically clever; whipping wasn't effective so foreign brides did their work; orphan girls of dubious heritage stilled the childish chatter of native tongues" (115). Miscegenation is described here as the ultimate form of forced assimilation.

"Indian medicine" becomes a commercial venture in the story, the powers on which it draws being those of indoctrination and demagoguery rather than wisdom and spirituality. In preparation for her first meeting with Minnie, Dinah asks Amy to bring cotton squares, tobacco, and an offering of money or jewelry. Amy remembers that her grandmother used to heal many in the community without ever asking for anything in return and finds the idea of the offering "strange." Nevertheless, she decides to accompany Dinah on her trip north to see the Cree woman who is described in the following way:

When she wasn't decked out in her moosehide beaded dress which she wore in public, she was usually dressed in a nondescript housedress. She always wore high kneelength beaded moccasins and gobs of elaborate Indian turquoise jewelry and beadwork, all very distinct. Her wrists boasted ornate silver and turquoise bracelets, as did her ears and fingers, and she always wore a huge squash blossom necklace. (130-31)

Like the other cross-dressers in Warrior's stories, Minnie pretends to

be what she is not to obtain the power to control others. But unlike the "white" cross-dressers who "go Native" to gain privileges and leave a compromised past behind, Minnie "steals from" other tribal cultures and abuses the community's longing for physical and spiritual healing. Not only does she appropriate sacred objects and rituals, but she does so to make money from those who do not see through the sham.

Amy, who assumes the critical voice in the story, is able to keep her distance and unmask Minnie's Hollywood shamanism through her spiritual connection with her dead grandparents who symbolize authentic healing powers in the story. Amy's vivid memories of her grandfather's teachings help her to realize that Minnie's ceremony is a "farce":

She had tended her grandfather's sweats as a child, but they had spoken in Blackfoot and he had called her by name and she knew it was time to lift up the blankets that covered the sweatlodge. . . . She felt embarrassed and was glad there was nobody there to witness the many times Dinah and group would go out of tune during the singing going on in the sweatlodge. The next thing she knew, one of the "spirits" through the medium, Herbie, belted out a Hank Locklin hit from the 60's called "Pick me up on your way down." She hoped her grandparents or none of the Sioux dignitaries that Minnie and Dinah associated with their goings-on were around to hear this because this was turning into a farce. (140)

The story makes it clear that the only way to protect future generations from false medicine, or "new Indian medicine" as Warrior calls it in one of her poems, is to keep the memory of the ancestors and their teachings alive.

While the cross-dressers in Warrior's stories share the negative qualities of the trickster figure, his/her voracious appetite and lack of moral and social values, Warrior uses trickster discourse¹⁰ to disclose/unclothe the cross-dresser's moral and social transgressions. Her discourse is humorous and ironic rather than confrontational or plaintive. The names Warrior gives her protagonists are representative of her comic strategy to unmask the cross-dressers' fake identity and cultural trespassing. Belle evokes the wild West with its disregard of the law, Helmut Walking Eagle rings of German nationalism, and Minnie suggests the Hollywood qualities of its owner's performance. For a woman writer who, according to Blackfoot tradition, carries a man's name, and a member of a tribe whose name means "badly-dressed robes" (Dempsey), cross-dressing seems to be a fitting trope to deal with the various forms of cultural appropriation. The trickster and shapeshifter, is, of course, a mythological ancestor of the "postcolon-

ial" transvestite figure. By trapping her protagonists in their assumed identities rather than granting them the freedom to undress, Warrior makes it clear that the ultimate losers are the cross-dressers.

NOTES

¹I would like to thank Susanna Egan, Bill New, and Peter Dickinson for their critical responses to my essay.

²Emma Lee Warrior's short stories, some of which form part of a Master's thesis that she completed at the University of Washington in 1985, have appeared in *Canadian Fiction Magazine* and in *An Anthology of Canadian Native Literature in English*. Warrior grew up on the Piegan Reserve in southern Alberta where she attended a boarding school. Her stories deal with the Native struggle for self-identification and the search for spiritual meaning.

³Compare James Weldon Johnson's *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912).

⁴Ironically, in the way racial difference is constructed, for a white person "going Indian" is much easier than "going African" or "going Asian."

⁵I have been drawn to write about Emma Lee Warrior's short story "Compatriots" since it confronts me with a fictional representation of cultural behaviour that strikes close to home.

⁶I am adopting this term from both Marcia Crosby's "Construction of the Imaginary Indian" and Daniel Francis' *The Imaginary Indian*.

⁷Warrior's choice of a name for this cultural transvestite demonstrates her sense of humour. Helmut is a typical German name, popular a few decades ago. The name connotes solidity, good nature, and honesty. Furthermore, the eagle is not only the most distinct of German national emblems but also, in the mythology of many Native peoples, a sacred bird often associated with shamans. As Phoebe Dufrene points out, the eagle often symbolizes "transportation to other realms," "overcomes the earthly world and enters the gateway of immortality, the place of origin" (124).

⁸The cowboy associated with the West has always been constructed in European literary, historical, and cinematic discourses about the mythological "wild West" as the white male. Testimony conflicts as to whether Wyatt Earp, the American law officer and gunfighter, was not a thief and murderer himself. Belle Starr, whose original name was Myra Belle Shirley, the notorious horse thief and murderer, was part of Jesse James' group and was not associated with Wyatt Earp. She finally married Sam Starr, a Native man, and went to live in the Indian Territory in Oklahoma where she created a retreat for outlaws.

⁹I use the term "white" rather than "European-Canadian" because non-Native people in Warrior's stories are of both European and European-Canadian background.

¹⁰See Gerald Vizenor's "Trickster Discourse."

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Blurs, Blends, Berdaches: Gender Mixing in the Novels of Louise Erdrich

Julie Barak

We have come to the edge of the woods,
out of brown grass where we slept, unseen,
out of leaves creaked shut, out of our hiding.
We have come here too long.

It is their turn now,
their turn to follow us. Listen,
they put down their equipment.
It is useless in the tall brush.
And now they take the first steps, not knowing
how deep the woods are and lightless,
How deep the woods are.

Erdrich, "Jacklight"

In an interview with Jan George shortly after the publication of her first book of poems, *Jacklight*, Louise Erdrich comments on the title poem, explaining that "Jacklighting and hunting are both strong metaphors for me of sexual and love relations between men and women. In the male tradition, men are the hunters and women are their prey, but in the poem 'Jacklight,' I am trying to say something like this: If our relationships are going to be human, . . . men have to follow women into the woods and women likewise. There must be an exchange, a transformation, a power shared between them" (243). "Living in empty country," she says, "the woods to me have always been a place of mystery, shelter. That's where we have to go to find each other" (243).

Erdrich and her husband and collaborator, Michael Dorris, have apparently found each other in that woods. Their many publishing successes in recent years are proof of the strength of their writing

relationship, anyway. Both of them describe that writing relationship as a sensual/sexual union. Erdrich explains to Kay Bonetti in a 1988 interview how she and Dorris collaborate: "Michael and I plunge into each other's work with very little ceremony. We plot together, we dream up our characters together, we do everything together, except write the actual drafts, although even the writing is subject to one another's deepest desires" (79). Erdrich describes their joint efforts as "co-conceiving"(82) and says that she feels "more and more that we're seeing out of the same set of eyes . . . we think each other's thoughts, truly, so it is very much like having one vision" (84). Dorris experiences their relationship in much the same way, noting that "when writing about both male and female characters it is a distinct advantage to have an absolutely trusted and equitable input from someone of the other gender who shares the same vision, almost as an opposite-gender version of yourself" (86).

At one point, early in their collaborating lives, Erdrich and Dorris did join together to publish under a pseudonym, Milou North. The name and their collaborative efforts under it were an experiment, they explain in a 1987 interview with Hertha D. Wong, one that they enjoyed for "the romance of it" (203). They thought it established a sense of mystery for their readers—"You really think that's probably a female, but you don't know" (203). Through their play with authorial gender and the gender blending of their authorial selves in their shared labor they create the exchange and transformation Erdrich sees as necessary in gendered relationships.

Just as they played with their readers' expectations of authorial gender in the creation of that pseudonym, in their collaborative plotting they play with their characters' genders in the discovery stages of their novels. Dorris tells Wong how the character of Rayona in *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* evolved during a long car trip he and Erdrich took together:

When we left New Hampshire the book was about a young boy who was coping with his mother's death, and by the time we reached Minnesota it was about a young girl whose mother lives. Since then it has expanded into three parts. One of which is in the mother's voice, and the next in *her* mother's voice. All of that really evolved out of changing the main character from a male to a female. Louise, I think, proposed that originally. It was hard to think of. It's like sending somebody to Sweden for a sex change operation, but it just worked better. (201-02)

Erdrich and Dorris play with gender roles and boundaries in other ways, too. Where Rayona's gender is, finally, decided and firm, even

though they experimented with it in the early stages of the novel, several characters in their work, especially those in the tetralogy published under Erdrich's name—*Love Medicine*, *Tracks*, *The Beet Queen*, and *The Bingo Palace*—are "gender-mixed" characters who are described either as exhibiting or in some way acting out opposite sex role mannerisms or behaviors. In developing this line of thought in what follows I will focus almost entirely on the tetralogy and cite these works as Erdrich's. The importance of Dorris's contributions should not be slighted or forgotten, however.

Erdrich develops a fluidity of gender identities in her characters by recreating a gender role available to her through her Native American background—that of the berdache, a powerful figure in many pre-contact aboriginal societies in North America. In "The North American Berdache" Charles Callender and Lee M. Kochems define the berdache as a "person, usually [but not exclusively] male, who was anatomically normal but assumed the dress, occupations and behavior of the other sex to effect a change in their gender status. This shift was not complete; rather, it was a movement toward a somewhat intermediate status that combined social attributes of males and females" (443).

It is important to note that because many berdaches participated in cross-dressing it was often assumed that berdaches were all homosexual. However, Callender and Kochems believe that this "frequent equation with homosexuality distorts the sexual aspects of berdachehood," and they have found that though berdaches and their spouses or partners were the most consistent participants in homosexual behavior, "their orientations could be bisexual or heterosexual." Several other scholars support Callender and Kochems in this conclusion. Harriet Whitehead, in "The Bow and the Burden Strap: A New Look at Institutionalized Homosexuality in Native North America," asserts that "there is no evidence that homosexual behavior as such was used as a reason for promoting reclassification of an individual to the gender-crossed status. In contradistinction to occupational and clothing choice, cross-sex erotic choice is never mentioned as one of the indicators of the budding berdache" (95). Of female berdaches, or manly-hearted women, Midnight Sun, in "Sex/Gender Systems in Native North America," writes that the role was "only associated with gender status and not cross-dressing or lesbianism" (44).

Many North American tribes attributed a special status to berdaches and recognized them as especially valuable members of the community. Economically, berdaches were a boon to the community because they performed so many tasks so well. Callender and Kochems note that "[m]ale berdaches are consistently described as

exceptionally skilled in women's work, while female berdaches showed a similar pattern of excelling in male activities, with hunting most often cited" (447). The berdaches' ability to perform both roles, however, is what made them special to the community. A significant element in the prosperity of a household inhabited by a berdache "rested on the intermediate nature of their gender status, allowing them to combine activities proper to men and to women and maximize their economic opportunities" (448).

Along with their economic success, berdaches were thought to possess many other talents or assets. James Thayer Steel, in "The Berdache of the Northern Plains: A Socioreligious Perspective," details the most common of these. They were often called upon to give children names in naming ceremonies and they were thought to have a special talent in educating children that accompanied a reputation for intelligence. They were seen as match-makers or "love-talkers" because of their ability to move easily between men and women. Moreover, they were reputed to have extremely active sex lives. Many berdaches had reputations as healers, especially good with love medicines, but also with childbirth, insanity, and wounds. Berdaches often oversaw funeral rites. They were thought to be blessed with both a lucky and a long life.

The female berdache is more commonly referred to by anthropologists as a manly-hearted woman. Oscar Lewis, in "Manly-Hearted Women Among the North Piegan," details the qualities that distinguish manly-hearted women from their sisters, noting that aggressiveness, independence, ambition, boldness, and a pronounced sexuality, as well as wealth and maturity, are among her common characteristics. Like the male berdaches, manly-hearted women excel in both men's and women's work. They also often practice medicine. Lewis notes that in contrast to the quiet demeanor of other women, manly-hearted women "do not hesitate to make speeches in crowds, they joke and tease and express opinions and disagreements, just as though they were men. They are often avoided because of their sharp tongues and readiness to defend themselves from criticism by exposing others to ridicule and humiliation" (181). Moreover, manly-hearted women are reputed to be "*ikitaki*,—passionate women, and their sexual unconventionalities are the subject of much gossip" (182-83). A woman becomes known as manly-hearted when she "can equal men in their own skills, in personal wealth, in the manipulation of property, in sexual prowess, and in religious participation, [and] break away from the verbalized restrictions applied to [her] sex" (187).

Thayer points out that berdaches were both respected and ridiculed among their people, noting that the berdache "tended to be a marginal figure among the tribal groups of the Plains, but at the same time had

a clearly recognized status and clearly defined talents" (290). Because they received the call to become a berdache in a vision they were thought of as holy or special. "However," continues Thayer, "there was also a profound ambivalence towards this figure. On the one hand, his ritual and ceremonial power were highly regarded and his womanly talents highly praised, but because of his awesome vision and exotic life, the berdache also had a feared and avoided place in social relations" (290). Because of their "in-between" status, berdaches in many tribes were treated, not just for a ceremonial moment but for all of their lives, like initiands in rites of passage ceremonies; they were freed from the restrictions of the usual, feared and respected for the powers granted them by their difference.

Many of Erdrich's characters fit, partially or completely, the definition of the berdache detailed above. Some do not, however, and these exceptions are telling in their own ways. A prime example of the disaster of mono-genderedness is Russell Kashpaw in *The Beet Queen*. Russell is a man—through and through. He was a high school football player, a volunteer for service in and a decorated veteran of three wars, who fell in love with the most stereotypically feminine of all of Erdrich's women, Sita Kozka. He suffers from a series of strokes and heart attacks which leave him completely paralyzed. When he is "displayed" in his uniform with all his medals in the Argus Beet Queen parade, many of the spectators believe that he's "stuffed." Suffering in the same way that Russell does are King, Henry Jr., and Gordie of *Love Medicine* whom Nora Barry and Mary Prescott describe in "The Triumph of the Brave: *Love Medicine's* Holistic Vision" as "doomed, but only because they are fixed upon their inability to measure up to the demands of traditional masculine ritual, and because they are unable to imagine anything else for themselves" (125).

Some of her male characters are gender-mixed but unable to accept that mix gracefully; they struggle to find a way to live comfortably within it. This was common to many berdaches. They received their call to berdachehood in a vision, but they could refuse to pay heed to that vision, choosing instead to walk a safer, more conventional line. Ignoring a vision, however, often creates difficulties. Wallace Pfef, for example, in *The Beet Queen*, is aware of his homosexuality, but denies it to his community. Instead, he buys a picture of a pretty young girl at a farm auction and displays it in a prominent place in his living room. He creates a story for the townspeople about their love and her tragic death so that he won't be expected to court or marry any of the women in the community. Like the berdache, Wallace is good at making money. He is also good at both men's and women's tasks. Along with being a prominent citizen in Argus and a sharp businessman, he decorates his new home tastefully and cooks delicious meals,

for both his adopted niece, Dot, and for his sometime lover, Karl Adare. He is present at Dot's birth, helping Celestine Jones in any way he can, and in this way is responsible for her naming: Dot's legal name is Wallacette.

Wallace's lover, Karl Adare, is another good example of a gender-mixed character who is uncomfortable with his vision. He is bisexual; he has affairs with both Wallace and Celestine Jones. Descriptions of him in the novel hover between the masculine and the feminine. He, too, has good luck with jobs and money, though he never amasses as much wealth as Wallace. Karl is a wanderer, never settling down long enough to create a niche for himself in any community. He's scared of love—searching constantly for the love his mother took away from him when she flew off into the afternoon sky with Omar the stunt pilot. Hans Bak observes that Karl "harbor[s] both masculine and feminine elements . . . [and] hovers uneasily in-between, unable to reconcile both sides into a balanced whole, incapable of finding rest or rootedness in either homosexual or heterosexual love, but always vulnerable to the danger of plunging into an underlying void" (67).

Several other male characters in the novels are more comfortably gender-mixed and take on feminine tasks in the tradition of the berdache. Eli Kashpaw, for example, an expert hunter in *Love Medicine*, adopts June and cares for her. Barry and Prescott point out that "besides sharing with her his knowledge of the woods, he mothers her in a way she can trust." They continue: "Eli's behavior is unorthodox and encourages gossip because in his relationship with June he demonstrates complementary male and female ritual" (127). He also acts as a healer later, in *The Beet Queen*, when he takes in and cares for his half-brother Russell after his strokes paralyze him.

Old man Nanapush, in *Tracks*, the "prequel" to *Love Medicine*, like many berdaches is a healer. His care saves Fleur from death when consumption is raging on the reservation. When Lulu's feet are frozen, he thaws them for her. As he sings a "cure song" to calm her as the blood pours back into her feet, he thinks,

Many times in my life, as my children were born, I wondered what it was like to be a woman, able to invent a human from the extra materials of her own body. In the terrible times, the evils I do not speak of, when the earth swallowed back all it had given me to love, I gave birth in loss. I was like a woman in my suffering, but my children were all delivered into death. It was contrary, backward, but now I had a chance to put things into a proper order. (167)

When Fleur leaves the reservation after losing her land, Nanapush

becomes Lulu's guardian, raising her as his own. He is also adept at love medicines, as berdaches often are, providing Eli with the medicine he needs to win Fleur. And, like many berdaches, he is sexually attractive and active, even into his eighties when he takes up with Margaret Kashpaw.

Many of Erdrich's female characters are berdaches or manly-hearted women too, though there are, as with the male characters, exceptions. The tragicomic life of Sita Kozka in *The Beet Queen*, like Russell Kashpaw's in that same novel, serves as an example of the perils of mono-genderedness. June, in *Love Medicine*, functions much like Karl Adare and Wallace Pfef do in *The Beet Queen*. She is called to be and trained in berdache ways, but is unable to accept her intermediate or mixed-gendered status. She has been taught to hunt by Eli; in many ways she is his "son," even dressing like Eli when she is younger. But she refuses this role in life and seeks out feminine, traditional women's roles. Through the course of her life she fails as a beautician, a secretary, and a waitress. She also fails at motherhood, abandoning two sons. Like Wallace and Karl she resists the call of her vision and is tortured by her refusal to answer it. June is one of those who can't be comfortable in accepting a gender mix inside herself.

Pauline in *Tracks* is, perhaps, another. As is common to many berdache, one of her occupations is overseeing funeral rites. Physically, she is described in both male and female terms. William Gleason, in "'Her Laugh an Ace:' The Function of Humor in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*," says that Pauline's passion is the "repressed rage of latent lesbianism," citing Leopolda's vicious scolding of Marie followed by her sensuous rubbing of liniment in "slow wide circle[s] into Marie's naked back," to support his assertion. Julie Tharp, in "Women's Community and Survival in the Novels of Louise Erdrich," claims, on the contrary, that Pauline's heterosexuality, her jealousy of Fleur's relationship with Eli, "keeps the women wary of one another and creates a vindictive streak within Pauline" (168). Whatever her sexual preference, however, Pauline is definitely a tortured soul in terms of her sexuality, who finally chooses the chastity of the nunnery over sexual relationships with either men or women.

Mary Adare and Celestine James in *The Beet Queen* are both manly-hearted women. Both of them are economically independent, choosing to remain single and to support themselves, rather than marry. Marie Kashpaw, in *Love Medicine*, is a manly-hearted woman, too. She has raised herself up economically and socially by marrying Nector Kashpaw and she has, as many manly-hearted women do, made him into the man he is in the community. Lulu Nanapush is another. Lulu is well-known for her sexual promiscuity. She is bold about her sexual history, though, and like the manly-hearted woman she is unafraid to

boast about her exploits. In *Love Medicine*, she hears people whispering "bitch" and "All those Lamartine sons by different fathers" behind her back during a tribal meeting. As a manly-hearted woman, she speaks up. "'I'll name all of them,' I offered in a very soft voice. 'The fathers . . . I'll point them out for you right here'" (284).

However, Fleur is the quintessential berdache or manly-hearted woman. She is a good hunter, better than most men on the reservation. She is big and strong, capable of lifting sides of beef and pork by herself and of hauling her cart of odds and ends for sale throughout the community. She has great luck in cards, winning enough in her stay in Argus to pay taxes on her land for two or three years and, years later, winning her land back in a game of cards with Jewett Parker Tatro, the former Indian agent who had acquired her land in her absence. She lives alone, until Eli falls in love with her and comes to join her. Then their sexual exploits give the reservation plenty to talk about. She is also a healer, collecting medicines and distributing them. She saves Marie's life in childbirth. Lipsha goes to Fleur for love medicine in *The Bingo Palace*. Like many berdaches she is both feared and respected for her powers in her community.

I've detailed descriptions of only a few of the berdache characters in Erdrich's work. Lyman Lamartine, Gerry Nanapush, and Lipsha Morrissey also possess berdache characteristics. Shawnee Ray and her sisters, Mary Fred and Tammy, Zelda Kashpaw, Dot Adare, and Rushes Bear are among the women characters whom one could consider to be manly-hearted. Erdrich's reasons for blurring and blending gender borders in so many of her characters can, perhaps, be understood by comparing it to the other transformational or border-crossing characters in Native American myth.

In "Why Bears are Good to Think and Theory Doesn't Have to Be Murder: Transformation and Oral Tradition in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*," Joni Adamson Clarke discusses the bear's importance to Chippewa myth. Bears were considered "quasi-human in anatomy, erect carriage, a cradling of young with the forearms, enjoyment of sweets and liquors, manner of drinking liquid, shows of intelligence, and inclination to moderate behavior despite great physical strength. . . . Moreover, a bear's life cycle, moving from hibernation in winter to reemergence in the spring, made him seem at once a symbol of both life and death" (33-34). Clarke claims that "by thinking or 'playing' with the bear's human-like qualities and seasonal cycle, formerly sharp borders—like those between animal and human, life and death—fade and 'novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements'" (34). Mixed-gender characters in Erdrich's fiction are "good to think" in this same way because, "as Judith Butler points out in her discussion of the subversion of gendered identity, 'perpetual

displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization'" (Butler qtd. in Clarke, 34).

Erdrich's texts promote an openness to "resignification and recontextualization" not only by blurring gender boundaries but also by blurring other boundaries. Many of her characters are, for example, ethnically mixed and their genealogies and family relationships are hard to trace. Moreover, Erdrich blurs narrative lines in her fiction, fracturing her story line by employing many different narrative voices. Other critics have observed how Erdrich's work crosses genre boundaries and have attributed her power as a story teller to that aspect of her writing. Ann Rayson, in "Shifting Identity in the Work of Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris," cites a review of their jointly-authored novel, *The Crown of Columbus*, in which the reviewer claims it is "a very mixed bag" that "tries on too many costumes—domestic comedy, paperback thriller, novel of character, love story—and finally decides that, unable to make up its mind, it will simply wear them all at once" (35). Rayson believes that "[i]n this artistic synthesis lies the power of Louis Erdrich and Michael Dorris and the challenge to critics who would seek a clear female or ethnic voice to legitimize theories of feminist and Native American literature" (35).

Geoffrey Galt Harpham, in *On the Grotesque: Strategies of Contradiction in Art and Literature*, observes that "genre, genus, and genitals are linked in language as in our subconscious" (5). Erdrich's blurring of all three in her fiction creates a grotesque art that "threatens the notion of a center by implying coherencies just out of reach, metaphors or analogies just beyond our grasp. . . . Looking at ourselves looking at the grotesque, we can observe our own projections, catching ourselves, as it were, in the act of perception" (Harpham 43). Erdrich's play along the boundary lines of genre, genus, and genitals acts in exactly this way in her novels. In her play with gender borders, in particular, she is attempting to break down her reader's notions of traditional gender roles by creating, over and over again, characters who cross over and through traditional gender definitions, who cannot be classified, who refuse to fit the traditional mold.

There is a connection, obviously, between the berdache figure and the figure of the trickster. Many critics have decoded Erdrich's characters as tricksters. The name of one of the main characters in *Tracks* is Nanapush, one of the linguistic variants of the name of the Chippewa trickster. This name is shared by two other characters in the text: Lulu Nanapush, his adopted daughter, and her son Gerry Nanapush. Several other characters in the novel inherit trickster traits from her or her son, most notably another of her sons, Lyman Lamartine, and Gerry's son, Lipsha Morrissey. Gerry's sometime lover, June Morrissey, as well as Mary Adare and her brother Karl,

from *The Beet Queen*, have also been identified convincingly as trickster figures in recent criticism. The question to deal with here is not whether these characters are tricksters (there is certainly no lack of evidence to support that assertion) but rather how the blurred gender traits of so many of Erdrich's characters fit into the trickster motif.

In "A Tolerated Margin of Mess: The Trickster and His Tales Reconsidered," Barbara Babcock-Abrahams discusses the ambivalence of the trickster's character, labeling such characters "dialogic phenomena" (161). She believes that "the ambivalence and the contradictions with which Trickster's tales abound are *not* proof, as Radin and others imply, of an incapacity to differentiate true from false, good from evil, beneficence from malevolence. Rather, they *express the generative situation of ambivalence and contradictions* that are the very basis of culture" (164, italics mine). Furthermore, she asserts that "the mediating figure of Trickster does not represent a regression to a primal, undifferentiated unity *but is created in response to a present and constant perception of opposition*" (164, italics mine). The plethora of mixed-gendered tricksters in Erdrich is her literary response to the present and constant perception of opposition in her life and in the lives of her characters. The fact that so many of her characters are mixed-gendered tricksters leads to the conclusion that one of the most threatening aspects of contemporary life in America is its insistence on strictly bifurcated gendered behavior.

Like so many of Erdrich's characters the trickster figure often crosses over gender borders. In one story in the Winnebago trickster cycle, for example, the trickster decides to find a home for himself one cold winter by disguising himself as a woman using an elk's liver and kidneys to create a false vulva. He presents himself to the chief of a nearby village, is accepted into the family, marries the chief's son and bears three sons. Later, while being teased by his mother-in-law, he loses his false vulva; his identity is discovered and he is forced to flee. Trickster's gender switching in this story functions in quite the same way that bears function in Ojibway/ Anishinabe myth; trickster's crossing over encourages an openness to a fluidity of identities that can lead to resignification and recontextualization of traditional binary relationships.

Many definitions of trickster label him or her as a liminal figure, living on the edges of the worlds of animal and human, physical and spiritual, male and female. Like trickster, many of Erdrich's characters live in-between worlds—and not just gender worlds. Fleur, for example, is often thought of by others and depicted in their stories as a bear-woman, a fish-woman, a spirit-woman. We are told very emphatically several times in Nanapush's story that he lives at a crossroads in the town. He is also one of the only survivors from

"before the white people," crossing the borders between the old and the new ways. Gerry Nanapush is both a hero and a villain. Lipsha's return to the reservation after a long absence is described in all sorts of "in-between" ways: "He slid through the crowd during the *middle* of an *Intertribal* song. We saw him *edge* against the wall to watch the whirling dancers, and immediately we had to notice that *there was no place the boy could fit*" (*Bingo Palace* 9, italics mine).

Victor Turner points out in "Betwixt and Between: Liminal Period" that "in liminal situations, neophytes are sometimes treated or symbolically represented as being neither male nor female. Alternatively, they may be symbolically assigned characteristics of both sexes, irrespective of their biological sex" (98). Turner believes that the grotesqueness and the monstrosity that such gender negation or blurring imply are not

aimed so much at terrorizing or bemusing neophytes into submission or out of their wits as at making them vividly and rapidly aware of what may be called the "factors" of their culture. . . . Elements are withdrawn from their usual setting and combined with one another in a totally unique configuration, startling neophytes [and I believe other participants, too, observers or readers for example] into thinking about objects, persons, relationships and features of their environment they have hitherto taken for granted. (105)

As liminal figures, berdaches and tricksters serve this same purpose in Erdrich's fiction, working between worlds to raise questions about accepted patterns of thought and action.

When Lipsha returns to the reservation at the beginning of *The Bingo Palace*, people are confused, not only about where he fits in but also about what sort of person he is. The description of who he is *not* emphasizes his mixed genderedness and his status as a liminal figure.

He was not a tribal council honcho, not a powwow organizer, not a medic in the cop's car in the parking lot, no one we would trust with our life. He was not a member of the drum group, not a singer, not a candy-bar seller. Not a little old Cree lady with a scarf tied under her chin, a thin pocketbook in her lap, and a wax cup of coke, not one of us. He was not a fancy dancer with a mirror on his head and bobbing porcupine-hair roach, not a traditional, not a shawl girl whose parents beaded her from head to foot. He was not our grandfather, either, with the face like clean old-time chewed leather, who prayed over the microphone, head bowed. He was not even one of those gathered at the soda machines outside the doors, the ones who wouldn't go into the warm and

grassy air because of being drunk or too much in love or just bashful. He was not the Chippewa with rings pierced in her nose or the old aunt with water dripping through her fingers or the announcer with a ragged face and a drift of plumes on his indoor hat. (9-10)

He is not male or female, not old or young, not in or out of the tribe. "He was none of these, only Lipsha, come home" (10).

What Lipsha's reappearance and his antics do for the community is to help them revise their thinking about themselves as individuals and their goals as a community; his actions are a catalyst in the community's re-visioning experience. He is a "combination" character, a berdache figure, whose strength comes from his special role in the community and from the ways he is "mixed." Turner believes that "during the liminal period, neophytes are alternately forced and encouraged to think about their society, their cosmos, and the powers that generate and sustain them. Liminality may be partly described as a stage of reflection" (105). It creates an unsettled situation in which "there is a promiscuous intermingling and juxtaposing of the categories of event, experience, and knowledge, with a pedagogic intention" (106). Lipsha certainly learns his lesson in *The Bingo Palace*, and there is great hope at the end of the novel that, as the person in whom much of the community is joined, he will be able to share it with them.

Robert Pelton believes that "the trickster is not an archetypal idea, but a symbolic pattern that includes a wide range of individual figures" (3). He calls trickster "a sort of inspired handyman, tacking together the bits and pieces of experience until they become what they are—a web of many-layered meaning" (4). According to Pelton, the trickster represents the human race "individually and communally seizing the fragments of his experience and *discovering* in them an order sacred by its very wholeness" (255). Hence, "the trickster discloses the radically human character of the whole cosmos," while at the same time "he shows the holiness of ordinary life" (256). In many ways, Erdrich entreats her readers to join the carnival of her text in this role of "inspired handyman," to join together the pieces of her narrative strategies, genre crossings, and gender blurrings to create their own quilt of a text. The reader becomes the trickster, responsible for making the pieces fit for herself and for those for whom she interprets the text.

In *Love Medicine*, Lipsha begins "to see how instantly the ground can shift you thought was solid. You see how all the everyday things you counted on was just a dream you had been having by which you run your whole life" (252). This is the message that readers of Erdrich's fiction begin to see, too. Her narrative strategies impress the reader with the idea that neither individual nor collective points of view

are reliable or consistent. Her play with the berdache role nudges the reader toward seeing that this is also true of hegemonic gender expectations. Every kind of firm belief, in fact, becomes suspect. Everything is a puzzle, there is no one "true" way to solve it, the pieces never fit together in only one way. Nothing can be assumed, everything has gestaltic possibilities, the facts keep rotating gyroscopically, offering ever-changing possibilities. Just as Shawnee Ray puts together a ribbon shirt for Lipsha at the end of *The Bingo Palace* from "brown, calico, blue, cream, salmon trim—fitting the collar to the shoulders, figuring out the way she would join the ribbons at the yoke . . . [piecing in] scraps of other projects—turquoise, black and yellow satin" (26), so the reader must put together a new view of gender roles and possibilities and of other generally held truths.

In the last chapter of *The Bingo Palace*, Fleur packs her sled with her ancestors' bones and takes them with her on her journey into death, trading her life for the life of her great-grandson, Lipsha. She doesn't leave them for good, however. Bear and berdache, she keeps them asking essential questions about themselves and their lives. Often in the night they hear her "bear laugh" as she watches them through the panes of window glass:

yet, no matter how we strain to decipher the sound it never quite makes sense, never relieves our certainty or our suspicion that there is more to be told, more than we know, more than can be caught in the sieve of our thinking . . . and all night our lesser hearts beat to the sound of the spirit's drum, through those anxious hours when we call our lives to question. (274)

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Beyond the Iconic Subject: Re-Visioning Louise Erdrich's Tracks

Nicholas Sloboda

The widespread success of Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*, the third novel in her quartet, has contributed to recent, vigorous debates about the nature of Native American fiction and its portrayal of Native Americans. In a forceful wave of criticism directed against "canonical" (mis)readings of Native American writing, critics have engaged in a two-fold attack, refuting "Western" interpretive frameworks and promoting alternative and indigenous readings. Leslie Silko's famous dismissal of Erdrich's fiction as "postmodern" (10-11) has already become firmly fixed as a cornerstone of any discussion of Erdrich's texts in particular and, in general, contemporary Native American fiction.¹ Stemming from a candid concern about what postcolonial theoreticians might designate as a "lower-case" compromise of identity, readers such as Silko voice their concerns in an attempt to prevent a marginalization of Native American literary voices. While this rejection of Western readings and promotion of indigenous and alternative perspectives draws attention to the nature of the Native American voice and its own rich tradition, it also runs the risk of appropriating the individual text to fit the proposed theoretical paradigm.² In reconsidering *Tracks* outside of already common prescriptive readings, I propose to reexamine Erdrich's depictions of the individual and social subject. I argue that Erdrich does not develop characters who cede to typifications associated with their voice. Instead, she presents an often subtle exploration of identity and subjectivity that neither over-regulates her Native American voices, nor engages in a "postmodern" free play of language and dissolution of subjectivity.

Not depicting her characters in a prescribed manner, Erdrich,

accordingly, disputes Louis Owens' conclusion that characters in Native American fiction strive for "transcendence" that involves "the recovery of 'eternal and immutable' elements" and "that places humanity within a . . . cyclically ordered cosmos" (20). Owens venerates such iconic figures by contrasting them with characters he pejoratively describes as celebrating "the fragmentation and chaos of experience" (20). While Owens correctly recognizes the expression of native spirituality within many of this fiction's characters, he establishes a reductive oppositional framework which tends to prioritize a "classic" Native voice. Using a similar heuristic model, other critics read Erdrich's narratives as closed "historical dialogues" (Stripes 26) or as "antithetical strands" (Rainwater 406). Along these lines, Arnold Krupat claims that, essentially, Native American fiction presents a teleology that strives for a "legitimizing" of voices and a "warning" to "other languages to beware" (*Voice* 161). Such oppositional readings tend to promote stereotypical readings of Native peoples and their conflicts with the white man and, in the process, gloss over significant aspects of Erdrich's novel, namely her distinctly dialogic subjects.

Moreover, these types of closed, schematic readings lack both conceptual and practical validity. Bhabha, in his theoretical discussions about culture in postcolonial contexts, counters frameworks that treat people as "simply historical events or parts of a patriotic body politic" (*Location* 145). Situating people "within a range of discourses," he explains further that "[t]hey are also a complex rhetorical strategy of social reference where the claim to be representative provokes a crisis within the process of signification and discursive address" (*Location* 145). By exploring the relation between individual and nation and the gaps within their symbolic orders and signification systems, Bhabha draws attention to the complexity of socio-ideologic formations. Not restricting her characters to generalized discourses and universalized voices, Erdrich adopts a similar strategy in her narrative that acknowledges the existence of, to apply Bhabha's conceptualization, "a temporality of representation that moves between cultural formations and social processes without a 'centered' causal logic" ("DissemiNation" 293). From this "in-between" perspective, Erdrich addresses the intricate nature of a responsible interaction among diverse cultural voices.

To explore diverse, at times contradictory individual and social voices, both current and historical, Erdrich develops her literary subjects as, to apply Bhabha's term, "performative." This type of subject, as Bhabha explains, "does not simply revalue the contents of a cultural tradition, or transpose values 'cross-culturally'" (*Location* 241). Nor does it lead to "new symbols of identity, new 'positive images'" (247). Instead, it "reinscribes the 'lessons of the past' into

the very textuality of the present" (247). Extending beyond an iconic presentation of the Native American subject and community, Erdrich does not merely establish an opposition between increasingly dominant settler voices and marginalized Ojibwa.³ Activating what Bakhtin describes as a novel's "diversity of speech types" ("Discourse" 262) she presents a wide range of complex and often tension-filled exchanges among the local Chippewa themselves and between them and the non-natives. Recognizing language is a social phenomenon, she incorporates into the utterances of her characters, "contextual overtones" ("Discourse" 293), to use Bakhtin's terms, that, in turn, lead to an "active" dialogism (*Problems* 197-99).⁴

Erdrich presents subjectivity as dialogic by placing her characters in contract with and often in battle against other cultures, their social hierarchies, and systems of knowledge. Her strategy complements what Bhabha describes as the "dialogical" subject, or, similarly, what Bakhtin (Vološinov) designates as a *responsive* dialogism in which the "verbal performance engages . . . in ideological colloquy at large scale: it affirms something, anticipates possible responses and objections, seeks support, and so on" (*Marxism* 95). Here, "the agency of identification," to further apply Bhabha's explanation, "is never pure or holistic but always constituted in a process of substitution, displacement or projection" (162). By drawing attention to "this discourse of 'living perplexity'" (162), to how "[d]esignations of cultural difference interpellate forms of identity" (162), Erdrich rejects expressions of finality and ethno-cultural exclusivity. Instead, by focusing on the interaction between Natives and settlers, she explores the lasting consequences of American government policies and the destructive and violent influences of the settlers on Native populations. In the process of deliberately crossing cultural boundaries and thresholds of understanding, Erdrich strives to articulate what Bhabha describes as the "metaphoricity of the people" ("DissemiNation" 293) in which "thresholds of meaning . . . must be crossed, erased, and translated in the process of cultural production" ("Introduction" 4). Erdrich engages in dynamic explorations of self and other, without compromising Native American concerns. She, accordingly, supports Said's declared emphasis on the importance within a text of "binding engagement on matters pertaining to discovery and knowledge, freedom, oppression, or injustice" ("Textuality" 703).

Switching her novel's narrators between the elder hunter, trickster, and spiritual figure, Nanapush, and the discontented young woman who is one-quarter "white" blood, Pauline Puyat, Erdrich presents a comprehensive overview of the few remaining Chippewas around Matchimanito Lake. Through their intertwining relationships with each other and with surviving members of the local community, Nanapush

and Pauline renegotiate themselves, not as stable and closed entities, but as changing and dynamic characters. Each interacts directly and indirectly with the other, actively interpreting events around them and, at the same time, *doubling* each other's actions. Erdrich, hence, extends Nanapush and Pauline beyond enclosed psychologic characterizations; their voices emerge in the local Native community as individual yet interconnected, similar yet divergent.

In the chapters narrated by Nanapush, Erdrich focuses on the ongoing formation and expression of his subjectivity in relation to both accordant and discordant voices (and worlds) within and beyond his community. Here Erdrich exposes how the formation of a consciousness opens itself through a flexible agency, one that expresses an outward relation to others. Nanapush uses humorous and self-reflective discourses and calls upon alternate voices within his own community—including spirits—to polemicize, directly and indirectly, against increasingly overwhelming (and often destructive) forces of assimilation. While Nanapush immerses himself in the events of his surrounding community, Pauline removes herself from the local native community and its familiar social discourse. Instead, she enters into the discourse of an *other*. That is, she strives to incorporate or embed a type of (Western) asceticism into her own utterances and being, hoping to use her new voice to, paradoxically, "save" the very community from which she has intentionally displaced herself. Her conflicts with members of the local community often stem from this intense, internal polemic. While narrating and participating in intensely social discourses, both Nanapush and Pauline re-confront and reconfigure significant aspects of their sense of identity, including how they relate to their living space (the woods and the town), language (Ojibway and English), and religion (Anishinabe spirituality and Catholicism).

Nanapush is constantly aware of his role in the community. With his repeated line, "I was the one" (3), he recognizes that it is up to him to take action and respond to the crisis faced by his people. Accordingly, he sets out to bury the dead and restore order to the Pillager cabin. With his "I" directed toward the community, Nanapush interacts with both the spiritual and actual world. By asking "those Pillagers . . . to leave us now and never come back" (5), he refuses to submit passively to the overwhelming forces around him of alienation and destruction. To counter these forces, Nanapush draws upon a variety of voices, in both the real and the spiritual world. In one such moment, he helps Eli in his hunt by beginning to "sing slowly, calling on my helpers [in the spiritual world], until the words came from my mouth but were not mine" (101). During such moments, Nanapush gains another dimension to his character: his body functions as a key physical site where other worlds voice a presence.

While attempting to restore order and stability among the survivors in the local community, Nanapush participates within both the physical and spiritual worlds. All the time, he remains implicitly aware of and attentive to each world. On one occasion he explains that, apparently, a spirit bear "crashed through the brush into the woods, and . . . left no trail" (60). Later, he comments on the white men's wanton and rampant destruction of wildlife, noting that the buffalos' "spirits slip between the lightning sheets" (140). While in dialogue with these other worlds, Nanapush does not prioritize his own voice. Accordingly, he maintains what Bakhtin terms as "genuine polyphony." Here, a "multitude of characters" is not reduced to "a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness." Recognizing his role as mediator, and not regulator, Nanapush plays his part within, as Bakhtin concludes, a "plurality of consciousnesses . . . each with its own world" (*Problems* 6). Mediating between worlds, Nanapush extends his subjectivity beyond his quotidian reality and develops a consciousness beyond his own corporeal self.

Through personal reflection, Nanapush gains a level of self-understanding and intensifies his awareness of his particular role in both the physical and spiritual worlds. In determining the nature of his role, he realizes that "[o]nly after, when an old man sits dreaming and talking . . . the design springs clear" (34). He then acknowledges that an integral part of his own constitution occurs through his constant expression and interpretation of voices from others, voices often conveyed in the form of stories:

I opened my mouth and wore out the boy's ear, but that is not my fault. I shouldn't have been caused to live so long, shown so much of death, had to squeeze so many stories in the corner of my brain. They're all attached, and once I start there is no end to telling because they're hooked from one side to the other, mouth to tail. During the year of sickness, when I was the last one left, I saved myself by starting a story. . . . I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and travelled on. (46)

While telling stories, Nanapush discovers that this form of dialogue promotes renewal. Erdrich, in the process, exposes the open nature and authenticity of Nanapush's dialogism. In theoretical terms, Bakhtin explains that, within a dialogue "[t]here is neither a first nor a last word and there are no limits to the dialogic context (it extends into the boundless past and the boundless future)" ("Speech" 170). In a community that is losing its voice or "dialogic context," Nanapush nonetheless continues to assert himself authentically, to interpret and act on the present with due regard for the past.

Nanapush, however, not only faces the devastating force of the plague, but also the ever-increasingly loud, often destructive voices of the white men. The loss of his living space severely challenges his ability to continue his narration. Observing the clear-cutting of the area around Fleur's cabin, Nanapush describes the resultant space:

Around me, a forest was suspended, lightly held. The fingered lobes of leaves floating on nothing. The powerful throats, the columns of trunks and splayed twigs, all substance was illusion. Nothing was solid. Each green crown was held in the air by no more than splinters of bark. (223)

Emptied out, the forest, for the local community, loses both its real and spiritual presence. Now a capitalist site, it displays only a bare surface, "a landscape level to the lake and to the road" (223). This destructive act denies Nanapush the benefit of a home space within which to set his identity, to retain his memory and subjectivity.

In spite of the prevalent wanton destruction of the forest, Nanapush neither remains silent nor internalizes his condition. He relentlessly pushes ahead, constructing and expressing both his individual self and his communal identity, his socio-ideologic voice. Verbalizing this "design," he addresses Lulu, Fleur's daughter: "Once I had you I did not dare break the string between us and kept moving my lips, holding you motionless with talking, just as at this moment" (167). He further explains that children, "[o]nce they live in our lives and speak our language, they slowly seem to become like us" (169). Such reflexive passages, with their double address to Lulu and the reader, reveal Nanapush's understanding of his role to act as mediator for his people. He recognizes his need to articulate his self awareness within and beyond his community, to combat an assimilation of his people into a superficial type of global village. Aware of his role in saving the community, Nanapush begins to explain to others his simultaneously individual and communal consciousness. Here Erdrich exposes his intersubjective nature. Before talking with Eli Kashpaw he reflects, "I'm Nanapush, remember. That's as good as saying I knew what interested Eli Kashpaw" (41). Later, Nanapush recalls how their community suffered as they themselves stripped all the bushes around Matchimanito Lake of cranberry bark for a tonic dealer. In coming to terms with this loss, he notes that no one person, even Fleur and her powerful dreams, could save them. He then reminds himself that "I never made the mistake of thinking that I owned my own strength . . . [a]nd so I never was alone in my failures" (177). Nanapush thus realizes that his role in relation to events around him extends beyond a causality between himself and the world.

Through Nanapush's active dialogue with those around him, Erdrich avoids a simple dichotomy between Native and settler voices. Nanapush explains, "Our trouble came from living, from liquor and the dollar bill. We stumbled toward the government bait, never looking down, never noticing how the land was snatched from under us at every step" (4). Also, notwithstanding possible personal motivation, he acknowledges that the spreading of the "talking backwards" Lazarres, remains problematic for the continuation of their tribe:

It seemed they were every place now, multiplying and dividing, taking up the cracks and crevices between the clans, the gaps that illness had left. . . . There was always a Lazarre . . . all of them grown stout and greasy from the meat supplies that they had pilfered from their neighbors. . . . A crippling poison had followed on the tail end of disease. (184)

Nanapush critiques what he perceives as destructive growth from seeds of displacement on Chippewa land, seeds that were not merely imported from outside the tribe but that also emerge from within the tribe itself.

Enacting his dialogic nature, Nanapush attempts to bridge Anishinabe and Western worlds. Recognizing that Native and settler voices interact in a complex manner, Nanapush recalls talking to the Catholic missionary, Father Damien, in "both languages in streams that ran alongside each other" (7). Significantly, Erdrich does not reduce such dialogic moments to mere pluralism and thus ignore the tensions between Natives and the settlers. Nanapush, accordingly, does not neutralize his own voice. In an act of subversion, he recalls pushing settlers "under with my words." Rejecting the government officials by telling them "what I thought of their papers in good English" (33), Nanapush understands that for the politics of unmasking, English functions as an appropriate language. On other occasions he uses humor as a means of mediating between the two worlds, particularly between the old and new religion. At a Benediction Mass, he critiques the hard pews noting that "the Anishinabe characters . . . were not exactly perfect but at least did not require sitting on hard planks." Father Damien counters that awareness of such suffering allows one to become sensitive to God's presence, to which Nanapush replies, "A god who enters through the rear door . . . is no better than a thief" (110). By frequently including comical anecdotes in his dialogues, Nanapush breaks through the cloud of despair looming over his community. His humor also silences stale or destructive voices and, instead, sparks a negotiation between Native and settler voices.

At the end of the novel, Nanapush solidifies his role as mediator

among his own people and between his community and the settlers. Through his interactive stance, he thus calls for reconciliation among his people. He urges Lulu to forgive her mother, explaining that "[p]erhaps when you finally understand, you'll . . . go out there, forgive her, though it's you that needs forgiveness and you that will need a mother" (211). Nanapush, himself, through Fleur's prompting, reconciles with Margaret, even though Margaret redirects their commonly collected funds to pay the Agent only for the Kashpaw land. Regarding the settlers, Fr. Damien—another mediator between spiritual and physical worlds—urges Nanapush to lead his people: "You must gain the Agent's ear, help make these decisions, find ways to prohibit whiskey traders from roosting on the reservation boundary" (185). Eventually, Nanapush cedes to this role, explaining that "[t]o become a bureaucrat myself was the only way that I could . . . reach through the loophole and draw you [Lulu] home" (225). Aware that language is a social phenomenon, here Nanapush decides to take advantage of its permeability by developing what Bakhtin describes as a "loophole of consciousness." Bakhtin explains that this "potential other meaning . . . accompanies the word like a shadow." Not, then, the "ultimate word . . . it is only the penultimate word and places after itself only a conditional, not a final, period" (*Problems* 233). Nanapush understands that his interaction with other people, through language, can result not only in shared meaning but in a possible transformation of another's discourse. As a bureaucrat, Nanapush hopes to enter into a world of discourse not his own to subvert aspects of this voice and to promote a hybrid voice, one influenced by his own people.

Although Nanapush acts, in part, as an elder figure and counter-voice to the destructive forces within and around his community, he is not, however, an idealized character, a noble but clichéd agent of resistance and emblem of the past. Aware of his flaws and limitations, Nanapush retains an individual and idiosyncratic self, noting that "[t]alk is an old man's last vice" (46). He recognizes his own need to talk, to retell stories; he knows that, in spite of all the chaos, death, and destruction around, to stop talking "made it worse" (6). Not only interested in preserving his community, Nanapush also concerns himself with his own interests. Divulging to Eli his secret to dealing with women, for example, he explains, "The thing I've found about women is that you must use every instinct to confuse" (46). Later, for his own survival he goes to live with Margaret, even though she betrays him and Fleur. Thus, although he contrasts himself to Pauline, declaring that "I was careful with my known facts" (39), he nonetheless maintains a cunningness for his own benefit. By continuously talking to himself and others, Nanapush simultaneously expresses and explores his being as an imperfect self in ongoing process of becoming.

While Nanapush explores and develops his subjectivity through interpreting and contributing to changing Chippewa and Western voices, Pauline, by contrast, finds herself feeling like an exile in her own home setting and decides to explore her sense of being by distinguishing herself from her community. To do so, she tries to fuse her consciousness with the speech of an *other*. Embedding her discourses with religious, particularly salvational, language, she strives to incorporate a type of (Western) asceticism into her own utterances. In the process, she intentionally displaces herself from her community. While disassociating herself from her familial ties, she also dismisses Natives in general. Nonetheless, she attempts to formulate a new identity by combining her Chippewa and Christian self. Responding to her feelings of oppression, Pauline carefully positions herself both inside and outside her community.

Pauline establishes her *double* nature at a young age, by combining Native traditions with her experiences and schooling in non-Native customs. After returning to the reservation from Argus, Pauline experiences her first vision (a common and natural occurrence among the Chippewa). While sitting at the deathbed of a schoolmate, Mary Pepewas, Pauline "began to doze in waking, and in waking to dream with clear sight" (67). In this liminal state, she envisions Mary as a boat pulling away from shore. Pauline finds herself cutting the rope and letting Mary drift away. She then recalls the focus of the dream-like scene shifting to herself: "A cool blackness lifted me, out of the room and through the door. I leapt, spun, landed along the edge of the clearing" (67). Pauline proceeds to describe her peculiar response: "My body rippled. I tore leaves off a branch and stuffed them into my mouth to smother laughter. The wind shook in the trees. The sky hardened to light. And that is when, twirling dizzily, my wings raked the air, and I rose in three powerful beats and saw what lay below" (68). During her vision, Pauline identifies herself, according to Ojibwa tradition, as a crow. She then introduces her own perspective, a viewpoint that draws from but eventually transcends her Catholic religious upbringing. She remembers feeling "They were stupid and small, milling behind the lanterned windows. . . . I alone, watching, filled with breath, knew death as a form of grace" (68). Pauline's distortion of Native and Western cultural and spiritual traditions, leads her to fashion her own hybrid identity.

Pauline's spiritual passion increases until she becomes convinced that her visionary spirituality is the only path to salvation. First, to explain her occluded perspective to herself, Pauline notes that, "I saw through the eyes of the world outside of us. I would not speak our language" (14). She then interprets her identity as a crow, based on her out-of-body experience, as a sign that she is not like those around

her: "I knew I was different. I had the merciful scavenger's heart. I became devious and holy, dangerously meek and mild. I wore the nuns' castoffs . . . entered each house where death was about to come, and then made death welcome" (69). She distances herself from those around her to the extent that, later, she actually perceives the Lord explaining to her that she was an orphan. Pauline reports that "He . . . told me I was chosen to serve" (137) and fuses her calling with her Native sense of herself as a crow: she reads her mission to be a scavenger for Native souls, to deliver them to Christ and, in the process, destroy the power of the Native devil, Misshepeshu. Further distinguishing herself, she observes that "despite my deceptive features, I was not one speck of Indian but wholly white" (137). Accordingly, she vehemently rejects the ways of her people: "They could starve and fornicate, expose their young for dogs and crows, worship the bones of animals or the brown liquid in a jar. I would have none of it" (196). In the process, she ranks those outside of the Native community as superior: "Our Lord . . . had obviously made the whites more shrewd, as they grew in number, all around, some even owning automobiles, while the Indians receded and coughed to death and drank" (139). The more she differentiates herself, the more Pauline commits herself to her spiritual purification and Mission: "I would be chosen. His own, wiped clean" (196). By drawing from both Christian and Chippewa traditions, Pauline invents an ascetic spirituality that takes each spirituality well beyond its traditional character.

In her attempt to play the dual role of savior and scavenger, Pauline enters into an unusual *dialogue* with those around her. She actually tests her role on herself and on those around her. Here Erdrich exposes how an individual self can cede to an agency, as Pauline commits herself to what she interprets as a larger spiritual force. She tells herself that "He gave me the mission to name and baptize, to gather souls" (140-41). In addition to her statements, Pauline's actions also accentuate her "outside" position. By taking on the job of preparing the dead, she becomes, in the words of Nanapush, "good at easing souls into death but bad at breathing them to life, [she was] afraid of life" (57). By emphasizing Pauline's belief in her spiritual discourse, Erdrich distinguishes her fusion of Western religion and Native spirituality from Nanapush's dialogism between his people's spirituality and the Catholic mission. Erdrich, however, does not establish a mere opposition between Nanapush and Pauline as two voices, one present, the other absent, in the community. Pauline develops a hybrid character in a complex relationship, at times close and at times distant, to her native land.

Pauline's individual fusion of Christian and Native beliefs leads her to intense, but contradictory and confused, feelings, especially with

regard to her sexuality. In her mind she struggles with her sexual desire and her own sense of being undesirable. Pauline finds herself attracted to Fleur, as she recalls her strong feelings when Fleur once carried her to bed (20). Later, her locking of the men in Argus in a freezer and witnessing of Fleur's rape at the young age of fifteen further compound her tensions associated with sexuality. During this time, Pauline develops a skewed interpretation of Chippewa spirituality that links sexuality with the lake monster Misshepesu and with drowning. She also finds herself sharing Fleur's bodily violation in her dreams: "I was witness when the men slapped Fleur's mouth, beat her, entered and rode her. I felt all. My shrieks poured from her mouth and my blood from her wounds" (66). In this out-of-body, liminal, experience, Pauline relives Fleur's horrific rape; she uses the sense of humiliation and mortification to justify her own acts of self-inflicted punishment and flagellation, later, in the convent.

Pauline does not restrict her visionary abilities to co-feeling the pain or pleasure of others. She soon recognizes the potential of her talent and takes advantage of her power. Frustrated at her own lack of sexual gratification, Pauline soon becomes envious of Eli and Fleur and their raw passion. Wanting to experience bodily pleasures herself, Pauline perceives herself as being "drawn by Eli's heat" (76). She anticipates an encounter of her own with him, thinking "with wild certainty, that he would hold my fingers to his lips." His mere "curiosity" and lack of "intent," however, disappoints her severely. Rather than re-examining her strategy to displace Fleur, Pauline, instead, re-channels her desire for Eli into "hate" (77). Pushing ahead with her now vengeful scheme, Pauline manipulates the actions of those around her. She treats Eli's new lover, Sophie, like a puppet, as she "stitched the dress right on the girl" (78). Pauline then communicates with the spiritual world but, unlike Nanapush, directs her abilities here predominantly for personal gain. She uses Moses' "dreamcatcher" potion to lure Eli to Sophie. Invading their minds with her own desires, she spies on the couple in the woods: "I turned my thoughts on the girl and entered her and made her do what she could never have dreamed of herself" (83). Continuing to transpose her thoughts, Pauline enters into Eli's mind:

I drove Eli to the peak and took his relief away and made him start again. I don't know how long, how many hours. Their bodies would grow together and their skins hang loose. Their breasts and thighs would wrinkle like a toad's, their faces puff, their eyes bloat, yet they would move and move. I was pitiless. They were mechanical things, toys, dolls wound past their limits. (84)

Feeling empowered, eventually Pauline lets them stop, "[a]s if cut from puppet strings" (84). While Pauline guides the couple's lovemaking in order to co-feel their pleasure, she also enjoys her sense of power and control, forcing Eli and Sophie to take their lovemaking to the extreme. She thus exposes a darker side of her character, the personal gain she feels from her contrived sense of superiority over those around her. Pauline's goal of spiritual purification thus emerges, at least in part, from her own skewed sexuality and personal frustration from a lack of intimacy with the local community.

In her attempt to sustain a controlling influence on the lives of those around her, Pauline finds herself further isolated from the local Native community. To gain forgiveness from Fleur for his affair with Sophie, Eli leaves Fleur's home and seeks counsel from Nanapush. During this time, Sophie, seeking forgiveness, kneels outside Fleur's cabin, refusing to leave. Finally Clarence and Napoleon carry over a statue of the Blessed Virgin in an attempt to get Sophie to move. At this moment, Pauline observes a miracle: tears rolling from the statue's eyes. Still not opening herself to others, however, she decides to keep the information to herself, as her own "private miracle upon which no sounding trumpet should intrude" (94). By remaining silent, Pauline rejects the possibility of sharing a significant experience in the formation of her self and, accordingly, participating in the ongoing communal activity. She proceeds to try to live as a nun and recalls returning to the Pillagers' cabin, "dressed as a novice now, in gaiters and thick woolens. My hair was partly hidden, a cross of myrtlewood hung from my neck, and my waist was belted by a forged metal rosary" (141). Thinking only of herself, she asks for food and explains, "I have no family . . . I am alone and have no land" (142). Declaring that she has abandoned her body and soul to Him, she proceeds to quickly consume the stew given to her before noticing that Eli, Fleur, Margaret and Nanapush themselves eat hardly anything. By ignoring their plight, Pauline misses another opportunity to gain an insight into both her self and the local community. Instead, she continues to promote her own spiritual duty and piety, a belief system that encourages a sense of superiority over those around her.

As Pauline becomes increasingly absorbed in her absolutism, she refuses to (or cannot) accept the invitations of the others around her to re-enter the community. Pointing to Nanapush's dialogism, Erdrich shows Nanapush telling comical tales to try to bring Pauline closer to the community. After hearing about how she mortifies herself by not visiting the outhouse, Nanapush tells a story about a girl floating in water. While he speaks, however, Pauline maintains her estranged perspective. She perceives Nanapush as "informed by Satan, sent to

me on purpose to test my resolve. He meant to bar me from gaining joy in the presence of my Savior, in heaven" (150). In this singular mind-set, she cannot recognize the humor of Nanapush's story. Later, Fleur comes close to bringing Pauline into their world. In a highly symbolic and ritualistic scene, she washes Pauline's filthy body and gives her clean clothes. For a moment, under Fleur's sensuous lure, Pauline enjoys herself. Shortly thereafter, however, when Fleur needs help, Pauline cannot break from her self-absorption and provide assistance to her. In coming to terms with her inaction, she explains to herself that "the Lord overtook my limbs and made them clumsy" (157).

While using her mysticism to "save" herself and her community, Pauline plays off her beliefs against Nanapush. Throughout the novel, the two narrators interact directly and indirectly. Aware of his active interest in her, Pauline states: "Nanapush was sly enough to get the better of me sometimes by asking questions without limit or end" (145). Early on, Nanapush reveals an understanding of Pauline's deceptive and gossip-filled perspective: "In describing the things she had not seen her fingers wandered in the air, her voice screeched. . . . The practice of deception was so constant with her that it got to be a kind of truth" (53). Commenting on Pauline's constant process of internalization, Nanapush further observes that "[k]nowledge kept in could kill a person like Pauline" (54). He contends that when she did speak, she often strove to "gain attention by telling tales that created damage" (39). Later, while Nanapush prepares medicine for Fleur, Pauline engages in another act of extreme self-punishment by plunging her hands into the pot of boiling water. Thus, in spite of Nanapush's awareness of Pauline's nature, and his and the community's attempts to welcome her into their living space, Pauline consistently rejects their reality and refuses to see that, notwithstanding her personal convictions, she is part of that world.

In Pauline's later stages of sanctification, Erdrich emphasizes her transformation into an agent of spirituality. Attempting to attain a holiness—that even the nuns declare is too extreme—Pauline decides to sanctify herself and, simultaneously, save the Chippewa. At the convent, she imagines herself fulfilling "His" mission at Matchimanito Lake by destroying Misshepeshe. She thinks that "If I did not forsake Jesus in His extremity, then He would have no other choice but to make me whole. I would be His champion, His savior too" (195). She returns to the lake, and, taking Nanapush's leaky boat, she drifts off-shore in the foggy, freezing water. From within her mystical mind-set, she observes that, "The water rose to my ankles. I prayed. The water stopped" (197). Feeling empowered and superior to those around her, she observes, "They were such small foolish sticks strung together

with cloth. . . . This is how God felt: beyond hinderance or reach" (197-98). Although Nanapush braves the waters and swims to her to steady the bow of the boat, Pauline rejects his attempts to save her and rocks the boat, eventually pushing Nanapush away. In Pauline's mind, she has now triumphantly returned to her community and can destroy Misshepeshu (and Fleur) and begin to gather Chippewa souls to lead them to the Christian heaven.

Pauline convinces herself that the success of her mission will release her from her familial connection to the Chippewa. In a ritualistic act while alone in the windy star-lit night, Pauline strips off her clothes and stands naked, save for a rosary gripped in her hand. Eventually, the boat drifts and slams to the shore where a mysterious "he" wraps a blanket around her. In her altered consciousness after a night-long exposure, she perceives Misshepeshu has taken the form of Napoleon. Feeling she must rid herself and the Native community of this devil, Pauline recalls her attack: "I seized him and forced myself upon him, grew around him like the earth around a root, held him still" (202). She describes how they fought: "I . . . scattered myself in all directions, stupefied my own brain in the process so thoroughly that the only things left of intelligence were my doubled-over hands" (202). Then, in this state of derangement, she completes her duty:

My fingers closed like hasps of iron, locked on the strong rosary chain, wrenched and twisted the beads close about his neck until his face darkened and he lunged away. I hung on while he bucked and gagged and finally fell, his long tongue dragging down my thighs. (202)

Pauline believes that Christ empowered her to kill off this devil creature. Later, recognizing that this "he" is Napoleon Morrissey, she quickly reinterprets the event, asking "[h]ow could I have known what body the devil would assume?" (203). Locked within her sense of mysticism, Pauline perceives all events—even if she must creatively reinterpret or re-imagine them—as part of the spiritual warfare in which she plays a prominent role.

From this point, Pauline strives less to tell stories with her own voice and more to fulfill her visionary consciousness. After the Lake Matchimanito incident, she sanctifies herself, "marrying" her absolutism. She becomes a "bride" for Christ who, she declares, "will take me as wife" (204). Finally, she changes her name to Leopolda, reminding herself that "my name, any name, was no more than a crumbling skin" (205). The others recognize her change of appearance, her loss of a personal look. Nanapush, accordingly, describes her face as "a flat crude picture, a piece of paper with two round black holes cut for the eyes" (190). Pauline thus fulfills her goal to

"dissolve" (141), to become one with Providence. In doing so, however, she also finalizes her separation from her community. At the end of the novel, she coldly envisions the demolition of Fleur's cabin and the selling and dividing of the land:

The place will be haunted I suppose, but no one will have ears sharp enough to hear the Pillagers' low voices, or the vision clear to see their still shadows. The trembling old fools with their conjuring tricks will die off and the young, like Lulu and Nector, return from government schools blinded and deafened. (204-05)

As a "bride of Christ," Pauline solidifies her fatalist vision of her community, her belief that the Christian world has conquered the evil of Fleur and Misshepesu. In light of her peculiar juxtaposition of Native and Christian beliefs through which she emerges in a "sanctified" state, Pauline chooses to view the impending doom of her community in positive terms, as a conquering of evil.

While attending to orality, myth and ceremony within *Tracks*, Louise Erdrich also calls for a simultaneous awareness of and dialogue with the ever-changing world. This strategy leads to a continuous reinterpretation of the world and reconsideration of previously secure or stable meanings and designs. Not merely displaying a variety of voices within a relativised context, however, Erdrich situates her characters in a shared, interactive, and conflictive discursive (and actual) space in which voices collide and horizons of understanding become altered. By presenting the perspectives of both Nanapush and Pauline, Erdrich examines the consequences of two disparate world views. She contrasts Nanapush's choice to retain his Native identity and negotiate some kind of living future for himself and his people with Pauline's decision to live in her own mystical world and engage in extreme acts, both individually and socially. In the process she exposes the problems resulting from interpreting self and world in reductive models of good versus evil, with the new world of whites and Christianity as good, and the traditional world of the Natives and Chippewa beliefs as bad. With her characters reconstituting themselves and, concurrently, the world, Erdrich counters the stereotypes of a common voice among the Chippewa and a united front against the white settlers. Her mutually engaged yet autonomous characters interact with each other in relation to both Chippewa culture, with its ritual and myth, and Western society, with its mix of capitalism and Christian beliefs. With her characters crossing cultural boundaries and thresholds of meaning (both present and past), Erdrich exposes and confronts contentious sites of social reference. In the process, she tracks the ongoing tensions and changes within self-identity and social expression.

NOTES

¹Silko views Erdrich's fiction as emblematic of literary postmodernism's and, implicitly, Western society's celebration of a semantic rift between signifier and signified, its dissolution of subjectivity into mere language play, and its overindulgence in self-reflexivity or meta-fiction. Such fiction, Silko contends, focuses exclusively on psychological and subconscious character dilemmas and, in the process, fails to attend to any pointed political and social matters. Susan Castillo attends directly to the Silko/Erdrich controversy. Castillo attempts to reconcile the two writers' stances by affirming Erdrich's commitment to extratextual matters. Introducing Erdrich's subsequent novel, *Tracks*, Castillo contends that Erdrich uses postmodern strategies as part of a significant ontological focus that situates the Chippewa world in a living—albeit sullen—discursive relation to the surrounding world.

²In one such recent alternate reading of Erdrich's novel, Lee Schweningen contends that an "ecofeminist approach" can be used to expose, within *Tracks*, "power relationships concerning racial, sexual, and ecological practices" (37). Schweningen's model, while providing a different perspective, nonetheless tends to over-emphasize Erdrich's involvement in larger critical discourses on Western society in general, such as patriarchal oppression or exploitation of the marginalized.

³Erdrich uses the *Americanized* name "Chippewa" throughout her novel.

⁴Arbitrarily fusing Bakhtin's notions of polyphony with a Jameson-type of postmodernism, Krupat generalizes that theories of "openness," such as Bakhtin's dialogism, convey too much "inconsistency and ambiguity" ("Silko" 57) and thus operate within a "schizophrenic heteroglossic domain" (65). Bakhtin, in fact, discusses the negative consequences of this type of disorder, or free-play: "When discourse is torn from reality . . . words grow sickly, lose semantic depth and flexibility, the capacity to expand and renew their meaning in new living contexts—they essentially die as discourse" ("Discourse" 353-54). Krupat, nonetheless, concludes that Bakhtin creates a "discursive type" ("Silko" 58) relevant only to "Western forms" ("Silko" 58-59) and leading to the "projection of a particular image of human community" ("Silko" 59). In actuality, Bakhtin's study of the link among language, ideology, and subjectivity is *not* localized to either (vague) notions of "Western form" or particular literary periods. It examines the interaction of diverse voices—including actual and even projected—within their different codes of meaning. Not contained to a particular image, form, or type, this dialogism, instead, remains, by definition, dynamic, *always* oriented toward other utterances.

Moreover, most postcolonial theoreticians do not share Krupat's relativization of Bakhtin. Pointing to Bakhtin's "politics of textuality," Gayatri Spivak acknowledges the significance of his "implicit dialectical hinging of subject and language in/of ideology" (121). Bhabha also draws attention to Bakhtin's ability to expose "the transformation of social discourse while displacing the originating subject and the causal and continuist process of discourse" (*Location* 188).

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FORUM

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- (2) specific questions informed or elucidated by such source material;
- (3) the work of European academics, activists, amateurs, artists, authors (and others) relating to the cultures, histories, presents, and futures, arts, languages and literatures, and the mystique of the indigenous peoples of North America or of North American Indians;
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(Fax +49-69-7982 3390).

NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Thomas K. Dean and George Cornell seek proposals for essays for an edited collection on Native American literature and the environment. A variety of approaches is encouraged, though the editors will be looking especially for essays that are grounded in the realities of Native American life, history, and cultures in conjunction with literary expressions of relationships with the natural world. Three university presses have expressed interest in this project. Please send proposals and vitae **by 1 November 1996** to:

Thomas Dean
Department of American Thought and Language
Ernst Bessey Hall
Michigan State University
East Lansing MI 48824-1033
e-mail DEANTH@PILOT.MSU.EDU

or

George Cornell, Director
Native American Institute
Owen Graduate Center
Michigan State University
East Lansing MI 48824
e-mail: 22607GLC@MSU.EDU.

ANTHOLOGY OF RADICAL WRITING

An anthology of Native American writing, edited by Diane Glancy and Mark Nowak, seeks submissions of hybrid and hyphenated radical writing (including poetry, poetics, and theory and criticism) that resists

established methodologies of defining indigenous aesthetics. Open works exploring bilingual texts, re-interpretation of traditional tales, and critiques of the Western tradition in anthropology and the social sciences are especially encouraged. Submit writings, a brief bio, and SASE by **31 December 1996** to:

Prof. Mark Nowak
College of St. Catherine-Minneapolis
601 25th Avenue South
Minneapolis MN 55454.

CONFERENCE ON NATIVE AMERICAN LITERATURE, EUGENE OR, 15-17 MAY 1997

Entitled "Ethnicity and the Problem of Multicultural Identity: 'Where Do You Come From, Where Do You Go?'" the conference will be held at the University of Oregon in Eugene, Oregon. Keynote speakers are Leslie Marmon Silko, N. Scott Momaday, and Arnold Krupat.

Although the focus of the conference is on literature, papers from all disciplines are encouraged. Reading time should be 15 to 20 minutes.

Abstracts, not to exceed two pages (typed, double-spaced), may be mailed to:

Call for Papers
Oregon Humanities Center
5211 University of Oregon
Eugene OR 97403-5211

All submissions must be accompanied by a cover letter providing name, institution, address, phone and fax numbers, e-mail address (if available) and title of presentation. Work must be original (i.e., not previously published or presented).

DEADLINE for abstracts: Postmarked 15 January 1997.

NOTIFICATION: by 28 February 1997.

For more detailed information on the conference, see our web page at [HTTP://DARKWING.UOREGON.EDU/~SLARSON](http://DARKWING.UOREGON.EDU/~SLARSON). Questions? Contact S. Larson at (541) 346-1311 or SLARSON@OREGON.UOREGON.EDU.

GENEALOGIES, MISCEGENATIONS, MISSED GENERATIONS

Call for submissions: travelling exhibition and illustrated critical anthology about racial and sexual indeterminacy, Fall 1999. Send slides, abstracts, resumé or c.v. and SASE to

Erin Valentino
Dept. of Art and Art History
University of Connecticut
875 Coventry Road U-99
Storrs CT 06269;

tel. 860-486-3930; fax 860-486-3869;
e-mail EVALENTINO@FINEARTS.SFA.UCONN.EDU

REVIEWS

The Feathered Heart. Mark Turcotte. Chicago: Abrazo, 1994. \$7.95 paper, ISBN 1-877636-12-6. 61 pages.

*the endless others
guide my days
medicine the scars
that fill my throat
give me voice and give me voice
chant and chant
within my feathered heart.*

In his new book of poems, Mark Turcotte renders his own life experiences against the background of ancestral drumbeats. His images are earth-toned, resonant with primal metaphors: wind, fire and water. The pacing is rhythmic, graceful; these poems are meant to be read aloud, perhaps even sung. Mark's word images are beautifully complemented by the artwork of his wife, Kathleen Presnell, who illustrated the book.

He begins with a poem about his own conception by an Irish-American mother and Ojibway father. In the poems that follow are glimpses of his childhood on the reservation. He refers to himself as a "little boy" galloping his wind horse through tall grasses. In "Flies Buzzing" he dances "among the long jangle legs / of the men down /

beside the whispering moccasin women" where he "danced away from the fist . . . toward the rhythm of life." "True Sign" is an affirmation of ancient wisdom in the face of forced teachings of Christianity. Other poems deal with the death of his father, his abusive stepfather, disillusionment with writing, perhaps despondency.

Then an inspiration appears in the form of his future wife, bringing a sense of renewal. To Mark she is ". . . the glint at the tip of a feather on the wing of an angel . . . this wind / this you / . . . lifts the curtains in my heart one by one." "Wedding," which he read at the ceremony, begins like this: "Our god has slept and dreamed us here." The next poem, "Amber on Opal," comes full circle, suggesting the conception of his own son, Ezra. He finishes the chronology with "Winter" and "Foreign Shore," in which he envisions his own old age and death.

Mark's use of words is spare, but precise. Each one counts. His style at first appears completely free-form, but a closer reading reveals subtle transformations and repetitions, folding and unfolding from verse to verse. Images repeat, in slightly different form, never redundant. He suggests rather than implores, his lines more evocative than descriptive. His "sentences" are often incomplete, suggestive like a gesture or a rough sketch, letting the reader finish the picture.

In one poem, Mark remembers "dancing to the heartfelt savage rhythm of the native." "Native" he is, but naive he's not. His poems have an edge, an urban sophistication unexpected in a book with a "Native American" theme. He mentions Patti Smith in his acknowledgments, and a perceptive reader may detect a Hank Williams twang here and there. Several of his strongest poems were written in response to the urban experience. The city is profane, alien. In "Songs for the Endless Others" the poet roams at night, smoking Luckies, searching for signs of the spirits in the electric chill of the streets. Their murmuring is sometimes indistinguishable from the "low rumble of the city." "Motherdrum" is a haunting litany of urban intrusion: "sirens kill the night / the city chases away spirits from my hair / dreams from my reach / hope from my eyes." A spiritual cleansing of the city is envisioned in "Brother River Dreams" where he hears the ghostly laughter of the rice gathering peoples, the ancestors, in the flood-washed alleys of Chicago.

Although he honors his ancestors, there are no expressions of nostalgia for a romanticized past. He doesn't speak as a "Native American" with a capital "N," but as a very talented and intelligent poet who happens to be half Ojibway. Refreshingly, he isn't engaged in a "search for roots" or seeking redress for grievances. Whatever indignities he may have suffered as a native in America, he doesn't solicit our sympathy or allow cynicism to corrupt the elegance of his

form. He understands that an angry tone dilutes and undermines poetic content. Injustice is one of his themes, but Mark's agenda is much broader. We care about these issues because *he* cares, not because of implied guilt.

In another time, in other circumstances, this poet would be thought of as a seer, the wise one, the orator giving form and meaning to tribal life. But this is not a book just for the Native American audience. Although he uses ritualistic icons, the feather, the drum, the pipe, his themes are universal. He evokes the native within each of us, the part that still "sings at the scent sight" of the earth, that still searches for a true sign.

Jim Redd

CONTRIBUTORS

Julie Barak teaches at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, where she recently completed her Ph.D. in English. Her dissertation examines the uses of laughter, irony and the grotesque in contemporary women's fiction, expanding the concept of carnival as a tool for feminist writers and readers. She has an article on Julia Alvarez forthcoming in *MELUS*.

Blanca Chester is a Ph.D. candidate in the Programme of Comparative Literature at the University of British Columbia. Her field of study is North American Indian literatures, and she has worked extensively doing ethnographic transcription and translation for the books *Write It On Your Heart* and *Nature Power*. Her previous publications include articles on the form and context of Native narratives and on issues surrounding cross-cultural constructions of identity. The title of her forthcoming thesis is "Narrativity and Orality in the Native American Novel: Genres of Representation."

Petra Fachinger received her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of British Columbia in 1993. Her dissertation examines different textual paradigms of counter-hegemonic practice in contemporary autobiographical and fictional narratives written by immigrants in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Germany. She currently teaches as a Sessional Lecturer in the Department of English at UBC.

Andrea M. Penner, who completed her M.A. at Northern Arizona University in 1993, is currently pursuing her Ph.D. in English at the University of New Mexico. Her interview with Luci Tapahonso, published in this issue of *SAIL*, was awarded the 1996 New Mexico Folklore/Southwest Literature Prize.

Jim Redd is a writer, performance poet, and photographer living in Chicago. He is the author of *The Illinois & Michigan Canal: A Contemporary Perspective in Essays and Photographs* published by

Southern Illinois University Press. His reviews have been published in *The Bloomsbury Review*, *Letter X*, and other publications.

Nicholas Sloboda has recently completed his dissertation at McGill University on contemporary ethnic American literature. He has published on Donald Barthelme's novels and has articles forthcoming on Louis Zukofsky's prose and Barthelme's picture/texts. He also has a forthcoming book of poetry, *frost bite* (Gaff Press).