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THE NOVEL AS PERFORMANCE: COMMUNICATION IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S *TRACKS*

James Flavin

Early in Louise's Erdrich's *Tracks*, Nanapush, one of the novel's two narrators, says, "Nanapush is a name that loses power every time it is written and stored in a government file. That is why I only gave it out once in all those years" (32). The passage reminds us of the customary hesitancy for the Anishinaabeg to utter their own names, believing, in the words of Basil Johnston, that it was "presumptuous and unbecoming, even vain" (*Heritage* 121) to do so. However, this is an awkward moment in the text, for there, in print on the page, is the written word "Nanapush" uttered by Nanapush himself. While readers know that Nanapush himself has not written the word on the page, that its presence there is the responsibility of Erdrich and the printer, this textual moment must give us some pause, for here, text threatens to subvert character. The name Nanapush, written upon the page, robs the character of power. The character/narrator won't give it out, yet the novelist must use the name again and again throughout her story.

Erdrich's narrative dilemma, I believe, is another manifestation of a problem Karl Kroeber notes in his discussion of N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*: "Momaday is caught up in a hazardous contradiction between his theme and the means available to him for its artistic evocation" ("Technology" 19). In other words, the novel form, as Kroeber notes earlier in the same discussion, is "an Anglo-American literary structure that must prohibit any authentically Indian imaginative form" (18).

Kroeber identifies a problem all Native American novelists face as they struggle with story and discourse. Is it possible to convey in written discourse a "realistic" sense of a culture whose traditional discourse is oral? The novel, of course, is not indigenous to the Native American. In form the novel differs considerably from those forms which are native, the song and the oral tale. Kroeber notes elsewhere that "All Indian poems . . . are songs, and most are integral to a 'ceremonial situation,' sometimes religious, sometimes secular, sometimes highly formalized, sometimes quite 'open.' But always the Indian poem exists as utterance. It never exists as text, only as act" ("Indian" 106). Kroeber notes that the essential feature of Native American texts is that they are not texts at all but rather performances involving speakers and listeners in specific cultural situations. The distance between these native forms and the novel seems wide indeed, for the experience of the novel is usually private, seldom oral, and rarely brings together artist and audience.

In the Nanapush sections of *Tracks*, Louise Erdrich focuses on

communication in a variety of forms within the Anishinaabe culture to explore the relationship between communication and whose oral traditions are central to its survival.

To begin, Erdrich sets up the Nanapush sections of the text in such a way that we have a narrator and a listener or narratee. Nanapush addresses his sections of the novel to his grandaughter, Lulu, thus helping to achieve on the simplest level a sense of the novel as "performance." We learn very early that Lulu's mother is Fleur, that Lulu will not refer to her as "mother." Lulu is angry that her mother has abandoned her, and Nanapush hopes that his narrative will bring mother and daughter together again, or if that is not possible, that his narrative will allow Lulu to understand the importance of the culture which she seems destined to abandon for the white culture, a culture imaged in the patent leather shoes she holds dear as a child, a gift from Eli Kashpaw. Nanapush's purpose of maintaining the family unit reminds us of his legendary counterpart (Nanabozho or Nanabush), a spirit/human who grew into manhood in a fragmented family and sought revenge on his father who he believed had been responsible for his mother's death. Throughout the story, Nanapush addresses Lulu directly, attempting to hold her attention: "Grandaughter, you are the child of the invisible, the ones who disappeared . . ." (1); "My girl, listen well" (32). Direct address reminds us that Nanapush's narrative is oral, that he sits before a specific audience to tell his story. Thus, the relationship here between narrator and naratee in the novel mirrors the performance situation of traditional native-American songs and poems to capture in written form a sense of oral performance.

Erdrich manages in the dramatic situation of the novel to create two levels of action. On the one hand, we are drawn into the story of Fleur and her attempts to save the land. On the other, at the level of the frame created by the narrator/narratee relationship, we are engaged in Nanapush's narrative, wondering if it will have the desired effect of reuniting mother and daughter and keeping Lulu within her native culture. As a wise elder, Nanapush offers advice to Lulu, hoping he can prevent her from making a mistake and marrying a Morrissey: "Granddaughter, if you join this clan, I predict the union will not last. Listen to experience and marry wisely. I always did" (182). The comic undercurrent here does not mask the seriousness with which Nanapush views the threat to the family unit.

Discussing the importance of storytelling in Native American cultures, Kenneth Roemer writes, "The stories contain information that the listeners needed or still need to understand themselves, their culture, and their environment" (41-42). Basil Johnston writes that Anishinaabe storytelling attempted to "foster listening and dreaming. Ultimately, the goals were to enhance the capacity to receive and to

instil inner peace. It was through the form of story and song that training was conducted and fostered stage by stage" (*Heritage* 122). He notes also that "to teach the young what was considered meritorious or what was reprehensible in human conduct, the grandparents as storytellers would re-create in story form the state of things in the family or community" (*Heritage* 122).

In fact, Nanapush is re-creating the history of the family unit, hoping that his story will re-unite the family for the sake of the future. The oral context of the novel heightens the tension within the text for it signals the potential for cultural survival or destruction. The older Nanapush, speaking to the child Lulu, must make her understand truths that might seem on one level too deep for a child to understand, for Lulu must see beyond the fact that her mother has abandoned her and has separated from Eli Kashpaw. Late in the novel, Nanapush is explicit about his motives for having told the story of the loss of the Pillager land:

> And so, with the three of you [Lulu, Fleur Pillager, Eli Kashpaw] standing there I told the story. I have seen each one of you since then, in your separate lives, never together, never the way it should be. If you wanted to make an old man's last days happy, Lulu, you would convince your mother and your father to visit me. I'd bring old times back, force them to reckon, make them look into one another's eyes again. I'd work a medicine. But you, heartless one, won't even call Fleur mother or take off your pointy shoes, walk through brush, and visit her. Maybe once I tell you the reason she had to send you away, you will start acting like a daughter should. She saved you from worse, as you'll see. Perhaps when you finally understand, you'll borrow my boots and go out there, forgive her, though it's you that needs forgiveness. . . . (210-11)

In a disintegrating family unit both the present and the future are destroyed. Especially destructive is the loss of a child, for the future of tribal survival depends upon the willingness of the child not only to acknowledge her roots but to embrace the responsibility that those roots bring with them. When a child leaves her culture, when he dies or seeks other cultures within which to live, the entire community feels the loss.

The drama within the frame is also evident as Nanapush struggles with the process of telling: "And now I ask your indulgence for I can only repeat what I remember, even to a granddaughter . . ." (105); "I don't know how to tell this next thing that happened . . . " (109). At important moments within his narrative, he reminds Lulu to "listen,"

calling her attention to information he feels is especially important. Narrative self-consciousness is evident also as Nanapush comments upon the structure of his story, a story which deals in large part with how Lulu happened to receive his name when she was not related to him, a detail which Nanapush tries to explain: "There is a story to it the way there is a story to all, never visible while it is happening. Only after, when an old man sits dreaming and talking in his chair, the design springs clear" (34). Reflected in tranquility, stories come together in the mind of Nanapush, one bound to another in an image of a serpent:

> I shouldn't have been caused to live so long, shown so much of death, had to squeeze so many stories in the corners of my brain. They're all attached, and once I start there is no end to telling because they're all hooked from one side to the other, mouth to tail. (46)

In the narrative moment we find story bound to story, life bound to life, past bound to present. The drama of performance exists within the frame as Nanapush tells a story of the past with the hope that it will bring Lulu back to her native culture.

While the dramatic frame of the Nanapush sections shows Erdrich creating an oral context within the novel form, oral traditions are significant in thematic development as well. Nanapush is keenly aware that he lives in a world that has changed:

> I guided the last buffalo hunt. I saw the last bear shot. I trapped the last beaver pelt of more than two years' growth. I spoke aloud the words of the government treaty, and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake. I axed the last birch that was older than I, and I saved the last Pillager. (2)

If experience has made him a wise elder, one characteristic of that wisdom is his understanding that the continued destruction of tribal lands and traditions cannot continue. Thus Nanapush rebels against the government's attempts to buy Indian land and then sell it to logging companies intent on harvesting the trees. Nanapush says:

> I've seen too much go by—unturned grass below my feet, and overhead, the great white cranes flung south forever. I know this. Land is the only thing that lasts life to life. Money burns like tinder, flows off like water. And as for government promises, the wind is steadier. (33)

Here, tradition is equated to preservation. Shared land, the inherited tribal past, is threatened by a system which values land only as a means to immediate riches. As the novel begins, the task of preservation lies

in the hands of only a few, for sickness wipes out all of Nanapush's family and many others, leaving the tribe "unraveled like a coarse rope" (2).

For Nanapush, preserving place is essential, but place is not simply space. Gerald Vizenor says that while the Anishinaabeg did not create written histories "The tribal past lived as an event in visual memories and oratorical gestures" (24). Space, which is a part of that past, exists not merely in a physical sense but in a metaphysical sense as well, an image which links past with present, generation with generation. In Vizenor's history *The People Named the Chippewa* Pezeekee refers to a map as he points out "tribal communities, memories in space" (52). In addition, Vizenor says, "The words the woodland tribes spoke were connected to the place the words were spoken. The poetic images were held, for some tribal families, in song pictures and in the rhythms of visions and dreams in music: timeless and natural patterns of seeing and knowing the energies of the earth" (24-26). Language is then not simply a means of communication through words and gestures but expression that hints at spiritual links between the earth and the Native American. Vizenor also writes that "Tribal words have power in the oral tradition, the sounds express the spiritual energies of woodland lives" (24). Thematically then, the oral tradition helps to define within the novel the importance of the preservation of space and heritage.

Nanapush, however, is not simply a spokesman for one side of an argument. He is an intricately developed character, a combination trickster/medicine man who employs language as a tool for survival. "Nanapush. That's what you'll be called," his father said. "Because it's got to do with trickery and living in the bush" (33). "Nanapush" is the name for the Anishinaabe trickster figure, and in many ways Nanapush remains true to the figure. His home overlooks a crossroads, a location common to the trickster figure in many Indian tales (Babcock 162), and his interest in scatology and in his own sexual potency is reminiscent as well of trickster figures. Vizenor writes:

> [T]he trickster is related to plants and animals and trees; he is a teacher and healer in various personalities who, as numerous stories reveal, explains the values of healing plants, wild rice, maple sugar, basswood, and birch bark to woodland tribal people. More than a magnanimous teacher and transformer, the trickster is capable of violence, deceptions, and cruelties: the realities of human imperfections. The woodland trickster is an existential shaman in the comic mode, not an isolated and sentimental tragic hero in conflict with nature (3-4).

The trickster is a complex figure of considerable power, and the

source/manifestation of that power in Erdrich's trickster Nanapush is found in language.

Nanapush is first and foremost a "talker." "I know what's fact," he says, "and have never been afraid of talking" (4). He speaks both the language of his tribe and the language of the white people. Though Nanapush knows how to read as well as write, talking is central to his existence, for it ties him to the oral traditions of the past while proving to be a tool for survival. For Nanapush, language is the source of his magic, a weapon against evil, and evidence of his own existence.

From the very beginning, Nanapush's curative powers are intrinsically rooted in his voice. As he and Edgar Pukwan carry a half-dead Fleur Pillager home, Nanapush "encourage[s] Fleur with songs" (4). Later, as he sits with Fleur, they do not speak "because the names of their dead anchored their tongues" (6). But when Father Damien, the Catholic priest, visits, Nanapush's tongue is loosened:

> My voice rasped at first when I tried to speak, but then, oiled by strong tea, lard and bread, I was off and talking. Even a sledge won't stop me once I start. Father Damien looked astonished, and then wary, as I began to creak and roll. I gathered speed. I talked both languages in streams that ran alongside each other, over every rock, around every obstacle. The sound of my own voice convinced me I was alive. (7)

Nanapush's voice is a vehicle through which he asserts selfhood. The stream of sound and rhythm grows stronger as Nanapush speaks until at last he recovers the enthusiasm and strength essential to survival.

Talk is also the very tool by which Nanapush saves himself during the year of the sickness:

> During the year of the sickness, when I was the last one left, I saved myself by starting a story. One night I was ready to bring to the other side the doll I now gave Eli. My wife had sewed it together after our daughter died and I held it in my hands when I fainted, lost breath, so that I could hardly keep moving my lips. But I did continue and recovered. I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and traveled on. (46)

Talk is again a means of asserting the physical reality of being, a kind of continued assurance that "I AM" which allows Nanapush to escape the ravages of disease. The point is echoed by Margaret Kashpaw, who when Nanapush worries that he may be past the age of love-making, consoles him by observing, "As long as your voice works, the other will" (129). Nanapush's virility is linked here to the power of his

voice, allowing us to see that "communication" is the binding of individual with individual in an exercise of creative exchange.

Kenneth Lincoln observes that "Native Americans seem to believe that words make things happen" (92), a principle evident in Nanapush's use of language. Nanapush tells us, for example, that when he and Margaret had been taken captive by Boy Lazarre and Clarence Morrissey, "I was a talker and a hunter who used my brains as my weapon" (118). Language, thought, and action are linked in Nanapush's attempts to control his world. We see words cause event in a comic confrontation between Pauline Puyat and Nanapush. Pauline has resolved in her devotion to Christ to relieve her bodily fluids only twice a day. Discovering this, Nanapush tells Pauline a story of a little girl who is rained upon. His sensuous description of the ensuing flood and the effect of water upon the girl finally drives Pauline to an early, unplanned discharge of bodily fluids. While language accomplishes here what Nanapush intends, this is not always the case. Although he talks when he and Margaret are taken prisoner by Lazarre and Morrissey, it is not Nanapush's talk which eventually frees them. As with any other weapon, language can at times prove inadequate, evidence perhaps that Erdrich sees her Nanapush as more flesh than spirit.

While talk for Nanapush is a means of self-preservation, it is also the source of curative powers he directs toward Lulu. When Lulu is quite young her feet are frostbitten because she insists on wearing the black patent leather shoes Eli Kashpaw buys for her. Nanapush works to save Lulu's feet through his special medicine, and again language is central: "Eventually, my songs overcame the painful burning and you were suspended, eyes open, looking into mine. Once I had you I did not dare break the string between us and kept on moving my lips, holding you motionless with talking . . ." (167). He talks through the night until it seems he can talk no more: "I talked on and on until you lost yourself inside the flow of it, until you entered the swell and ebb and did not sink but were sustained" (167). Like a stream, Nanapush's voice supports Lulu in her struggle, and it is the power of the voice which binds Lulu to him, links his will with hers, and allows him eventually to save her feet. These "cure songs," as Nanapush calls them, "throw the sick one into a dream and cause a low dusk to fall across the mind" (167); they combine the elements of song and rhythm, traditional elements in Anishinaabe ritual. Still later, in a ceremony designed to heal Fleur's spirit, Nanapush concocts a protective paste "with exact words said" (188).

Nanapush's cure songs reveal the link that exists between the physical and the metaphysical in the Anishinaabe culture, a link established through the medium of language. Basil Johnston notes that traditionally the Ojibway ritual medicine combined song and drum:

"While he drummed, man chanted, so that his petitions were borne by the echo of the drum and transformed into the language of the spirits who dwelled above and below and beyond" (*Ceremonies* 100). A similar link is established in visionary moments which occur within the novel. When threatened with starvation during the winter months, Eli Kashpaw and Nanapush rely on traditional methods of hunting and trapping for their survival. Working independently, they find nothing. But one day, Eli out alone, Nanapush checks his snares and then lies down:

> In my fist I had a lump of charcoal, with which I blackened my face. I placed my otter bag upon my chest, my rattle near. I began to sing slowly, calling on my helpers, until the words came from my mouth but were not mine, until the rattle started, the song sang itself, and there, in the deep bright drifts, I saw the tracks of Eli's snowshoes clearly. (101)

While the vision seems to come from a source exterior to Nanapush, it allows him to link his will with that of supernatural forces to direct Eli in the pursuit of the moose. Once the moose is killed, Nanapush watches as Eli butchers the carcass, lashes pieces of meat to his body, and begins the journey home:

> Without opening my eyes on the world around me, I took the drum from beneath my bed and beat out footsteps for Eli to hear and follow. Each time he speeded I slowed him. I strengthened the rhythm whenever he faltered beneath the weight he bore. In that way, he returned, and when I could hear the echo of his panting breath, I went outside to help him, still in my song. (104)

The rhythmical cadence of the drum links the will of Nanapush to the spirit world. Here Nanapush becomes a vehicle through which another force functions. This visionary experience links Nanapush with Eli and both of them with the world of the spirit.

Speaking of the language of ceremony, Paula Gunn Allen writes:

> The participants do indeed believe that they can exert control over natural phenomena, but not because they have childishly repeated some syllables. Rather, they assume that all reality is internal in some sense, that the dichotomy of the isolate individual versus the "out there" only appears to exist, and that ceremonial observance can help them transcend this delusion and achieve union with the All Spirit. (68)

Language is a medium which allows Nanapush to bring together the

world of the flesh and the world of the spirit, creating in the process a community of forces devoted to survival. Basil Johnston says that "For the Anishinabe the vision became the theme and quest in his life that attained the character of force; as a force, it could alter the course of individuals, bend the nature of living, enhance the tone of life, and change character" (*Heritage* 119-20).

The song is the medium through which Nanapush links his will, Eli's action, and the spiritual force: "And then the song picked up and stopped him until he understood . . . "(101). Once Eli's mind clears, he tracks his moose to a stand of young saplings. "Now the song gathered. I exerted myself" (102). Nanapush and Eli work together. As Nanapush watches Eli advance on the feeding moose and take aim, he notes that the bullet can be diverted by scrub brush around, "But my song directed it to fly true" (103). Kenneth Lincoln observes that "Dreams relay visions from the spirit world," that "a thought is a spiritual act; a word has the magical power to actualize spirits" (100). Nanapush's words, chanted alone in bed, summon a supernatural force. The vision quest is an ancient tribal custom devoted to human survival in an often harsh world, and when Eli returns Nanapush finally leaves his bed and goes outside to help him, "still in my song" (104).

A scene like this reveals Erdrich working in the novel form in ways that recall the verbal world of her subject. Basil Johnston suggests of the Ojibway:

> Songs were the utterances of the soul. As such, they evoked every theme that moved men's hearts and souls. Songs were poems chanted; they could be praises sung; they could be prayers uplifted to the spirit. Most were of a personal nature composed by an individual on the occasion of a dream, a moving event, a powerful feeling. (*Heritage* 148)

Song is a form of utterance that links human to human, human to spirit, human and spirit to nature, thus resulting in an organic world. Nanapush's "magic" is clearly language-centered.

The source of Nanapush's visionary strength and of his power to cure lies in the fact that he refuses to elevate himself above others, thus remaining true to the communal nature of tribal society. He says:

> [P]ower dies, power goes under and gutters out, ungraspable. It is momentary, quick of flight and liable to deceive. As soon as you rely on the possession it is gone. Forget that it ever existed, and it returns. I never made the mistake of thinking that I owned my own strength, that was my secret. (177)

Nanapush sees himself on one level as a medium through which forces

stronger than himself act upon the world. In order to affect his world through visionary experience, Nanapush must first recognize that the power lies outside himself, that it resides in sources more timeless than his own will. Giving himself over to their control, he becomes a vehicle through which the spiritual and physical worlds are brought into harmony.

Concerned as he is with the survival of tribal traditions, Nanapush distinguishes between oral language and print as modes of communication. Kenneth Lincoln observes that "A common language is essential. Oral traditions unite the tribal people, just as they poeticize the common speech" (92). Lincoln also asserts that "the spoken, sung, and danced language binds the people as the living text of tribal life" (81). This concept is evident in Nanapush, who clearly sees the oral tradition as a bonding force:

> Before the boundaries were set, before the sickness scattered the clans like gambling sticks, an old man never had to live alone and cook for himself, never had to braid his own hair, or listen to his silence. An old man had some relatives, got a chance to pass his name on, especially if the name was an important one like Nanapush. (32)

The passage recalls a tribal world that is social, a world in which relative helps relative, in which the sound of the human voice evokes images of love, care, and a sense of community. Spoken communication is the vehicle through which bonding occurs. Nanapush notes that the past lives on in the present through a shared language:

> We do not have as much to do with our young as we think. They do not come from us. They just appear, as if they broke through a net of vines. Once they live in our lives and speak our language, they slowly become like us. (169)

Shared traditions of language create bonds between parent and child, link past to present and to future. It is the "shared language" which finally makes our children "become like us."

For Nanapush, the oral tradition links human to human, past to present, physical to spiritual. Opposed to this tradition is print, the medium of white culture. One of the pivotal meanings of "tracks" as it is used in the novel relates to words printed on a page. At one point in the novel, Margaret Kashpaw, in a moment of frustration and anger, swipes at the page of a newspaper Nanapush is reading:

> She swiped at the sheets with her hand, grazed the print, but never quite dared to flip it aside. This was not for any fear of me, however. She didn’t want the tracks rubbing off on her skin. She never learned to read, and the mystery

> troubled her. (60)

Printed words, like tracks in the snow, are evidence of a more fundamental presence. Oral language with Nanapush is vital, fluid, an agent that binds. But letters—words on a page which are sent to readers miles or worlds away—create no bond between speaker and audience. Discussing the system of post, Nanapush says:

> [It] was still a new and different thing to Indians, and I was marked out by the Agent to receive words in envelopes. They were addressed to Mr. Nanapush, and I saved every one I got. I had a skin of them tied and stowed beneath my bed. (97)

The letters communicate the government attempts to take the allotment land belonging to Nanapush. Thus, their content represents an attempt to destroy tribal traditions even further. In this instance written communication is clearly threatening to the traditions Nanapush attempts to preserve. Tied in the skin stowed beneath Nanapush's bed, the letters are held in secret storage like the sacred objects in the medicine bag of the Anishinaabe medicine man. While the letters themselves threaten to destroy Nanapush's culture, the words, separated from the white culture's context and form, are sacred agents to the talking Trickster.

Printed language, Nanapush suggests later, is potentially dangerous to the tribal culture:

> . . . once the bureaucrats sink their barbed pens into the lives of Indians, the paper starts flying, a blizzard of legal forms, a waste of ink by the gallon, a correspondence to which there is no end or reason. That's when I began to see what we were becoming, and the years have borne me out: a tribe of file cabinets and triplicates, a tribe of single-spaced documents, directives, policy. A tribe of pressed trees. A tribe of chicken-scratch that can be scattered by a wind, diminished to ashes by one struck match. (225)

The paper trail that has replaced the oral tradition of Nanapush threatens the existence of Nanapush's culture, for Indian lore, religion, and custom have been passed on traditionally through talk, talk linking human to human, flesh to spirit. Removed from tribal traditions, his tribe, Nanapush fears, may become as paper to trees, weak, neatly filed, easily burned and destroyed.

In *Tracks* Louise Erdrich focuses on language, on oral traditions and their importance to tribal culture. She does this by creating a novel which utilizes a framed tale and takes as part of its subject the nature of language in the Anishinaabe culture. In an important sense, language

may be seen as the subject of the Nanapush sections, for his narrative reveals the power of the spoken word in the tribal world. With Nanapush, language re-forms his world in ways that encourage, if not guarantee, survival. The final image of unity within the novel occurs at the end with the return of Lulu from the boarding school. Nanapush and Margaret "gave against your rush like creaking oaks, held on, braced ourselves in the fierce dry wind" (226). While Nanapush's narrative has not brought mother and daughter together as he had hoped, it has brought Lulu back to a world she once seemed intent on abandoning, evidence of the power—and perhaps of the limitations—of oral communication in a world that comes to depend upon a system of post to bring people together.

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TRANSPERSONAL SELFHOOD: THE BOUNDARIES OF IDENTITY IN LOUISE ERDRICH'S *LOVE MEDICINE*

Jeanne Smith

Louise Erdrich has commented that "one of the characteristics of being a mixed-blood is searching. You look back and say, 'Who am I from?'"[1] In *Love Medicine* Erdrich finds a way of answering that question, and offers a path towards identity for her readers as well. *Love Medicine* delineates a selfhood both figuratively and literally transpersonal. Characters flow out of their bodies and open themselves up to engulf the world. Even death does not contain them. In a vision of expansive, unboundaried self reminiscent of Whitman, Erdrich suggests a sense of identity that can only be based on a capacity to merge. While Erdrich shares a universalist perspective with writers like Whitman, however, she firmly grounds her characters' identities in their Chippewa heritage.

In *Love Medicine*, characters build identity on transpersonal connections to community, to landscape, and to myth. Like many contemporary Native American novelists, Erdrich uses a "homing" plot, which emphasizes family, community and culture, rather than the classic American "leaving" plot, which emphasizes individual freedom (Bevis 618). This homing structure supports a transpersonal view of identity, which "includes a society, a past, and a place. To be separated from transpersonal time and space is to lose identity" (Bevis 585). Erdrich suggests that contemporary Native American writers emphasize this recovery of home and culture because "in the light of enormous loss, they must tell the stories of contemporary survivors, while protecting and celebrating the cores of cultures left in the wake of the catastrophe" ("Where I Ought to Be" 23).

While the reservation landscape, its community, and Chippewa myth all inform Erdrich's transpersonal vision in *Love Medicine*, the idea of a transpersonal selfhood transcends cultural boundaries; the human need for reference and connection is also expressed by American Romantic writers. Whitman, seeking in "Song of Myself" to create a distinctly American identity, also bases this identity on transpersonal connections: "Absorbing all to myself" (*Leaves of Grass* l. 234), incarnating "a kosmos" (l. 497), and flying "those flights of a fluid and swallowing soul" (l. 800). In "Democratic Vistas" Whitman recognizes the importance of culturally grounded myths to an American identity, declaring that genuine American literature must be "vitalized by national, original archetypes" (*Works* 242) and "fresh local courage" (245).

As a celebration of cultural survival and self-definition, *Love Medicine* answers Whitman's call for "fresh local courage." The novel also fulfills James Ruppert's demand that the best contemporary Native

American literature bring "spirit into modern identity, community into society, and myth into modern imagination" (210). Through their transpersonal connections to each other, to the landscape, and to myth, Erdrich's characters offer a compelling contemporary vision of the sources of identity.

In *Love Medicine*, Erdrich, like Whitman, translates the concept of a fluid, transpersonal identity in concretely physical terms: bodies become boundaries, outer layers which limit and define individuals. Erdrich suggests that from the moment of conception, our "personal geography" defines us:

> In our own beginnings, we are formed out of the body's interior landscape. For a short while, our mothers' bodies are the boundaries and personal geography which are all that we know of the world. Once we emerge we have no natural limit, no assurance . . . for technology allows us to reach even beyond the layers of air that blanket earth. We can escape gravity itself, and every semblance of geography, by moving into sheer space, and yet we cannot abandon our need for reference, identity, or our pull to landscapes that mirror our most intense feelings. ("Where I Ought to Be" 24)

Erdrich's language suggests the real danger that a lack of reference presents in our modern world: individuals cut off from transpersonal connections lose control over their own boundaries, jeopardizing even physical existence.

Love Medicine opens with just such a case. As June Kashpaw waits for a bus that will take her home, she flirts with a stranger in an oil boomtown bar and decides to put off her trip: "The bus ticket would stay good, maybe forever. They weren't expecting her up home on the reservation" (3). June's ties to home are tenuous at best; the only personal connection she mentions is Gordie, her divorced husband. June's alienation from her home parallels a striking disjunction from her own body. Late in the evening, after she has missed her bus, June begins to feel fragile: "Walking toward the ladies room she was afraid to bump against anything because her skin felt hard and brittle, and she knew it was possible, in this condition, to fall apart at the slightest touch" (4). She thinks of Andy at the bar peeling back the shell of a hard-boiled egg, and her skin itches under her own pink knit "shell" (4). When Andy finally passes out on top of her in the truck, she again "felt herself getting frail. . . . She knew that if she lay there any longer she would crack wide open" (5).

June's sense of alienation and isolation translates into physical fragility; severed from her home, she can no longer hold her body

together. Attempting finally to regain physical control, June extricates herself from the truck and, pulling "her shell down" (5), begins to walk home. She does not make it home alive. "June grew up on the plains. . . . She'd have known a storm was coming," her niece Albertine muses later; "she'd have known by the heaviness in the air, the smell in the clouds. She'd have gotten that animal sinking in her bones" (9). But June misreads the coming snowstorm for a mild wind; her estrangement from her culture finally kills her.[2]

In the chapter titled "A Bridge," fifteen-year-old Albertine also feels physically distorted at a crucial moment of self-imposed separation from the community, when she runs away from home. Truly alone in a strange place for the first time, Albertine loses touch with her physical and psychological relation to the world:

> She let her eyes close. Behind her eyelids dim shapes billowed outward. Her body seemed to shrink and contract as in childish fever dreams when she lost all sense of the actual proportion of things and knew herself as bitterly small. She had come here for some reason, but couldn't remember what that was. (132)

Surrounded by strangers and cut off from any transpersonal identity, Albertine loses a sense of herself and feels utterly directionless. Her impulse on the bus to Fargo is to connect with the strangers by a physical exchange of breath with them: "Albertine gulped the rank, enclosed, passenger breath as though she could encompass the strangeness of so many other people by exchanging air with them, by replacing her own scent with theirs" (130). Albertine's impulse to exchange breath with a crowd of strangers suggests an implicit need to establish a physical connection in this alien environment.

On the cold street in Fargo she follows a man partly because he looks Indian, even Chippewa, and indeed "he turned out to be from a family she knew. A crazy Lamartine boy. Henry" (135). Henry Lamartine Junior has just returned from the Vietnam War and carries "enough shrapnel deep inside of him, still working its way out, to set off the metal detector in the airport" (134). The war has altered Henry's physical as well as psychological make-up. The sexual encounter between these two desperate, solitary Chippewas in a cheap hotel room forms a momentary connection. Yet their encounter, like Henry's bar trick of balancing steak knives across water glasses, is one of "precarious, linked edges . . . a bridge of knives suspended in air" (135).

At this point in their lives, transpersonal connection is impossible for Henry and Albertine; neither has the strength to merge with the other, or exchange air, as each tries to preserve the frail outline of the self. After their lovemaking "she got as far away from him as possible.

It was, to Henry, as if she had crossed a deep river and disappeared. He lay next to her, divided from her, just outside and with no way to follow" (141). While their "precarious, linked edges" connect them. the preservation of those edges also prevents the merging necessary to real strengthening of self.

Lipsha Morrissey also experiences a distortion of his physical boundaries when threatened with the loss of his adopted grandmother, Marie Kashpaw. When Marie collapses Lipsha suddenly loses his own bearings: "She had been over me, like a sheer overhang of rock dividing Lipsha Morrissey from outer space. And now she went underneath, . . . sending half the lake splashing up to the clouds. Where there was nothing" (209). Lipsha defines his relation to Marie in terms of physical space. She forms a shelter for him, and when she fails, his own boundaries disappear. Lipsha's terrifying loss of reference recalls Erdrich's description of the personal geography of birth, suggesting both the nature of his dependence on Marie and his own need to establish identity.

However, if alienation from oneself and others causes loss of control over one's physical boundaries, the very possibility of dissolving those boundaries can also be an extremely powerful positive force. Just as isolation induces physical distortion and collapse, connection and reunion allow a healing physical merging with others and with the external world. Identity, Erdrich suggests, depends not on one's ability to isolate the self, but rather on a capacity to surpass physical boundaries and join in communion with others. June's ability to "drift out of her clothes and skin with no help from anyone" enables her to survive her encounter with Andy (4). And when she finally heads home, this "pure and naked part of her" (6) can do what she had never been capable of alive: "The heavy winds couldn't blow her off course. . . . June walked over [the snow] like water and came home" (6).

Although June's fluid inner body is a strength of sorts, its disjunction from her outer shell ultimately prevents her from creating a unified self and returning home in one piece. Albertine more successfully integrates an ability to merge with a strong physical awareness, and in so doing she reestablishes her connections to home, place and myth. On the night of her homecoming after June's death, Albertine achieves a mystical physical communion with the landscape:

> Northern lights. Something in the cold, wet atmosphere brought them out. I grabbed Lipsha's arm. We floated into the field and sank down. . . . Everything seemed to be one piece. The air, our faces, all cool, moist, and dark, and the ghostly sky . . . At times the whole sky was ringed in shooting points . . . pulsing, fading, rythmical as breathing . . . as if the sky were a pattern of nerves and our thought

> and memories traveled across it . . . one gigantic memory for us all. (34)

Albertine's vision of a vast, universal brain of which her own face forms a part, expresses what Bevis calls "transpersonal time and space" (585). Everything connects and interrelates in living, breathing patterns and rhythms which Albertine inhabits both physically and mentally.

Albertine's description echoes Whitman's "Song of Myself": "This the far-off depth and height reflecting my own face, / This the thoughtful merge of myself, and the outlet again" (*Leaves of Grass*, ll. 380-81); and recollects Emerson's transcendentalist vision in "Nature":

> Standing on the bare ground,–my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space,–all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent eye-ball: I am nothing: I see all; the currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part and particle of God. (10)[3]

While echoes of Whitman and Emerson suggest Erdrich's affinity to American Romantic writers, an even more striking parallel to Albertine's vision is Chippewa writer Edward Benton-Banai's description of a visionary experience:

> As he rested in camp that night, Waynaboozhoo[4] looked up into the sky and was overwhelmed at the beauty of the ah-nung-ug (stars). They seemed to stretch away forever into the Ish-pi-ming (Universe). He became lost in the vast expanse of the stars. . . . Waynaboozhoo sensed a pulse, a rhythm in the Universe of stars. He felt his own o-day (heart) beating within himself. The beat of his heart and the beat of the Universe were the same. Waynaboozhoo gazed into the stars with joy. He drifted off to sleep listening to his heart and comforted by the feeling of oneness with the rhythm of the Universe. (56-57)

The parallel imagery in Albertine's and Waynaboozhoo's visions suggests their distinctively Chippewa outlook. While Emerson's and Whitman's visions emphasize his personal participation in the Universal Being, Benton-Banai's description, like Erdrich's, stresses the tremendous comfort the sense of a universally shared pulse can bring.

Albertine's merging experience works directly to counteract the sense of alienation and disconnectedness with which the chapter (and the novel) begins. She hears of June's funeral after the fact because, as her mother writes, "we knew you probably couldn't get away from your studies . . . so we never bothered to call and disturb you." Albertine feels "buried, too" at this news, as if, "far from home, living in a white woman's basement," she too is dead to her family (7). She

drives home two months later to witness violent fighting between her cousin, King, and his wife and father. With the links holding her family together apparently disintegrating, Albertine's vision of the sky as "one gigantic memory for us al" and everything "all of a piece" is powerfully healing (34).

Albertine's vision is so powerful because it reestablishes her sense of connection to her home landscape, to her family (she holds Lipsha's arm and they float together), and importantly, to Chippewa myth. Albertine sees the northern lights and imagines the sky as "a dance hall. And all the world's wandering souls were dancing there. I though of June. She would be dancing if there was a dance hall in space" (34-35). In Chippewa myth the joyful dancing of the dead in the afterworld creates the northern lights (Vecsey 64).[5] As Paula Gunn Allen explains, myth is crucial in reestablishing one's sense of connection after a disjunction from one's culture and community. Myth, she says, universally expresses "the human's need for coherence and unity" (4), and is therefore vital to identity: "The mythic heals, it makes us whole. For in relating our separate experiences to one another, in weaving them into coherence and therefore significance, a sense of wholeness arises . . . which . . . constitutes direct and immediate comprehension of ourselves and the universe of which we are integral parts" (11).[6] Albertine's vision places June within a community, in a "dance hall in space," and reestablishes her own links to her culture. By reinforcing her transpersonal and mythic connections to her family, her community, and the natural universe, Albertine's physical merging into the cool, dark night intensifies her own sense of identity.[7]

If Albertine confirms the positive force of a single merging experience, Lulu Lamartine is Erdrich's vision of a wholly transpersonal state of being. The vibrant, strongly self-aware Lulu is the best illustration that dissolving physical boundaries can strengthen identity. Lulu possesses an exceptional ability to merge with and absorb her environment. "I was in love with the whole world and all that lived in its rainy arms," she says (216). Totally receptive to the natural world, Lulu physically and spiritually opens herself to it all: "I'd open my mouth wide, my ears wide, my heart, and I'd let everything inside" (216). Even the men she is famous for chasing are largely just a part of her ability to absorb beauty: "There were times I let them in just for being part of the world" (217).

Lulu's loving, all-inclusive attitude towards life questions even the possibility of imposing boundaries. "All through my life I never did believe in human measurement," she explains, "Numbers, time, inches, feet. All are just ploys for cutting nature down to size. I know the grand scheme of the world is beyond our brains to fathom, so I don't try, just let it in" (221). Lulu's outlook fuses geography and psycholo-

gy, land politics and identity, an important connection for Erdrich. By linking the boundaries of identity with shrinking reservation borders, Erdrich affirms the inseparability of identity from land, and equates western encroachment on Native American lands with an equally devastating threat to self-concept.[8] "The Chippewas had started off way on the other side of the five great lakes. . . . We were shoved out on this lonesome knob of prairie," Lulu says (222). Lulu's refusal "to move one foot farther west" (222), her resolve "to stay where I was" (222) confirms the strength of firmly grounded, unbounded identity.

When Lulu's house burns down after she refuses to move off her own land to make room for a factory, she expresses her grief through an intense desire to get past the physical, sensual constraints of her body. She asks,

> How come we've got these bodies? They are frail supports for what we feel. There are times I get so hemmed in by my arms and legs I look forward to getting past them. As though death will set me free like a traveling cloud . . . I'll be out there as a piece of the endless body of the world feeling pleasures so much larger than skin and bones and blood. (226)

Lulu's projection of herself as a piece of an endless body arises, like Albertine's vision, from an extremely painful moment born of discord within the community. She reads the tribe's complicity in the house fire. "My people," she bitterly calls them, "the tribal fire trucks were all broken down at the time. That was their plan" (226). Like Albertine's, Lulu's private anguish eases as she envisions herself in the context of the much larger harmony in the universe.

It is not surprising that human relationships, which Erdrich describes as necessarily involving "an exchange, a transformation, a power shared" (George 243), are among the most powerful sources of identity in the novel. Individuals are strongest when they are together. Erdrich's description of "Lulu's boys" gives one of her most fully realized models of communion:

> Their gangling legs, encased alike in faded denim, shifted as if a ripple went through them collectively. . . . Clearly they were of one soul. Handsome, rangy, wildly various, they were bound in total loyalty, not by oath but by the simple, unquestioning belongingness of part of one organism. (85)

Moving in synchronized harmony, they are one being, yet they still preserve their wildly various individualities. The boys present an ideal, yet somehow believable, picture of a potentially competitive and

explosive system of interrelationships unified and strengthened by a sense of "unquestioning belongingness."

For Erdrich sexual exchange, a temporary suspension of physical boundaries, can have a powerful effect on identity. June's sense that she will "crack wide open" under Andy (6), and Henry and Albertine's feelings of "harsh fear" and "numbing terror" (142) during their encounter underscore the danger sex poses to an already frail identity. In contrast, Beverly Lamartine's first encounter with Lulu after her husband's death illustrates the potentially positive power of sex. For their healing union to take place, the boundaries between bodies become indistinguishable: "The grief of loss for the beloved made their tiny flames of life so sad and precious it hardly mattered who was what" (87). Their encounter years later similarly involves surpassing the body, as they fall through time and space together: "His mouth fell on hers and kept traveling, through the walls and ceilings, down the levels, through the broad, warm reaches of the years" (86). Revealing her merging ability, Lulu explains that "I'd slip my body to earth, like a heavy sack, and for a few moments I would blend in with all that forced my heart" (217). The blending signals an irrevocable transformation and, as Erdrich says, "a power shared" (George 243): once two people merge they are never entirely separate, and each is stronger for their union.

Nector's metamorphosis after his buttery afternoon with Lulu shows how thoroughly sexual exchange can transform a person. "I felt loose limbed and strong in the dark breeze, roaring home . . . my veins full of warm, sweet water." In fact, every time he visits Lulu

> it was as though I left my body at the still wheel of the pickup and inhabited another more youthful one. . . . I was full of sinkholes, shot with rapids. . . . I was a flood that strained bridges. . . . She could run with me, unfolding in sheets and in snaky waves. I could twist llke a rope. I could disappear beneath the surface. (100)

Transformation, a primary characteristic of the mythical Nanabush, Chippewa trickster figure, empowers because it signifies ultimate control of one's own physical boundaries.[9] For Nector, however, the power of sexual communion is ultimately destructive: his involvement in two opposed relationships actually destroys his identity altogether. Because Nector's unions with Lulu and Marie both demand his complete physical and spiritual involvement, his identity finally collapses. He fell "right through the hole in his life," as Lipsha says (190).

Love Medicine ends with a culmination of Erdrich's concern with identity. In "Crossing the Water" Lipsha Morrissey finally finds his

identity through transpersonal connections, by reconnecting with both his father and mother and with Chippewa myth. Lulu decides to reveal Lipsha's parentage to him because, as she tells him, "You never knew who you were" (245). At the news that June Kashpaw and Gerry Nanapush are his parents, Lipsha feels "confusion. It was a bleak sadness sweeping through my brain. . . . More than anything I resented how they all had known" (246). Feeling betrayed not only by his parents but by the community, Lipsha leaves the reservation on a mock-American hero journey to find his identity. By now we know that any attempt at forging an identity cut off from the community is doomed. From the beginning Lipsha seems to sense that leaving home is a mistake. As he later tells Gerry, "I believe that my home is the only place I belong and was never interested to leave it, but circumstances forced my hand" (270). Lipsha explains that he sneaks into Marie's room to steal bus fare, which he feels she has subtly offered him as "a chance to get away from here in my confusion. . . . More than any thing I wanted to say I'd get back as soon as I could, reassure her somehow" (245). Lipsha clearly regards leaving home as temporary and even criminal. Wallowing in a border town, Lipsha loses his bearings: "There was no clear direction to follow, nothing to send me anywhere" (247). Suddenly he understands that to find himself he must find, as Erdrich would say, "who he is from": "I want to meet my dad," he says aloud (247).

At King's apartment in Minneapolis Lipsha finally meets Gerry Nanapush, who draws his son into him with his gaze: "The slow method his eyes took me in by notches gave me reason to believe that he knew whose son he looked at" (260). Lipsha's reunion with Gerry involves June as well.

> I could see how his mind leapt back, making connections, jumping at the intersection points of our lives: his romance with June. . . . Me growing up. And then at last June walking toward home in the Easter snow that, I saw now, had resumed falling softly in this room. (262)

Past and present become one, as the snow which separated both of them from June now links all three. Lipsha describes the encounter as "the father meeting up with the son and the ghost of a woman caught in the dark space between them" (265).

June's sons and her lover play poker for the Firebird bought with her life insurance money. They all have equal claim to it, as they have equal claim to June. "Everyone treated the car with special care . . . as if [it] was wired up to something," Albertine observes earlier (22). The car becomes a symbolic reincarnation of the rather battered but still racy June. "Hell on wheels!" Gerry calls June (268). As he drives

off in her car, Lipsha comments, "I had seen there was nicks and dents in the beautiful finished skin" (266). June is again encased in a shell; the car's nicked, dented, but still "beautiful finished skin" encloses both her son, Lipsha, and Gerry, who is wedged in the trunk. The scene culminates in a rebirth: Lipsha discovers Gerry by his intermittent pounding, and releases him from near suffocation. "He was curled up tight as a baby in its mother's stomach, wedged so thoroughly inside it took a struggle to get him loose" (267). Through the birthing scene this forgotten and unrecognized family momentarily reunites, as June's spirit, embodied in the car, becomes both the vehicle for Gerry's escape and the site of Lipsha's communion with his father.

As they drive on together, June remains a palpable presence in the silent night. When Lipsha asks Gerry if he knew June, the "ghost of a woman caught in the dark space between them" (265) surges up all around: "We were driving the small roads, the less traveled and less well kept. The dark was vast and thick" (268). Amid this darkness, Gerry acknowledges Lipsha as his son, focusing significantly on a physical trait: "You're a Nanapush man. We all have this odd thing with our hearts" (271).[10]

Their reunion is brief, as Lipsha leaves Gerry over the border in Canada, which, like the border into the Chippewa afterworld, Gerry cannot recross without great danger.[11] But that one mystical night in the car, next to his father and encircled by his mother, has been enough to give Lipsha an awareness of his own importance and place in the universe:

> So many things in the world have happened before. But it's like they never did. Every new thing that happens to a person, it's a first. To be a son of a father was like that. In that night I felt expansion, as if the world was branching out in shoots and growing faster than the eye could see. I felt the smallness, how the earth divided into bits and kept dividing. I felt the stars. I felt them roosting on my shoulders with his hand. The moon came up red and warm. We held each other's arms, tight and manly, when we got to the border. (271)

Lipsha's sense that this has "happened before" helps connect him to all others who have felt a similar reunion, enriching his own very personal experience. His simultaneous awareness of the "expansion . . . branching out in shoots" and "the smallness, how the earth divided into bits and kept dividing," places him as an individual point within a vast web of connection. He feels the stars on his shoulders with his father's hands, and the moon comes up as if signalled by their union.

When Lipsha leaves his father at the border, he is not alone. He

rides in June's shell as in a womb, enclosed by her dark spaces: "I cruised for miles and miles in the clear moonlight, slow, feeling the comfortable dark behind me and before" (271). June fills Lipsha's thoughts, and his connection to her also links him with Chippewa culture. In Chippewa myth, souls journeying to the afterworld must cross over

> a rapidly flowing river, spanned by a log-like snake. The person needed to cross over the river on the back of the snake, while the wind blew and the slippery bridge shook. Those who fell into the raging water became toads or fishes, or died forever. (Vecsey 64)

When Lipsha comes to "the bridge over the boundary river" (271), he stops the car as if hovering himself between life and death. Looking down into the "dark, thick, twisting river," Lipsha comes to terms with June's deserting him. "I tell you, there was good in what she did for me. . . . The son that she acknowedged suffered more than Lipsha Morrissey did" (271-2). He considers the old Chippewa legends of "an ancient ocean, miles deep, that once had covered the Dakotas and solved all our problems" (272), as if wishing to blot out land boundaries as well as his own personal memories. But Lipsha resists this temptation to obliteration, and accepts the realities of the present: "The truth is we live on dry land. I got inside. The morning was clear. A good road led on. So there was nothing to do bur cross the water, and bring her home" (272). By crossing the water in June's car, Lipsha brings her back to life, and also enacts his own rebirth, finally in control of his "personal geography" and coming to life as June's son.

Erdrich closes *Love Medicine* with the paradoxical idea that identity depends on blurring the boundaries between self and other. Isolated and self-contained, the individual has no meaning. Her characters gain power and force only in surpassing personal boundaries, allowing themselves to blend with what is outside. Erdrich suggests that when they transform, and thus define themselves through their relationships to others and to the world, they begin to understand the individual's place in, as Lipsha puts it, the "expansion . . . [and] the smallness" (271) of the world.

NOTES

[1]In an interview with Joseph Bruchac, Erdrich described her background as "very mixed . . . one that includes German and French and Chippewa" (83).

[2]Albertine's description of the smashed pies later in the chapter reminds us of June: "All the pies . . . smashed. Torn open. Black juice bleeding

through the crusts. Bits of jagged *shells* . . . stuck to the wall" (38, emphasis added). Coming at the end of a description of the family reunion, this symbolic reference to June suggests the reverberating effect one member's alienation and death has on the community.

For analysis that attributes June's frailty to a fragmented gender identity, see Barry and Prescott, 130. I agree with Barry and Prescott, but I think that Erdrich's continued emphasis on home and June's inability to get there suggest that gender fragmentation contributes to a larger sense of June's alienation from all of the rituals and traditions of her home and culture.

[3]While Emerson shares Whitman's enthusiasm for communion with nature and recognizes a "universal soul" at the depth of each individual's experience (27), his transcendentalist perspective does not extend to the interpersonal aspect of transpersonal connection. Rather, his doctrine of self-reliance and non-conformity emphasizes the strength of the individual apart from society.

[4]Waynaboozhoo, whose name is more commonly spelled "Nanabozho" or "Nanabush," is the Chippewa Trickster figure. I will turn to Erdrich's use of the trickster in *Love Medicine* later.

[5]Unlike the heaven of western thought, this afterlife is not exclusionary. Christopher Vecsey explains that "part of the happiness of the afterlife sprang from the fact that practically everyone went there" (64).

[6]Allen observes that Native American views about myth coincide, "in some significant ways, with contemporary psychoanalytical observation" (6). Much of Allen's discussion of myth expresses Jungian ideas; however, she notes the tendency of Jungian theory to see "what Indians say [as] . . . a factor of their overactive subconscious bubbling to the surface in nature-loving, imaginative form," citing in particular Frank Waters' *Pumpkin Seed Point* (Chicago: Sage Books, 1969). Jung's essays consistently refer to "primitive man," suggesting an earlier stage of psychic development and therefore closer ties to the unconscious (see, for example, Jung's discussion "On the Psychology of the Trickster Figure" in Paul Radin's *The Trickster: A Study in American Indian Mythology*).

[7]For a different reading of Erdrich's use of the homing pattern that Bevis delineates, see Louise Flavin, who suggests that Erdrich is skeptical about the possibility of renewal. Flavin cites Albertine as a character for whom "leaving home is the road to fulfillment" (56). My view is that although Albertine does live away from home, her continuing ties to the reservation are essential to her sense of self. The "self-defined individual" (56) Flavin sees in Albertine grounds her identity in transpersonal connections.

[8]While Lulu is the character most reminiscent of Whitman, the connections she perceives between land and identity ironically emphasize an important opposition between Erdrich's and Whitman's perspectives. Native American lands were constantly shrinking in the nineteenth century, as the United States continued to appropriate territory. In the 1855 Preface to *Leaves of Grass*, Whitman says the American bard "incarnates . . . geography" and expands with his country: "When the long Atlantic coast stretches longer and the Pacific coast stretches longer he easily stretches with them north or south" (*Leaves of Grass* 490, 491)

[9]Nanabush, who appears in *Love Medicine* in the magically flexible form of Gerry Nanapush, uses his transformational powers to escape from difficult situations and disguise himself to attack his enemies. Johnston explains that "of all the powers Nanabush possessed, none was more singular than his power of transformation." He could "assume at will, and in an instant, a new form, shape, and existence. Nanabush could be a man, and change to a pebble in the next instant. He could be a puff of wind, a cloud fragment, a flower, a toad" (19-20). For more information on the Chippewa trickster, see Johnston 159-161 and Vecsey 84-100.

[10]Lipsha's other inheritance from his mythical father is, of course, "the touch": "I know the tricks of mind and body inside out without ever having trained for it. because I got the touch. It's a thing you got to be born with. . . . The medicine flows out of me. . . . I run my fingers up the maps of those rivers of veins or I knock very gentle above their hearts or I make a circling motion on their stomachs, and it helps them" (190).

[11]For discussion of the travel between life and the afterworld, see Vecsey 64-65 and Johnston 103-108. Vecsey notes that though travel was difficult, "living and dead Ojibwa persons did not lose touch with one another" (65). I am greatly indebted to Elizabeth Ammons for her valuable insight and assistance throughout the editing and revision process of this paper.

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SHIFTING IDENTITY IN THE WORK OF LOUISE ERDRICH AND MICHAEL DORRIS

Ann Rayson

In the first formal joint-by-line novel by Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris, *The Crown of Columbus* (1991), mixed-blood Navaho protagonist Vivian Twostar defines her marginal status to imply that beneath the surface levity of this novel Erdrich and Dorris celebrate a new cohesion, the confluence of Indian-white heritages and male-female voices. Such authorship presents readers with a unique challenge and a new look at the old and perhaps useless label of "marginality." The significant questions are: What is the meaning of a mixed racial heritage for these authors? How do they deal with shifting racial identities in their various novels? Are they offering us a number of possible resolutions, moving to a new resolution in *The Crown of Columbus* of what it means to be bicultural?

Vivian's speech comes at the beginning of chapter 8:

> I belong to the lost tribe of mixed bloods, that hodge-podge amalgam of hue and cry that defies easy placement. When the DNA of my various ancestors—Irish and Coeur d'Alene and French and Navajo and God knows what else—combined to form me, the result was not some genteel, undecipherable puree that comes from a Cuisinart. You know what they say on the side of the Bisquick box, under instruction for pancakes? Mix with fork. Leave lumps. That was me.
>
> There are advantages to not being this or that. You have a million stories, one for every occasion, and in a way they're all lies and in another way they're all true. When Indians say to me, "What are you?" I know exactly what they're asking, and answer Coeur d'Alene. I don't add, "Between a quarter and a half" because that's information they don't ask for, first off (though it may come later if I screw up and they're looking for reasons why). If one of my Dartmouth colleagues asks me, "Where did you study," I pick the best place, the hardest one to get into, in order to establish that I belong. If a stranger on the street asks me where Violet gets her light brown hair and dark skin, I say the Olde Sodde and let them figure it out.
>
> There are times when I control who I'll be, and times when other people decide. I'm not all anything, but I'm a little bit of a lot. My roots spread in every direction and if I water one set of them more often than others, it's because they need it more. To the College I am a painless affirma-

> tive action, to Roger I'm presentably exotic, to Nash I'm too conventional, to Grandma I'm too Anglo, to Hilda and Racine I'm the romantic American friend. To Violet, at least for now, I'm perfect. No wonder I enjoy her company.
>
> I've read learned anthropological papers written about people like me. We're called marginal, as if we exist anywhere but on the center of the page. Our territory is the place for asides, for explanatory notes, for editorial notation. We're parked on the bleachers looking into the arena, never the main players, but there are bonuses to peripheral vision. Out beyond the normal bounds you at least know where you're not. You escape the claustrophobia of belonging, and what you lack in security you gain by realizing —as those insiders never do—that security is an illusion. We're jealous of innocence, I'll admit that, but as the hooks and eyes that connect one core to the other we have our roles to play. "Caught between two worlds," is the way it's often put in cliched prose, but I'd put it differently. We are the *catch*." (123-124)

The multiple meanings of "catch" suggest what Vivian determines her identity to consist of: the "catch" is something that checks or holds two things in place; a prize, something worth catching, especially a spouse; a concealed difficulty; the germinating of a field crop to such an extent that replanting is unnecessary; and a round for three or more unaccompanied voices written out as one continuous melody with each succeeding singer taking up a part in turn. Thus a mixed-race person as *catch*, holds two sides together; is special, the prize, a good catch (to blend the races?); but is a concealed difficulty (the mixed identity?); and is the final germination. The form of *The Crown of Columbus* consists of monologues by several main characters, which fits the "catch" as a round for several voices, each taking a part in turn. The use of "catch" in *Crown* can encompass all these definitions. Certainly Vivian means "catch" as prize and "catch" as connection. "Cache," as a play on "catch," is a hidden treasure; the crown of Columbus is a catch in a cache, or a cache itself, but Vivian's child, Violet, turns out to be the true cache. The mulatto or mixed breed used to be considered the detritus of both races, the reminder of unsanctioned miscegenation. But now the mix is to be prized, and the mixed blood brings the two cultures together as the hook and eye, the catch, the connection.

"We are the *catch*" is the point of *Crown*, a seeming lark of a novel with a serious attempt to rationalize, accept, and forgive the European discovery of America by Columbus. Vivian has a child, Violet, with Roger Williams, a caricature of the East Coast academic. Violet becomes the point of everything, "a tan-colored baby, light-haired,

mixed by God" (377), Moses in the bulrushes. After the bleak view of fetal alcohol syndrome in Native American life that is revealed so poignantly in *The Broken Cord*, the later novel may offer an antidote. Violet is the "new" American, out of the melting pot, but with a difference. Vivian and Violet are not "some genteel, undecipherable puree that comes from a Cuisinart," but Bisquick that leaves lumps. Through this novel the authors weave Asian martial art philosophies, Native American chants and rituals, and the Christian story of death and resurrection.

When a reviewer of this article asked if Vivian's statement was an articulation of the authors' point of view, Dorris replied in a letter to me that Vivian Twostar

> is not our "mouth piece," but a fictional creation, and speaks entirely for herself. Vivian's views on the subject of her mixed blood heritage have no bearing on characters in *Love Medicine, Yellow Raft*, or anything else we've written. Vivian Twostar—and Roger Williams, for that matter—are characters in their own right. We do not endeavor to use fiction as a smoke screen for advancing our philosophy or our politics and it would be a mistake (and a disservice to the books) to suggest otherwise. (16 April 1991)

Understandably, authors do not want to be pigeonholed. On the other hand, in discussing *Tracks* in a recent interview Erdrich has said,

> I think each of the books is political in its own way. I hope so . . . There's no way to speak about Indian history without it being a political statement . . . you really can't write a book about Native Americans without being political. Getting your teeth fixed is political. There's no way around it. I just don't want to become *polemical*. That's the big difference. (Schumacher 29)

The issue of mixed blood and shifting identity, of being part of more than one culture or ethnicity but not completely of one clear ethnic background, is of concern to Erdrich and Dorris and something they, in the various voices of their characters, have not resolved.

In *The Broken Cord*, Dorris explains how he identifies himself according to the situation he is in. While driving across the country he presents himself as white to get motel rooms and keeps his adopted Indian son, Adam, in the car and out of sight after one bitter experience: standing under a "Vacancy" sign a motel manager had excused himself with "Sorry, Chief. We're full up" (49) when Dorris had asked for lodging. Dorris explains, "Out of context, most strangers didn't place me as Indian, but with Adam, for Adam, it was going to be a

different story. We were in a part of the country with many reservations, and that's where unapologetic discrimination was usually the worst" (49). Once he arrives at the reservation, Dorris brings out his Indian side and is careful not to do anything stupid:

> A kind of protocol develops when you visit a number of reservations where you don't expect to know anyone. If you appear as unambiguously "Indian," it's easier—depending on how you're dressed: the question then becomes who are you with, why are you here? If you're a "could-be," a mixed blood, more validation is called for: . . . You're the petitioner, you're the one on trial, and there's no rushing the process. (53)

Dorris's flexibility enables him to move in and out of conflicting situations, yet he will never be either a Roger Williams or a Gerry Nanapush, neither a New England blueblood nor a grassroots Native American superhero.

At other times his outward lack of a clear identity makes him vulnerable. When Adam is hospitalized, he corrects the admitting office nurse, who thinks Adam is Vietnamese, saying "We're Indian.

> They surveyed my appearance with curiosity. It was an expression I recognized, a reaction, familiar to most people of mixed-blood ancestry, that said, "You don't *look* like an Indian." No matter how often it happened, no matter how frequently I was blamed by strangers for not resembling their image of some Hollywood Sitting Bull, I was still defensive and vulnerable.
>
> "I'm part Indian," I explained. From experience I knew they would not leave this topic until they were satisfied. "He's a full-blood. Adopted."
>
> Now they got it, and exchanged a knowing glance. (22)

Marginality is unnerving; rigid categories are difficult to overcome. Translation is required.

In discussing issues of translation and authenticity in American Indian literature, Susan Hegeman defines the "business of translation" as "mediating between two languages and two cultural contexts, to find a way to make one work comprehensible in an entirely different setting. If one did not acknowledge Anglo-American textual conventions to some extent, then there would be no translation—just as there would be no translation if what was produced did not claim to bear some similarity to the translated work" (280). Bearing one culture to another is what Erdrich and Dorris are doing as they "translate" the reservation experience to the canon, what Frederick Douglass, himself half white,

was doing in his slave narrative, translating the experience of slavery for white readers, a political act meant to garner support for abolitionism. It is through his process of translating his experience that he begins to understand it. Only with an outsider's perspective can Douglass understand the meaning of the "sorrow songs": "I did not, when a slave, understand the deep meaning of those rude and apparently incoherent songs. I was myself within the circle; so that I neither saw nor heard as those without might see and hear. They told a tale of woe which was then altogether beyond my feeble comprehension" (57).

Catherine Rainwater, in a reversed view of marginality, insists that "encoded 'undecidability' leads to the marginalization of the reader by the text" (407). For example, in *Love Medicine* Erdrich parallels the Easter passion story with the American Indian Shamanic tradition. The Western reader will decode the resurrection, but not the shamanic code. Because there is no synthesis in these "conflicting religious paradigms" (409), the reader is led "away from synthesis and into a permanent state of irresolution" (409). Many symbols in *Love Medicine*, for example June's beads, "invite the reader to bridge codes which do not interface" (413), forcing the reader, "temporarily disempowered," to "pause 'between worlds' to discover the arbitrary structural principles of both" (422). White readers come to understand Native American life a little bit. Erdrich has translated this culture for them/us while making them/us struggle with cherished versions of reality. For communication to occur, representatives who can articulate both cultures must provide the translation.

Erdrich and Dorris achieve in their work a mingling of the male-female voice and a confluence of white-Indian culture. That their writing has entered the canon and not remained on its margin is a tribute to their ability to translate the Indian side of their experience for the dominant culture. In doing so they celebrate Violet and what she represents, a resolution of the colonial suppression of the native. At the same time, baby Violet represents what is essential in life (just as baby Dot gives meaning to the marginal lives of Celestine, Mary, Karl, and Wallace in *The Beet Queen*). Says Roger of Vivian: "She hungers and thirsts for future justice, and I strive to bring forth from the past what is good. We meet in the present, in this house that holds the treasure. Violet glows at the center" (376). *The Crown of Columbus* espouses an extremely positive view of the confluence of two cultures, the ideal achievement, the new American.

Does this ebullience depend on fashion? Gerald Vizenor has said that "Indian . . . has become a good thing to be this decade [1980s]" (111). White acquaintances of mine now mention or stress their Indian blood, whereas fifty years ago they would not know of it or might repress the knowledge. Dorris and Erdrich now are heralded by the

establishment, which is ill-equipped to accept Native American ritual performances as American literature, but can grapple with a novel. Will "Indian" continue to be "a good thing to be"? And in what social circles?

One theme in *Love Medicine* is the Chippewa view of white culture. In *Love Medicine* the white is the "other." Chippewa culture is seen from the inside, and forays outside the reservation involve destructive experiences—June's suicide after she is picked up by one too many mud engineers in the boom town of Williston, North Dakota; Henry Lamartine, Jr.'s, character fragmentation and suicide after serving in Vietnam; and Gerry's brushes with law enforcement. In the classic American novel Indian territory is off the map, treacherous wilderness, hostile unmapped terrain; in *Love Medicine* Indian territory, now the reservation, is the place of safety and nurturance.

Lulu's is the voice of protest in the novel, angry at the long history of white interference. "Indian against Indian, that's how the government's money offer made us act" (223). Lulu holds on to cultural values, yet despite her anger about the history of white colonization, she does not discriminate in her choice of men. That her many sons have different fathers does not affect their ethnicity or "Indianness." At the end of the novel, Lipsha explains the basis of identity. While playing poker with King, Lipsha realizes he is a part of this family, "that both of our backgrounds were sprung from the same source," namely June. "Belonging was a matter of deciding to" (255).
Vizenor maintains that you are what you say you are:

> The application of mixedblood geometric scores was not a form of tribal cultural validation. Skin color and blood quantums were not the means the tribe used to determine identities. The Anishinaabeg classified a person Indian if he lived with them and adopted their habits and mode of life, according to David Beaulieu, former chairman of the Department of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota. (13, 107)

Belonging was not racial, but experiential. The percentage of Indian and white blood was not the determining factor; the distinction was cultural.

Dual authorship also complicates questions about sexual voice and identity. How is male-female voice related to ethnic identity? In *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* the important voices are female. In Erdrich's novels both male and female Native American voices have strength, but female characters are dominant. Since Erdrich's writing is textured by Dorris's contributions we cannot make statements about "fiction by ethnic women" as Mary Dearborn does in *Pocahontas's Daughters*, or

classify Erdrich's works in a gender category. Erdrich and Dorris are adamant about their process. In a recent letter to me Dorris says that "we work on most everything together" (15 June 1990), and in an interview they explain their writing method:

> We'll be talking about a character or a scenario and one of us will write a draft: a sentence, a paragraph, a page, a chapter, . . . Then the other person takes it and goes over it with a red pencil. The person who wrote the draft takes it back, tries again, sometimes four or five drafts' worth, until we sit down and read them aloud over a period of a week or so, and do the final paring and achieve consensus, on, literally, every word.
>
> In the course of it, we'll continuously plot and continuously talk about who the characters are, what they eat, what clothes they wear, what their favorite colors are and what's going to happen to them. In that way, I think it's a true kind of collaboration: we both really influence the course of the book. You can't look back and say which one made it go this way or that way, because you can't remember. You just remember that you had that exciting conversation.
>
> "Nothing goes out of the house," says Dorris, "without the other person concurring that this is the best way to say it and the best way of presenting it. One of the beauties of the collaboration is that you bring two sets of experience to an issue or an idea, and it results in something that is entirely new."
>
> Erdrich adds, "Some people don't believe it's possible to collaborate that closely, although we both have solitude and private anguish as well. You develop this very personal relationship with your work, and it seems fragile; you're afraid to destroy it. But I trust Michael enough so that we can talk about it. And every time I've been afraid to open it up, it has always been better for the work." (Berkeley 59)

Characters in *The Beet Queen*, Erdrich's second novel, are often of mixed or indeterminate racial heritage or sexual orientation, which supports the idea that Erdrich and Dorris are working toward synthesis through characters who are fluid. Karl, who is bisexual; Wallace Pfef, a repressed homosexual; Celestine, a six-foot tall, masculine-looking "breed"; and Mary, the square-built "cement root cellar" (333) all have indeterminate or "marginal" identities. *The Beet Queen* is a novel of the interior life of "the other"—the orphan, the homosexual, the bisexual, the Indian, the mixed-blood, the disfigured, the crippled, the mentally ill, the unattractive. The title character, Dot is described in *Love*

Medicine as "of the has-been, of the never was, of the what's-in-front-of-me people" (155). The central core of the novel concerns the psychological and sociological consequences of having a mixed or indeterminate identity.

In *A Yellow Raft in Blue Water* Rayona is named in a parody of Indian ritual. Rayon is the label on her mother's nightgown and the first thing the mother sees at Rayona's birth. Rayona's Indian mother, Christine, is the issue of a scandalous, therefore suppressed relationship, and her father is Black. Christine's orientation moves from the reservation to the outside, Minot and Seattle, and back to the reservation; although Rayona is Indian and Black, she has no experience of Black Culture, no relatives that we see, no Black influence. Her father, Elgin, is more absent than present. Rayona is a product of both the reservation and a larger culture that includes Blacks. Rayona's blackness never seems to be an issue except when people try to puzzle out her racial mix. Occasionally she is referred to as "nigger," but the epithet does not unduly disturb Rayona. She may look black, but since her ties are Indian, and the reservation accepts her on the basis of choice, Lipsha's "belonging was a matter of deciding to" explains her identity—culture over blood. On a fictional reservation this can work. The positive view of Rayona's mix is present, too. Christine tells Elgin, "We're the wrong color for each other. . . . That's what your friends think." He responds that "we may be different shades but look at the blend." Rayona likes to think this refers to her, "since my skin is a combination of theirs" (9).

The idea of racial mix moving toward synthesis in Rayona is repeated by Nash, Vivian's son in *The Crown of Columbus*, when he says, toward the end of the novel, "Memory fades, identity gets blurred, as fast as blood gets mixed." Yet he realizes he is "an improbable exception, a survivor of survivors of survivors" (364). Identity is not fixed: "Mostly it's ["feeling Indian"] just confusing or irrelevant, one disguise among many I put on. Except it's not a disguise, it's skin" (363). Creating yet a deeper layer of ambiguity to Native American identity, Dorris and Erdrich give the final vignette in *Crown* to the Bahamians. Now Vivian Twostar is "a tourist woman" (380), the outsider on Eleuthera rather than the native. Just as Mary Therese, a Caribbean native in Toni Morrison's *Tar Baby* represents everything "authentic" that Jadine, the black American model who has become the darling of Paris, is not, so Valerie, who has rescued baby Violet from the sea, is opposed to educated, assimilated Vivian. Yet Vivian is the one who can, through heritage and perspective, translate the diary of Columbus, bringing both cultures together in understanding and trying to right the injustices of colonialism.

Erdrich and Dorris create confusion and uncertainty in the reader's

mind over what it means to be Vivian, to have a mixed identity. The *New York Times* reviewer of *The Crown of Columbus* says the novel 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" (Houston 10). Another way to see this play with form is as a parallel to the identities characters assume and the ways they are seen in different contexts by others. This seeming indecision about intent and direction mirrored in the conglomeration of genres and allusions to other fiction comments on the theme of shifting identity. The characters are not always sure who they are; the novel does not know what form it should take. Dorris and Erdrich are playing on and working through the difficulty of determining a clear identity when multiple cultures and literary forms are available.

For Vivian Twostar, being of mixed blood, "marginal," is an advantage. She knows intuitively that "security is an illusion," what Ellison's *Invisible Man* has to wander through African-American history to learn: "there are bonuses to peripheral vision" (*Crown* 124). The Vivians are the "hooks and eyes that connect one core to the other" —they hold two cultures together. Erdrich and Dorris, in the same way as the hook and eye, connect the male to the female narrative voice, the Native American to the EuroAmerican perspective. Because of their working methods and mixed heritage, it is not possible to separate one authorial voice from another in their works. In this artistic synthesis lies the power of Louise 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. The consequence of this artistic synthesis is articulation of multiple forms of expression of mixed Native American and EuroAmerican identity.

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A NOTE ON NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE IN *TRACKS*

Victoria Walker

Somewhat reminiscent of Faulkner, Louise Erdrich employs a distinctive narrative technique in her third novel, *Tracks* (Harper and Row, 1988). Two participatory narrators share the tale, relating sections in turn. One is a liar, and the other does not speak to us, the novel's readers. Through these narrators, Erdrich exercises control over reader response and credulity. As readers, we are implicitly encouraged to question the words of each narrator. We are distanced from the text by the unreliability of Pauline, a protagonist whose words we are consistently warned not to believe. While we are unable to be so distant from the text when reading the authoritative and confiding tones of Nanapush, we are simultaneously caught in the compromising position of being an eavesdropper on an intimate conversation.

The novel opens with the voice of Nanapush. An elderly man who speaks with a voice of wisdom, not without a sense of humor, he enjoys talking, a skill at which he considers himself particularly adept. In the opening chapter he admits, "Even a sledge won't stop me once I start." (7). Nanapush speaks to Lulu directly throughout the novel. He explains to her aspects of her past and gives her insight into her heritage. His narrative passages are peppered with direct comments to Lulu, clarifying certain points or demanding more attention at a particular moment. In the final chapter he scolds her and attempts to give her advice: "Maybe once I tell you the reason she had to send you away, you will start acting like a daughter should" (210). A little later he shouts, "Don't stop your ears!" (218). When reading the chapters in which Nanapush is the narrator we are, in effect, prying, listening to a private and particularly personal exchange. Erdrich forces us into a position of complicity that allows us to become involved in the story in a way similar to one in possession of a secret.

Pauline addresses the audience using the first person, as does Nanapush, but unlike his listeners, the audience she speaks to is indefinite. Pauline's personality is radically different from Nanapush's. She does not possess his easy-going manner, mischievous sense of humor, or engaging trustworthiness. She is intensely serious, at first critically aware of her own failings, then later obsessed with her own saintliness. In chapter two she describes how she "blended into the stained brown walls" and was a "skinny big-nosed girl with staring eyes" (16). Later in the text, she views herself as saint-like, a quality she claims others recognize, too. She deceives the nuns in the convent into accepting her as a Sister, even though she is not a virgin and is an American Indian who has been told that the "order would admit no Indian girls" (138). She reports that the Superior in her convent tells her to "Go back to

sleep . . . Even a Saint must rest" (164). This perception becomes so intensified that by the close of her own narration, Pauline implies that she is greater than Christ. In the opening of chapter eight she claims that, "Christ was weak" (192). She develops this observation with the declaration, "I knew there was never a martyr like me" (192). The comparison is distorted. Pauline attempts to kill her child, Marie, before the baby is born. She does murder the child's father, Napoleon. In believing that she is a saint, Pauline deceives herself.

Her trustworthiness is in question throughout the novel. In chapter three, Fleur tells Nanapush, "Uncle, the Puyat lies" (38). He accepts this observation, clarifying it with comparison to himself: ". . . while I was careful with my known facts she was given to improving the truth" (39). He continues to explain what he means in more detail:

> Because she was unnoticeable, homely if it must be said, Pauline schemed to gain attention by telling odd tales that created damage. There was some question if she wasn't afflicted, touched in the mind. (39)

Nanapush concludes this statement with a claim that ". . . the only people who believed Pauline's stories were the ones who loved the dirt" (39). In saying this Nanapush, a fictional character, is indirectly telling the reader that if we believe the words of Pauline we love gossip, or "dirt."

In her own narrative, Pauline confirms further her tendency to distort the truth. In chapter four she describes how Margaret Kashpaw "pulled the truth or some version of it" (65) out of her. However, there is also the suggestion that Pauline is not simply lying, but is sometimes unaware of the truth: "Sometimes, thinking back, I see my arms lift, my hands grasp, see myself dropping the beam into the metal grip. At other times, that moment is erased" (27).

In contrast Nanapush appears (initially at least) to be more believable, though we have no scale or foil by which to judge the reliability of his narrative. Pauline does not claim that he lies, although she does accuse him of being a "smooth-tongued artificer" (196). He does not admit to lying, nor does he appear to deceive himself as Pauline does. It appears that he is simply explaining to a young woman various facts about her childhood and heritage. Nanapush appears eager to ensure that Lulu hears the truth: "Perhaps you've heard what I'm going to tell now, I don't know. If so, you've heard it on the lips of others and never from one who witnessed" (219). Nanapush is a "likeable" character. Unlike Pauline, who is serious and uptight, he enjoys people. When contrasted with Pauline's narrative, Nanapush's story suggests that he is more reliable than she is.

Differences between individual narrators' distinct styles would

emerge in comparison of their versions of the same incident. There are few scenes that clearly "overlap." There are, however, instances where each narrator discusses the same topic. Nanapush's approach to the question of Lulu's father, for instance, contrasts with Pauline's. Neither Pauline nor Nanapush actually knows the identity of Lulu's father. However, this is where similarities in their respective narratives end. In chapter three, making his deductions from Eli's descriptions, Nanapush assumes that Fleur is pregnant:

> From the way he described her actions, I was sure she was pregnant. I'm familiar with the signs, and I can talk about this since I'm an old man far past anything a woman can do to weaken me. I was more certain still when Eli said that he took her in his arms, helped her to a pile of blankets on a willow bed. (44)

When Lulu is born Nanapush assumes that the child is not fathered by Eli, although he has no evidence to support this belief. Towards the end of this chapter he again comments on the possibility that Eli is not the father of Lulu: "Who knew for certain about his being the father?" (61). In the same passage he also acknowledges that there had been speculation as to the identity of Fleur's lover. He does not add his own thoughts and views to the prevailing ones, but chooses instead, rather mischievously, to give the waters "another stir" (61). He lies to Father Damien, declaring that he is the father of the child, and then proceeds to name her Lulu.

His story is different from Pauline's. He does not attempt to conceal from his "listener" (Lulu as a young adult), the fact that he lied to the Father; on the contrary, he explains in detail the motives he had for naming the child as his own. He explains that Eli was young, and therefore still had much opportunity to produce "descendants in his clan" (61). He describes his resentment towards both Margaret and Pauline. His final reason is touching and can operate as an appeal to the sympathies of his audience—both Lulu and us, the eavesdropping readers. He declares, "I thought about my wives, especially White Beads and our daughter" (61). His wives and his daughter are all dead. He names Fleur's newborn child after his own daughter. Nanapush's declaration appears straightforward and appealing.

In contrast, at the end of chapter two, Pauline also considers the birth of Fleur's child. Unlike Nanapush, who simply accepts the existence of gossip concerning the identity of Lulu's father, Pauline describes in detail the nature of the speculation:

> Some say she married the water man, Misshepeshu, or that she lives in shame with white men or windigos, or that she's killed them all . . . That spring, I went to help her out

> in her cabin when she bore the child, whose green eyes and skin the color of an old penny have made more talk, as no one can decide if the child is mixed blood or what, fathered in a smokehouse, or by a man with brass scales, or by the lake. (31)

Her description is detached. She does not confirm or dismiss the "talk." Although apparently present at the birth, she does not describe it. She smugly admits that "They," (presumably the individuals involved in speculating on the identity of Lulu's father), "only know they don't know anything" (31). The passage suggests that Pauline does "know something," and it is information that she is keeping concealed from us.

Erdrich does not overtly direct the reader into a position of participation, nor warn us of our active and involved role. She simply presents the narrative perspective in such a manner that we automatically find ourselves in a position of complicity as we overhear Nanapush's conversation with Lulu. As his character is revealed in the course of the novel, he is portrayed as warm, humorous and talkative, an appealing personality. Erdrich entices us further into the text by making Pauline unreliable and untrustworthy. Without the guidance of omniscient interruption, we must deduce our own conclusions—do we believe a self-confessed, charming "talker" or a mean-spirited woman who is a proven liar? Erdrich draws us into her carefully crafted web of narrative perspective, and holds us in a position where involvement is unavoidable.

* * * *

COMMENTARY

From the Editors

This issue of *SAIL* has been in progress for some ten months, ever since James Flavin's paper on *Tracks* and the MLA special session on Louise Erdrich indicated the possibility of a special issue devoted to criticism of her work. As work progressed on the issue and papers underwent revision, more submissions were received, including a batch of interesting undergraduate studies produced by Pete Beidler's students at Lehigh University. The happy result was more very fine papers than a single issue could hold. Budget and time constraints precluded a double issue; consequently, both this last number of volume 3 and the first issue of volume 4 (spring 1992) will comprise an extended discussion of the works of Louise Erdrich.

The papers collected here represent a range from intense close reading to a broad perspective on collaborative and individual works. In "The Novel as Performance Communication in Louise Erdrich's *Tracks*" James Flavin offers a reading of *Tracks* centering on its celebration of and reverence for the power of language, while Jeanne Smith explores *Love Medicine* in the context of American Romantic literature in "Transpersonal Selfhood: The Boundaries of Identity in Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*." Ann Rayson's study moves over a number of prose works, fiction and non-fiction, by both Erdrich and Michael Dorris to take up the vexed question of "Shifting Identity in the Work of Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris." Finally, Victoria Walker's note on "Narrative Perspective in *Tracks*" opens up an issue relevant to all of Erdrich's (and Dorris's) work: the relationship of narrative strategy and reader manipulation.

Four long papers are planned for the following issue. Joni Adamson Clark examines Erdrich's transformation of oral stories in "Why Bears Are Good To Think and Theory Doesn't Have To Be Murder: Transformation and Oral Tradition in Louise Erdrich's Fiction," while Annette Van Dyke takes up the theme of mother-daughter relationships in "Questions of the Spirit: Bloodlines in Louise Erdrich's Landscape." Lissa Schneider focuses on healing processes in "*Love Medicine*: A Metaphor for Forgiveness," and Daniel Cornell extends the disussion of narrative perspective in "Woman Looking: Revis(ion)ing Pauline's Subject Position in *Tracks*."

Looking forward to 1992, we envision several important developments. High on the list, of course, is the actual incorporation and organization of ASAIL as an independent scholarly organization. The moment is right, now when interest in this field is mushrooming as evidenced by the attendance and spirited discussion at American Indian Literature sessions in conferences like MELUS, ALA and MLA.

Everyone who has worked on this project merits gratitude, especially from younger scholars who hope to specialize in or who want to know more about American Indian literatures.

Some submissions for the special issue on creative work have already come in; we welcome more, and hope that our call will be passed on to young Native American writers who may not have seen the published notices. Our new size can accommodate longer pieces, and we especially encourage submissions of prose. More information about the issue is in the Call for Creative Work below.

"Returning the Gift," a major project for American Indian writers which we have reported on before, has received two substantial grants, and plans are going forward for the conference in Oklahoma in summer 1992. SAIL has applied for a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to support a special issue in connection with the conference; if the grant is funded we shall be able to offer modest honoraria to contributors.

Greg Sarris has also agreed to edit a special issue on critical approaches to American Indian literatures. Greg's call for papers is printed below; we urge interested scholars to get in touch with him.

Helen Jaskoski
Robert M. Nelson

* * * *

More Grizzly Woman

It is good to see attention to Victoria Howard's Clackamas Chinook narratives. May I mention that some of them at least have now the chance of reaching a wider audience, through inclusion in a recent anthology. It is edited by Marian Arkin and Barbara Schollar, *Longman Anthology of World Literature by Women, 1875-1975* (Longman, 1989). Three short texts (in ethnopoetic form) by Victoria Howard follow two poems by Charlotte Perkins Gilman! They are "Laughing at missionaries," "Maybe it's Milt," and "Seal and her younger brother lived there" (pp. 106-9).

May I comment also on two points with regard to the interpretation of the stories in the Spring issue. As to authenticity, it counts for something that the texts show consistent use of Chinookan poetic, or rhetorical, patterns and that if one returns to them, they commonly yield more, not less, in the way of insight, insight interdependent often with details of form. I first wrote about "Seal and her younger brother lived there" twenty years ago. Writing an essay soon to appear, I discovered that a conjecture about narrative by the French linguist A.

J. Greimas added to understanding of the working of the short text. And when Gary Morson lectured at Virginia this spring on the Russian critic M. Bakhtin, a point he made added yet another perspective on its concluding scene.

Obviously dictated texts are not the same thing as a performance in a traditional setting. But we do not know that Victoria Howard ever told the stories she knew in a traditional setting. What we know is that she remembered stories told her by her mother-in-law and mother's mother, and had them in mind until the end of her life. Surely, then, they were not merely something remembered, but something enjoyed and something with meaning. Very likely she reflected on them, and the form in which she told them to Melville Jacobs embodies some of her reflection on their meaning. The variation and change to be observed among versions of related stories, among Native Americans of Oregon, and elsewhere, is not to be explained by variation in performance alone. It presupposes reflection and interpretation between performances.

In this regard it seems not accidental that Mrs. Howard remembered and told just the scene she did in "Seal and her younger brother lived there." A scene of suspense from a story of revenge by men has been transformed into a story of the consequences of revenge on two generations of women.

Further, in this regard, "Grizzly Woman began to kill them" (in my article on the second text addressed by Thompson I translate the inceptive aspect of the verb in Mrs. Howard's title) is one of a series of narratives involving the figure of Grizzly Woman. The series as a whole indicates that Grizzly Woman was a figure through whom Mrs. Howard, and perhaps those from whom she heard the stories, interpreted what we now call "aggressiveness" and "assertion" in women. That the figure was probably close to Mrs. Howard's own sense of identity is revealed in an unpublished passage in Jacobs' notebooks to text 114 (vol. II, p. 523). As a young woman, Mrs. Howard was ill from a power. The shaman who finally could remove it asked if he should kill it, or wash it and give it back. Her mother said to kill it. The power is not named, but the shaman who had finally the power to remove it himself had the very strong power of Grizzly Woman also.

I am sorry not to have made available in published form a book I drafted a decade ago on these stories. It was accepted by the American Folklore Society, with the title *Bears that save and destroy. Faces of feminine power*. But then I realized that there was more to say, that four of the stories involving Grizzly Woman in effect constituted a cycle. I worked on that one summer in Oregon, but back in Philadelphia was caught up in administrative responsibilities, and never finished the revision. For the record, there are *two* stories in which Grizzly Woman is finally destroyed. "Grizzly Woman began to kill them" is

one. The other is "Gitskux and his younger brother." The first has a younger sister (Waterbug) as decisive agent. The second has a younger brother (Gitskux, probably Fisher) as crucial agent. Two other stories end with a Grizzly Woman figure set loose upon the world. One with a young woman who becomes a dangerous being as decisive agent is "Grizzly and Black Bear ran away with the two girls" (CCT I, #14). One with a young man as decisive agent is "Black Bear and Grizzly Woman and their sons" (CCT I, #16).

The two stories with a young woman, and the two stories with a young man, appear to align. Parallels of detail between the two with a young woman are especially striking. These two center on relations between women, a mother and daughter in the first, a mother and a new father's wife in the second. In each of the two stories with young men as crucial agents, a woman has a crucial prophetic role. There is nothing known to me more moving and powerful as to the dignity and strength of a woman than certain scenes in "Gitskux and his younger brother," in which the woman the wandering, isolated older brother (Panther) finds, having brought him by her power to her bed, of her own free will confers on him the right to be the hunter of the household, and then, when his younger brother has been rescued by following her instructions, restores and indeed enhances his beauty, his long hair.

These stories are separate in the telling. The more one becomes acquainted with the complexity of the figure of Grizzly Woman in them, the more it seems likely that they belong together, two pairs, each ending with a final overcoming of what Grizzly Woman represents, one pair with young men as active agents, one pair with young women. Whatever one finds in one of the stories ought to be considered in the light of the others.

Whatever, then, the limitations of the original circumstances in which the stories were preserved, they were limitations which in the nature of the case could not be overcome. The consistency of form of the stories indicates that the tradition retained integrity in Mrs. Howard. Indeed, if one arranges the stories in the order in which they were told, one discovers that it was only about half-way through the seventeen notebooks that Mrs. Howard began to conclude them with the formal ending, *k'ani k'ani*. The appearance of the formal ending appears to be a sign of confidence on her part in her role, possibly in the completeness of what she had told. Apart from as yet unpublished narratives in Sahaptin, these narratives from Victoria Howard probably are the finest and fullest that can be known of what was once an ever-renewing abundance of oral narrative in Oregon. As an Oregonian, I am grateful for them.

With best wishes, and appreciation for SAIL.

Dell Hymes

Response

I am grateful to Dell Hymes for supplying the details on the parallels between the Grizzly Woman tales, and also for the information on Victoria Howard's personal relationship with Grizzly Woman; I hope he finds the opportunity to return to his manuscript and finish the revisions he feels are necessary for publication.

Professor Hymes raises two points concerning my essay on Mrs. Howard's tales. The first regards the "authenticity" of the myths. Because I am not sure what constitutes "authenticity" for him, it is difficult for me to respond. If he is arguing that they were sophisticated, rhetorically consistent texts, I agree with him completely. For my part, I used the term only because it was necessary, for the purposes of my essay, that the tales closely resemble something that was told in a traditional setting. *Generally*, the "rhetoric of authenticity" is something which I avoid at all costs—primarily because I know of no tales which I would refer to as "inauthentic."

Professor Hymes also writes that the Grizzly Woman stories should be considered in conjunction with each other. While the parallels he points out are fascinating, I do not agree that it was essential for my paper to analyze them together. My purpose was to counter the gender biased readings of Melville Jacobs, and to argue that the kinds of texts he cites can be seen as evidence that women were at least *perceived* as possessing power. I wrote about "Grizzly Woman Killed People" and "Awl and Her Son's Son" because (as I wrote in my essay), "the main characters are the type of women that Jacobs cites as evidence of the negative perception of women among the Clackamas. . . . [And] they are illustrative of my contention that sinister characters are not necessarily evidence of a negative attitude toward women." Given those goals, and the limitations of available space, I do not believe a comparison to the other Grizzly texts was necessary.

Craig Thompson

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Call for Creative Work

We are seeking submissions—previously unpublished poetry, short fiction, drama, essay, autobiography—for a special issue in 1992 on new creative work. *SAIL's* new, larger format, made possible by the increase in our subscriber list during the past two years, should enable us to publish more prose than we were able to print in the last creative issue. Poets, fiction writers, autobiographers, playwrights, essayists: we

welcome your submissions, and hope you will also pass our invitation on to other Native American authors who may want to submit their work.

We project publication for the winter issue of 1992; deadline is 1 February 1992. Please send submissions, typed and double-spaced, to Helen Jaskoski, Department of English, California Sate University, Fullerton, CA 92634.

Call for Papers on Critical Approaches to American Indian Literatures

Greg Sarris is preparing an issue of *SAIL* focusing on critical approaches to American Indian Literatures. He welcomes contributions on the following topics:

* Approaches to oral literatures
* Approaches to written works by American Indian authors
*Critical theory and approaches to American Indian literatures
*Issues of multiculturality in American Indian literatures

Deadline for submission of papers: June 1, 1992.

Send all materials to
Greg Sarris
Department of English
UCLA
Los Angeles, CA 90024

* * * *

REVIEWS

The Crown of Columbus. Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich. New York: Harper Collins, 1991. $21.95 cloth, ISBN 0-06-016079-9.

Early commentary on *The Crown of Columbus* by Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich has been generally hostile. Reviewers have focused especially on its unrealistic plot: the novel is a "potboiler" (John Leo, in *U.S. News & World Report*, May 13, 1991, p. 25); "the sort of thing one has seen in dozens of movies" (Michiko Kakutani, *New York Times*, April 19, 1991, p. C25); "a series of events seemingly gleaned from *Raiders of the Lost Ark* or *The Perils of Pauline*" (Robert Houston, *New York Times Book Review*, April 28, 1991, p. 10); "a novel with as much spontaneity as if it had been plotted by a computer" (John Elson, *Time*, April 29, 1991, p. 29).

Let's face it: for readers who demand realism, the plot is, well, novel. Two Dartmouth professors fall in love, have a baby, fall out of love, do not get married, do research on Columbus. The female of the pair, a part-Navajo anthropology professor named Vivian Twostar, discovers in the archives of the Dartmouth library some lost pages of Columbus's unexpurgated diary. She also discovers some oyster shells with encoded Hebrew clues to the whereabouts of a crown said to have been Europe's greatest treasure. The male of the pair, Roger Williams, an English professor and poet, thinks Vivian's work is all nonsense, partly because it contradicts what his own more systematic and mature research has revealed, and partly because it violates the spirit of his in-progress epic poem on Columbus. With Nash, Vivian's angry and drug-troubled son by a failed first marriage, and baby Violet, this unlikely professorial pair head to the Bahamas as guests of the evil Cobb, who hopes to bail himself out of his financial difficulties by stealing Vivian's documents and following their clues to the treasure. When she resists, Cobb tries to murder her. Meanwhile, baby Violet drifts off in a rubber raft and Roger is swept by a riptide through shark-infested waters into a bat-infested cave, where he recites his epic narrative poem to the bats. In the end, they find the crown, which turns out to be a holy relic—Christ's Crown of Thorns—enclosed in a 500-year-old glass box. Roger bonds with his daughter Violet; Nash bonds with Roger; Vivian gets tenure; and Roger and Vivian fall in love all over again.

I have no desire to defend this plot. It sells books and makes successful movies. I suspect that critics are troubled not so much that that this plot was written, but that it was written by Indian authors, particularly these two Indian authors. Husband Michael Dorris (*A Yellow Raft on Blue Water*, *The Broken Cord*) and wife Louise Erdrich

(*Love Medicine*, *The Beet Queen*, *Tracks*) are generally regarded as the two best writers of Indian descent now writing in America. The official critical stance seems to be something like this: "We know that this pair can write better stuff, because they have both proved it in the past, so why have they sold out? If this is what it takes to get a $1.5 million advance, better to remain poor." Early critics seem to believe that for these two Indians to write a best-seller is a little like Indians setting up a casino on reservation land: such behavior, if technically legal, is simply bad form for Indians. We expect more from the descendants of America's aboriginal people.

No critic I have read puts it quite that way. What the critics do say is that collaboration has failed. Although this husband and this wife have for years helped each other with their writing, *The Crown of Columbus* is their first fully collaborative book, the first one that lists both their names as authors. Rather than "blaming" crass or unIndian commercialism for this strange plot, critics blame the collaboration: "The magic that each exhibited in earlier books . . . fails them here, as if the combination of two powerful potions has resulted in a third, far less potent one" Houston, 10); "In the making of books, one plus one occasionally add up to less than two" (Elson, 76). Some critics even hint that the novel fails because one of the pair dominated: "*The Crown of Columbus* appears to be closer to Dorris's style than to Erdrich's" (Vince Passaro, *New York Times Magazine*, April 21, 1991, p. 39).

My own view is that *The Crown of Columbus* is a very good novel, and that it is as good as it is not in spite of the collaboration, but because of it. We cannot know, of course, what the novel would have been had either Erdrich or Dorris written it solo. But if the dual voices in the book are evidence of collaboration, then I say, hooray for collaboration. Vivian narrates eleven of the twenty central chapters, Roger nine of them. (The first and last chapters consist of eight "chapterettes," with Columbus himself narrating one, and teenager Nash Twostar another.) The mixing of voices works well. It helps to develop the characters, to advance the plot, and to underline the theme of discovery.

If critics are reluctant to admit that they expected more of Indian writers than *The Crown of Columbus*, they are also reluctant to admit a related attitude that seems to lie behind their unease with this novel: that it is not "Indian" enough. Oh, to be sure, Vivian Twostar's live-in grandmother is Navajo, Vivian herself is a mixed-blood ("Irish and Coeur d'Alene and Spanish and Navajo" [123]), and her children are part Indian, but here we have no reservation experience and little of the isolation, deprivation, frustration, and anger that many of us think being Indian is all about. Vivian's biggest problem is getting tenure,

not being Indian. Indeed, being Indian is part of the solution to the tenure problem, because she is fully aware that Dartmouth is not likely "to fire the only aboriginal assistant professor" (14), even if she has not accumulated an acceptably long list of publications.

Rather than being disappointed, it may be that we should thank our lucky twostars that The Crown of Columbus is not predictably "Indian" in its treatment of Columbus. Instead of trying to portray Columbus as the greedy, hateful, heartless barbarian slave trader he no doubt was, our authors—when they do not ignore him altogether—portray him as the inevitable accident of history. Had the "discoverer" of America not been Columbus, he would inevitably, within a very few years after 1492, have been some other European, quite possibly someone even more greedy, hateful, heartless, and barbaric.

Dorris and Erdrich are more interested in the Columbus in all of us than they are in the Columbus of history. We are, they suggest, all discoverers, if not of new peoples out there beyond the physical horizon, then of the more important people around us, and within us. *The Crown of Columbus* is about discovery, yes, but the crown we discover is not a bejeweled gold ring, but that painful one of thorns that we all bleed under and are ennobled by. Because our Indian authors have refused to let their novel drift into predictable anger at European exploitation of Indians, we have a novel of considerably more universality and endurance.

Indeed, *The Crown of Columbus* may well be at its weakest not when its unlikely plot is at its unlikeliest, but when it is most predictably Indian. In her most militant moods, we almost hope that Vivian is not supposed to be the spokesman for Erdrich and Dorris. When Vivian, for example, indulges in her "alternative perspective" on the arrival of Columbus, she imagines several Lucayan families as a "healthy, pleasure-loving group," nature lovers who wander nude on the beaches, enjoying "an endless summer of surf and starry nights." Then one day three Spanish caravels appear on the horizon and the Lucayans all run down to the beach to wave greetings to the newcomers: "They've got no reason to expect it's not more good news" (24-25). Are we supposed to nod in approval of Vivian's right-minded condemnation of Columbus as a destroyer of that early Indian paradise, or are we to shake our heads that she can be so naive as to believe that life was ever so happy, healthy, and carefree for anybody? Are we to applaud Vivian and Nash for reciting portions of the Navajo Blessing Way when the glass-encased Crown of Thorns is pulled out of the cave, or are we to believe that their doing so is little more than misapplied, perhaps sacrilegious silliness, roughly parallel to Roger's reciting his sixteen-page poem to the bats?

Are we to applaud when, at the end, Vivian goes out on the lecture

and legal circuit to make political use of the material she finds in the newly discovered diary of Columbus, "issues of aboriginal claim and sovereignty, of premeditated fraud" (375)? Or are we, rather, to wish she would seek a solution to the problems of Indian peoples less in the putative history of past injustices and more in a realistic appraisal of contemporary Indian social, chemical, political, and educational dependencies?

Or are we to applaud when Vivian, in a fine moment of self-discovery, admits that she wants to find the bejeweled gold crown not merely for political reasons, but because she is greedy: "I was becoming in my own way as obsessed with locating the treasure as Cobb, though I told myself that I wanted the crown for humanitarian, for political reasons–to prove an initial recognition of native sovereignty, to raise awareness, to produce incontrovertible evidence that would return at least a fraction of the much-ballyhooed discovery back to the discoverees. Although this was quite true, in my heart I knew that there was another reason—age-old, inglorious. I couldn't help it. Stars flashed in my head, the facets of precious stones; the gold gave off the gleam of greed. I wanted it" (269). With these words the stereotypical militant joins the ranks of humanity. Surely we are meant to applaud, if not Vivian's greed, at least her honesty.

If we judge a book less by its plot than by the quality of the questions it gives us to think about, then *The Crown of Columbus* is a very good novel indeed. This novel provides those who will look beyond the plot and beyond the too-easy Indian themes, a galleon of interesting questions. Those who insist that Indian writers write books that are heavy and serious and charged with hatred for the oppressive conquerors will be disappointed in *The Crown of Columbus*. Those who are willing to discover in it a healthy new direction for Indian writers, a direction toward playfulness, universality, and commercial success, may be surprised at the new world they find over the horizon.

Peter G. Beidler

* * * *

A Second View:

"So when Columbus knocked, I had no choice but to answer the door." Thus concludes Vivian Twostar, Assistant Professor in Native American Studies at Dartmouth, erstwhile lover of the more accomplished academic and poet Roger Williams, mother of churlish and

monosyllabic sixteen-year-old Nash. In her ninth month of pregnancy and with the security of tenure beckoning, Vivian is being pressured to provide an aboriginal perspective on Christopher Columbus for the campus alumni publication. Thus, too, do Michael Dorris and Louise Erdrich announce early in *The Crown of Columbus* the playful self-reflexivity with which they have chosen to respond to the parallel importunities and inducements proffered them, as prominent Native writers, in the advent of the Columbus quincentennial.

This collaborative novel (the authors are cagy about their respective contributions), alternately narrated through the unabashed voice of down-to-earth Vivian and the more academic, cadenced prose of the, shall we say, less spontaneous Roger, is a comic *jeu d'esprit*. Reading it conjures up the sardonic delight of its creation, of its authors' simultaneously embracing and subverting of mass-market conventions: "can we work in a murderous villain . . . a tropical setting . . . a karate fight . . . a shark attack?" By turns *The Crown of Columbus* is a detective story (as Vivian pursues archival leads to Columbus' lost journal), an adventure tale complete with coded clues to a hidden treasure ("But to throw in a treasure. It's really too much of a cliché. . . . Christopher Columbus as Long John Silver," scoffs Roger), a soap opera (with mystery baby washed up on the Bahamian shore or Vivian trapped overnight in the university library as childbirth threatens), and a romance of mismatched if not star-crossed lovers ("Just think of our kid," comments Vivian. "Beaded herringbone"). Roger's scandalized speculations, in light of Vivian's lack of scholarly diligence and her attraction to the sensational and fantastic, on what "silliness" she might be concocting for the alumni magazine, coupled with his confidence that she will thwart the editor's expectations of "a vitriolic lament, an excoriation blaming Columbus for all the Indians' troubles," function metafictionally as a wry commentary on the text itself.

The fifteenth-century Columbus manuscript pages Vivian has discovered, she keeps in her freezer, in one of the Tupperware containers (with patented "burp" formula) which she has been beguiled into buying. This incongruous image (parchment and plastic, priceless and commercial, historic and contemporary, scholarly and domestic) serves as an apt emblem for the novel itself, whose revisionist recuperation of history is contained within such an unlikely, seemingly frivolous narrative. For, naturally enough, Dorris and Erdrich do go on to take back history, enlisting as opportunities, along with Vivian's research project, her Native Studies class, Roger's stalled epic poem on Columbus, quincentennial radio interviews (the novel is set in late 1990, with a postscript in 1992), and arguments with Henry Cobb, predatory financier whose entrepreneurial ancestors acquired Columbus' diary. Columbus is rewritten as marginalized outsider, self-created

shape-shifter, eventual sufferer of a grievous failure of imagination. The enslavement and butchery of Arawaks, the dishonourable treaties, the smallpox-infested blankets, the boarding schools are all here. But they are produced casually, in passing, not as news but as givens, along with contemporary tokenism, romanticism and the commercialization of Native rage as entertainment. "Exactly the sort of revisionist approach I'm looking for," applauds Vivian's editor heartlessly, in another metafictional moment.

The Columbus jokes are here in plenitude too: "The one good thing from our point of view as Indians was that Columbus didn't think he was heading for Turkey. Get it?" And Columbus becomes the springboard for themes of discovery (like him, all the major characters seek everything except what they find); of the hazards of preconceived maps; of conflicting truths, fluid identities, flexible interpretations. Why, the protagonists even manage inadvertently to launch a rumour of Columbus' homosexuality. Even Nash, who is given his moment as centre of consciousness late in the novel (and reveals there a sensibility more developed than is suggested through the stories of others), ponders his Navajo great-grandmother's philosophy that "Truth was all in the story, in the way it was told and in who was doing the telling" and her willingness to accept both a truth and its equally plausible alternative.

The sexual politics of Vivian and Roger's fluctuating and fundamentally unconventional relationship has its underlying seriousness, too, as Roger (on probation as a lover through much of the novel) relinquishes his sense of prerogatives and learns to reciprocate love. Roger, whose idea of abandon is to add a croissant and imported marmalade to his breakfast ritual, hasn't a prayer of being a traditional male lead nor would the independent-minded Vivian know what to do with one. Their accommodation to each other embodies, pleasingly, a greater acceptance of real imperfections and disjunctures and of female primacy than the modern idea of romantic love usually allows. Furthermore, this "costume drama"—the dismissive phrase is Roger's—does contain poignant moments of emotion: Vivian's acerbic Navajo grandmother's outburst on being abandoned by those she loves, Vivian's defiance of Cobb's blandishments of "beads and trinkets," Nash and Roger's shared reprieve at the rescue of four-month-old Violet. In fact, there is a foundation of realism subtending the flourishes of the plot generally, a humorously gritty sense of life's day-to-day texture, whether in Vivian's retirement to the tranquillity of Roger's darkened clothes closet to soothe the fractious Violet or her abject gratitude for the implied mutuality of Nash's unexpected "please." Still, this is Columbus Goes To Hollywood, with the tension between revelations and absurdities, engagement and diversion, treasure and Tupperware all part

of a systematic parodic resistance to solemnity.

Like history, *The Crown of Columbus* is polyvocal. Like Columbus' Diary, it is multiple. Like the explorer himself, it is protean and elusive, embarked on its own voyage of discovery and appropriation. Humour and self-referentiality are its vehicles. This is a funny book, an intelligently funny book, one which gets more beguiling on rereading, once the reader surrenders to its tongue-in-cheek self-consciousness and abandons a misleading cartography of realism and high seriousness. The novel is not a sell-out but a send-up. Disparaging references to Columbus apocrypha and esoterica, to amateurs and dilettantes, to implausible whodunits and "Nancy-Drew-goes-tropical" remind cavilling readers that the text has got there before us. "Why can't you study an Indian? An Indian woman?" and "Let them study their own past," counsels Vivian's grandmother, in a rueful textual anticipation of the critics. As a joint effort (and my colleague Carol Miller has suggested that such collaboration is particularly appropriate in an American Indian environment valuing cooperation and community), the novel even plays with its own making, incorporating a facsimile page of Vivian and Roger's handwritten collaborative notes-in-progress on the Columbus manuscript. The plot, too, with a romance between a junior and a senior academic at Dartmouth (Dorris and Erdrich's home campus) and the meteoric acclaim attending the former, coyly echoes details from the authors' own history.

On a different plane, Roger and Vivian can be read as replaying, in more auspicious terms, the relationship of Columbus and Native peoples. Vivian's disparaging depiction of Columbus as a "thoroughly clothed" bureaucrat in his interactions with naked Indians is a tip-off, mirroring her mockery of Roger's inability to function without being apparelled right to his cuff links. Then, too, Roger identifies his boat trip from Florida to the Bahamas as Columbus' voyage in reverse, noting how it matters, curiously, that he be first to sight land (though like Columbus he is thwarted). Vivian, of the "lost tribe of mixed bloods" and so readily representing the variety of Columbus, hosts, is already contentedly esconced on the island when Roger arrives and—in his aversion to the insects, the inadequate cooking facilities, the local music—disregards her injunction not to spoil the paradise. Happily, though, this text proves susceptible to emendation. Roger learns reciprocity, precisely the value signalled by the fictional missing crown of Columbus, given in recognition by one sovereign nation to another, and through its recovery (in the novel's radically hopeful reconstruction of history at least) betokening some new measure of equity for descendents of its original recipients.

But ponderous analysis distorts the lightheartedness of such symbolism. And possibilities proliferate playfully: the novel *is* protean.

Cobb, in physical type "the closest living human representation of Columbus himself," and with moral affinities to that "Early American cheat" is a Columbus figure. So is Vivian, both in her role as the link between disparate worlds and in her discovery during her quest of a colonizing passion for possession. So is . . . Conversely, Roger can be an anti-Columbus, evoking the historic Roger Williams, expelled from seventeenth-century Massachusetts, who argued that the land belonged to the Indians not to Charles I. . . . Enough, already.

There are objections which can be raised about *The Crown of Columbus*. Roger's fatuousness is sometimes overdone, as when he anticipates the solace of reason for his infant daughter. But then Roger is a comic character, set up as a bit of a fall guy. And he is no fool, well aware of his own stuffiness, engagingly prepared to fight for a dull death, even, as the badge of his class. The plot creaks. Naturally. Vivian's ability to conduct library research encumbered with an infant struck me—though I have done likewise—as rather prelapsarian. The grand motivation for her investigations, to regain America, inspires scepticism. The disregard for Roger's urgent medical needs near the novel's end lacks verisimilitude. But verisimilitude or plausibility is hardly the issue; the novel is utopic, a romance, a *tour de force*, its plot a patent absurdity. The inclusion of Roger's sixteen-page poem, not incompetent but hardly the stuff of romance, is puzzling. An ultimate instance of authorial *chutzpah*? Proof, in its rendering of Columbus' own voice, of an absolute commitment to diversity of perspective? An ironic appropriation-of-voice in reverse, as Native authors put words in Columbus' mouth? More metafictional shenanigans? (In a 29 June 1991 KUOM radio interview, the authors reveal that, as in the novel, the poem has appeared in the journal *Caliban* under Roger's name.)

As a more serious objection, does the focus on Columbus and, eventually, on christianity (I'm trying to be discreet here about the ending) risk reinscribing a eurocentric worldview? Columbus, however inverted, is not entirely displaced in this narrative, and there are times when frankly I could do with less of him. Dorris and Erdrich talk of how, after initial distaste, they got caught up in the Columbus research. They are bucking, though, in the jauntiness of their revisionism, not only all the patriotism but also all the anger that has accrued to this emblematic figure. And the surprise twist of the ending, while debunking the materialism of the imperialist enterprise, seems to depend on a religious awe disturbingly ironic given institutional christianity's historic role in Native brutalization. I am convinced that the christian iconography too is parodic: as the protagonists' discovery, ironically coated in centuries of dung, is precariously hoisted above ground on fishnet, "what had been the center was moved to the edge,"

for instance, to cite one telling peripheral detail. Before Vivian takes back Native sovereignty, proclaiming "We've waited long enough" and shattering with unanthropological impatience the ancient glass protecting the treasure, Nash recites lines from the Navajo Blessing Way on finding mirage at the centre of the mirage. But the novel has less time to deconstruct this second major Western icon, though the authors get points for their boldness in also taking it on. So the ironies are less evident, the risks of recentring christianity greater.

The hidden hero of this Columbus saga is Peter Paul, the defiant eighteenth-century Mohawk student who instructs Vivian in the value of troublemaking and who sets the plot in motion by his original theft of the crown from the Dartmouth archives. He is taking back, he says tersely, what has been taken from him. *The Crown of Columbus*, not only in asserting a claim to place and to story but more concretely, too, in taking back some of the spoils of the Columbus quincentennial (lavish publication advances, film prospects, public relations budgets, captive audience), itself functions ultimately as the metafictional counterpart to Peter Paul's seditious gesture. The final twist of this postmodern romp is the book itself in all its materiality, booty that Columbus never knew he carried, another crown to be reclaimed. This is a clever and slippery novel. Appropriately enough, the end of the book belongs to the natives of the Bahamas, no longer Natives, thanks to Columbus and his ilk, but no less colonized, to whom Vivian ironically is simply one more oblivious American tourist. Here we have a final play on the novel's title and central conceit. For placid fourteen-year-old Bahamian Valerie Clock, the baby washed up on the shore and temporarily hers, like the crown years ago, is the gift denied, the unkept promise from the sea, that provokes a new resistance and inspires her to turn, not westward like Columbus, but eastward across the sea. The Empire looks back.

Helen Hoy

* * * *

Baptism of Desire: Poems. Louise Erdrich. New York: Harper and Row, 1990. 78pp. ISBN 0-06-016213-9.

In Catholic doctrine, Baptism of Desire has a rather technical meaning: a person who is unable to manage conventional baptism of water can, by earnestly and truly wanting to be baptised, gain the benefits of the sacrament, i.e., entry into the church and eligibility for

heaven. Longing and will may serve where form and ritual are impossible. In Louise Erdrich's latest collection of poems the technical meaning of longing to be baptised in the Catholic Church is rather a jumping-off point than a core metaphor. Again and again the poems return to Catholic tradition and terminology—not out of unquestioning acceptance, but to explore the legacy of this religion's impossible requirements and extravagant promises. The reader will not look to these texts for the abstruse reaches of theology (a list of sacraments leaves one out; Immaculate Conception is confused with Annunciation) but rather for the earthy details of Catholic legend and the piercing metaphors of popular belief. The occult and the superstitious, the surreal life of dreamer, mystic and seer, all find a place; *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Other Bible*. as well as lives of the saints, are offered as part of the textual matrix for these poems.

Erdrich calls upon her Chippewa traditions as well, and readers of her first collection, *Jacklight*, will welcome the return of Potchikoo, that charming adventurer. Potchikoo also, however, encounters Christianity in the tales in this volume; he undertakes something of a Dantean journey through heaven and hell (the hell for white people even has a sign over the gate like Dante's; it reads "Entrance: Hell") before he is restored to Josette.

Other characters from *Jacklight* also reappear in this collection. Mary Kroger returns, with stories and memories from her past. She remembers "Poor Clare," a slow-witted girl, "much too eager for a man's touch," whose pregnancy and the mysterious absence of issue from it give rise to a story told in small towns everywhere. Mary feels the ghostly presence of love-torn "Rudy J. V. Jacklitch, the bachelor who drove his light truck through the side of a barn on my account," she senses the ghost of a woman who burned to death, she returns to recollection of a Carmelite nun and the life of renunciation both fascinating and incomprehensible to her. The Mary Kroger poems have loosened in form since *Jacklight*: they are more discursive in expression, with less of the intensity and focus that metric lines and rhyme permitted in the earlier volume.

Nostalgia and the remembered life figure in other poems as well. One of the most complex poems in *Baptism of Desire* is "Saint Clare," which like "Carmelites" explores renunciation, a kind of ecstasy. In the five sections of the poem the voice of Clare recalls her response to the inspiration of her neighbor, Francis of Assisi, and her subsequent life as foundress of the Poor Clare order of sisters. In the last section, addressed to her own blood sister, Agnes, Clare ponders the paradox of renunciation: "It is almost impossible to ask for nothing. I have spent my whole life trying." She takes on responsibility for the destructiveness of sainthood, in which "density of purpose" creates the

impossible demand, "the stone wagon of example." This poem as well as the poems on Rodrigo de Avila, Mary Magdalen and Mary Kroger, does what Erdrich's fiction does at its best: they explore in the first-person idiom the depths of conflict at the heart of life lived in all dimensions of body, memory and spirit.

Desire of many kinds pervades the poems, which, a note explains, were mostly "written between the hours of two and four in the morning, a period of insomnia brought on by pregnancy." Longing and fecundity suffuse the diction. The language is rich, the imagery sometimes almost hallucinatory, as words seem to spill over the confinement of lines and lines are stretched out of elasticity. In "The Ritual" a parent meditates on sleeping children "in the hour of the wolf, the hour of the horn, / the claw, the lead pipe, and the oiled barrel of roulette," and in "The Flood" the persona remembers a basement bedroom where, one summer, "The river hammered and bubbled through the drains, / the line snapped, / their voices grew fierce as mosquitos / dancing on the head of a pin, clouding the wreckage / I passed, as the flood rushed me over its wide surface, / shredding my nightgown, my shawl of stingers." The language of sensation represents states of the soul: patience "must be tireless as rust and bold as roots" ("Fooling God"); prolonged anger "walked on elbows, / ate and screamed" ("Mary Kroger"); the disorientation of illness imagines that "children turning in their beds / turn dim and weedy" ("Translucence"). Such baroque exuberance promises to overwhelm; these poems push the reader to savor in measured doses, repeated readings, over time.

Helen Jaskoski

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Interior Landscapes: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors. Gerald Vizenor. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990. 279 pp., ISBN 0-8166-1848-8.

Griever: An American Monkey King in China. Gerald Vizenor. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1990. 240 pp., ISBN 0-8166-1849-6.

In *Griever* and *Interior Landscapes* Gerald Vizenor returns to that ancestral metaphor, the tribal trickster. outlaw insider whose amoral antics stretch and break cultural strictures, challenging the Establishment's reasonableness with the fantasies itself has produced. The novel, *Griever*, is the story of the "holosexual clown," the "mind monkey," who takes on contemporary Chinese politics in all its rigidity and

inhumanity. *Interior Landscapes* is Vizenor's autobiography, that of the mixedblood who must also be a trickster. Between cultures, he commemorates the stories of the past yet "honors impermanence," a marginal heir of the crane totem "on the run, run, run." This metaphor of the wiley, dodging actor, always in disguise and in transit, works well in the novel where it gives Vizenor the chance to translate Native American storytelling into antic language challenging the contemporary world's metaphors. The mixedblood trickster image functions less well in the autobiography, where it is dropped after a certain point, as though it no longer served its unifying narrative purpose. Perhaps no writer, seeing himself in his transformational trickster mode—as a mode—should write his life. Doesn't this put a heavy-handed fix on what is shown to be slippery and impermanent?

Griever has a wiry, pun-full rhythm going for it that is a happy stylistic equivalent for the adventures, cut on the bias, of a Native American clown who translates his role from one uptight society to another, crossing metaphoric boundaries with ease. Where the Anishinaabe have their own Naanabozho chasing women, gobbling down food, transforming himself and the world, the Chinese have their mind monkey who also gives fantasy a bad name among bureaucrats. Griever de Hocus, an Anishinaabe mixedblood, goes to teach English at Zhou Enlai University, and immediately takes off on the similarities between the White Earth Reservation and this oppressive society. Politically rebellious, a "holosexual clown," Griever has less of the amoral selfishness of his original and more of the humanity-loving actor who tries to "liberate" the Chinese imaginatively and literally with antics that break through the rigidities of the culture only at times. Wit and persnicketiness are on his side where the Chinese are rigid; he bargains for chickens' lives with their street butcher in his absurd, multi-layered Chinese, making everyone laugh. Ominously, when he frees a bird, a Peking babbler, from her cage, she flies back to it. "When a bird gets too big, it breaks the cage," says Griever. The people watching him understand the metaphor but cannot act on it. As he comes up against the bureaucracy of the university in the form of the director of foreign affairs, Egas Zhang, or a society which will not react to his challenges, Griever's fantasies, his jokey presence, increase in intensity. At one point, Griever tries to free prisoners being carried to execution in an open truck, men and women condemned for various reasons but all by an unjust society. Not everyone chooses to escape, however; the art historian, "leaden, a tractable animal on the trail," waits in the truck for the pursuing soldiers; the prostitute says that "Monkey Kings are only myths for the poor and oppressed." In exasperation the trickster cries, "Confucius and Mao Zedong were liars . . . no one here will ever be free" (15253), but no one is listening.

Griever is a sexual being, too, and gets one of the translators, Hester Hua Dan, pregnant; she kills herself in the pond where unwanted babies have been drowned secretly, victims of the law requiring Chinese to have only one child. Hester Hua Dan is a victim of her country's control of life and love. When Griever is frustrated in his liberation efforts, he digs "panic holes" and shouts his anguish into them. At last he runs away by flying across China in an "ultralight" air plane with yet another woman, the "mothwalker," Kangmei, a "mixedblood blond who speaks Chinese," and his logo rooster, Matteo Ricci.

Vizenor has translated the tribal trickster into another culture's anti-heroic figure of egotism, rebellion, and canniness, tying picaresque events together with edgy, witty language always about to fly away with the narrative. The verbal play tumbles with non-sequiters, shifting allusions, metaphorical transformations. Figures turn up as in dreams, disappear, or turn into others. A basketball game is read as a game played by pigs with butchers' marks on haunches and ribs. Intertextuality and attention to the novel as performance are very much in evidence: there is an injoke for F. Scott Momaday (173). The pet rooster is named for the Renaissance traveler to China about whom Jonathan Spence has written. The story opens and close with letters to "China Brown" who is researching a past president of the Natural Foot Society; the narrative derives from a scroll, "pictures from wild histories" Griever has left behind. Or is it the birchbark manuscript that has been "lost"?

Such verbal exuberance becomes the stylistic equivalent of the trickster on the run, transforming his tricks for human good, but with enough of his traditional egotism to remind us who he is. *Griever* would be a fine novel for a course on myth and its possibilities for re-fracturing for the contemporary world. Its ironic, laughing mode makes it a delightfully comic work to hold up against the "deep seriousness" and mythic pretentions of certain recent Native American literature.

Interior Landscapes is less successful. Here the in-and-out playful allusiveness that animates *Griever* vanishes before the often leaden plodding of the reportorial "I." The mixedblood as trickster is the metaphor employed here, too, and the running a trickster has to do is especially appropriate in the early chapters about Vizenor's childhood. Once he becomes serious and a responsible adult working out a place in American society, however, running with its connotations of irresponsibility is no longer apt; a certain arbitrariness in language and structure takes the place of imaginative leaping by the mind monkey. Of French-Canadian and Anishinaabe stock, Vizenor's father was murdered in Minneapolis during the Depression, victim of the "evil gambler" with whom every man, like Naanabohzo, must play for life.

Vizenor's white mother leaves him to a series of foster families and the marginal life of the mixedblood in an American working-class world. lt isn't until the army sends him to Japan and he discovers haiku poetry in school that the young Vizenor starts to develop into the writer and Native American exponent he has become.

These early years of growing up marginal, however, are related with a narrative gusto and an ironic edge that tapers off in the autobiography's second half. Where *Griever* successfully marries mythic narrative tradition and contemporary politics, here the metaphoric conection isn't consistently applied, perhaps because it is not satisfactory for an adult mixedblood who begins working within the Establishment as reporter, teacher, and rights advocate; "running" is no longer the proper mode. Vizenor tries to provide structural equivalents by breaking the narrative into dated episodic chapters presenting important sightings of the "interior landscape," but this technique does not really substitute for picaresque allusiveness. As always with Vizenor, characters and events are realized in sharp detail, though they often seem told for their own interest rather than because they advance a coherent narrative life. A chapter, for instance, is given over to a fantasy conversation between an imaginary trickster, "Erdupps MacChurbbs," and the young boy, which is meant to illustrate the metaphysics of tricksterism. It seems merely "cute," an exercise in whimsy, with examples of the kind of arbitrary allusiveness the style can drop into.

> My tricksters are tender on the wild rise in dreams, memories, myths, and metaphors now, and hold their chances over the wicked seams in ecclesiae. The best stories are survival trickeries on the borders, marcescent blues on the margins, on the colonial curbs; the rest would be simulations. (73)

We can dig out the point, but the language is attention-getting rather than imaginatively liberating.

Quotations and references from scholars and writers scattered here and there also have the effect of sleeve-tugging. Perhaps such devices indicate shaping forces on the narrator's mind but not that saving sense of self-irony Griever evidences. Later episodes are cast as rather pro forma historical events, lists: the narrator working for various Minnesota newspapers; his beginning a creative writing career; his own playing with "evil gamblers in the cities" as he takes up various—and important—Native American causes. This has been a life in which Values have been worth fighting for. At the same time things get left out: the narrator turns up with a second wife (228) without telling what happened to the first. He writes about himself in the third person

("George Vizenor implies . . ." 262) in a shift that may not provide the tone he intends. And the last chapter is a potpourri of small late moments (September, 1989) whose structure should suggest the "running" of the trickster but whose effect seems banal or unclear about their place in the narrative development of personality. Meeting James Baldwin may have seemed important to the narrator but it doesn't seem so to us. Not everything the trickster does in myth can be a model for a life as full of responsibility and commitment as Vizenor's has been, and he was wise to drop the mixedblood trickster model early on. But nothing with comparable metaphoric connections takes its place. We want Griever de Hocus back, throwing paper airplanes at a banquet, and preparing for flight toward Macao in his ultralight.

Robley Evans

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Native Writers and Canadian Writing. Ed W. H. New. Vancouver U P, 1990. 310 pp., $34.95 cloth, ISBN 0-7748-0370-3; $19.95 paper, ISBN 0-7747-0371-1.

This double issue of the journal *Canadian Literature* is devoted to the struggle by Native and non-Native Canadians to communicate their understanding of divergent identities. Contributions include nineteen essays on history, politics, literature, education, law and social life; thirty-six poems by contemporary poets of Native heritage; and two review articles. The volume makes a useful criticism of literary portraits of the Native in the canon of Canadian literature, questions the historical connnections between Natives and Euro-Canadians and draws close to the contemporary florescence of Canadian Native traditions and writing. It is an ambitious and generous contribution to the literature and literary criticism of Native America, providing valuable information and the sound of new voices. For those who have been observing parallel issues and developments south of the Canadian border, the book offers confirmation and encouragement of a worthy task.

In addition to its variety of topics and voices *Native Writers and Canadian Writing* gives the pleasure of intelligent organization. It turns from examination of historical work and older canonical literature to criticism of contemporary fiction and drama, widening its circle of growing self-consciousness about the value and use, or even the possibility, of cross-cultural communication by also including new or unexpected forms: the courtroom/conference report; the reminiscence-fiction; the record of a prophetic storytelling event.

Not a volume to read through at a sitting, *Native Writers* is a reference work, one that will grow more satisfying as the reader returns to it with new questions. Ideally one should read an essay or set of essays and then turn to the primary or supplementary reading they suggest, before returning to pick up a new aspect of the subject of the book. For example, two essays near the beginning of the book draw you toward familiarity with the body of translated Inuit poetry and with translations from the Haida of native storytellers John Sky and Walter McGregor as collected by Swanton. "Reassessing Traditional Inuit Poetry," by Robin McGrath, is brief and comprehensive. In eight short pages it efficiently takes up the history of publication of "Eskimo" poetry, analyzes four examples of Rasmussen's four types, distinguishes thematic links between various types of Inuit poetry, compares Inuit song to works by Keats, Blake, Wordsworth, and Canadian writers Archibald Lampman and Al Purdy, and ends by locating the common ground of Inuit and English poetry in the authenticity and directness of works produced out of need. One goes away from an essay of this kind longing to read everything it mentions.

One of the most valuable essays in the book is Robert Bringhurst's "That Also Is You: Some Classics of Native Canadian Literature." This is a masterful description of Haida verbal art as it has been conserved in language and oral literature. Bringhurst introduces his readers to the landscape and culture of the Queen Charlotte Islands; including the Hebrew and Ancient Greeks in his frame of reference, he centers his essay on two Haida poets, Walter McGregor and John Sky, both born between 1830 and 1840. Putting them in the context of such contemporary preservers of the archaic as Darwin, Van Gogh and Schliemann, Bringhurst celebrates their best narratives as sculpture, "fluently and deeply carved." He analyzes Sky's telling of an episode from the Raven epic to support his claim that its performer should be as well known to Canadians "as the names of Homer and Sappho, Aeschylus and Sophocles are known to all who study the literature of Europe" (38). Going on to consider the lives and work of George Hunt, who collaborated with Franz Boas on Kwakwala, and Henry Tate, who sent Tsimshian stories east at the turn of the century, Bringhurst offers a rich combination of history, geography, biography, literary analysis and storytelling which is worth the price of the book all by itself.

I would single out for briefer mention Parker Duchemin's "A Parcel of Whelps: Alexander Mackenzie Among the Indians," for its careful revisionary sifting of Mackenzie's *Voyages*. A brilliant essay on the politics of literature, it reviews Mackenzie's racist relationship to the Indians he encountered on his journey and recontextualizes his influence.

Four notable essays concern contemporary literature by Native

Canadians: first is Margery Fee's "Upsetting Fake Ideas: Jeannette Armstrong's 'Slash' and Beatrice Culleton's 'April Raintree,'" which asserts that "these novels are trying to open a space between the negative stereotype of the Indian and the romanticized popular view" (170). The essay that follows, "The Politics of Representation: Some Native Canadian Women Writers," by Barbara Godard, continues the consideration of these and other works that challenge Canadian literary tradition. This long essay, forty-two pages, treats contemporary Native Canadian work to a theorizing examination full of terms like "contestatory discourse," "strategically oppositional," "sub/alternization," its point being to enter the works into the discourse of contemporary literary criticism. Foucault, Bakhtin, Althusser, Spivak and others are invoked generously; when the essay centers on Armstrong and Maracle, it becomes more concretely an explanation of how these works challenge "established canons of address and representation" (221). As writing, Godard's essay is deliberately dense, tempting this reader to wonder, at times, if it is parody, but flashes of insight propel even the resisting reader, exhausted by the cleverness of "writing re(a)d" (222).

Two other notable essays, Margaret Atwood's on Thomas King and Denis Johnston's on the plays of Tomson Highway, complete this set of reconsiderations of innovative contemporary work in fiction and drama. But I must not overlook one last piece, Robin Ridington's "Cultures in Conflict: The Problem of Discourse." This unusual account of forty days of courtroom cultural exchange involving a land dispute brilliantly dramatizes failure to achieve communication. Ridington helps the reader to listen to the words of a Dunne-za/Cree elder, John Davis:

> What I can remember, I will say.
> What I do not remember, I will not say.
> I cannot read and write.
> I can only remember. (288)

Here the theoretical issue of resolving or reproducing the problem of discourse is firmly embedded in a concrete conceptual and linguistic issue, where it achieves its full impact.

Of all the writers mentioned so far, only Atwood and Ridington are familiar to this reader, who would have valued biographical and bibliographical information about the authors and an index to the volume. Even if an index is not consistent with periodical format, biographical identification of the writers certainly is. Admitting my south-of-the-border ignorance, I would like to know more about all of the contributors, especially Bringhurst, McGrath, Godard and Basil Johnston, whose work, energized by passion and irony, begins and ends the volume.

The essays described above are punctuated in this volume by poems addressing related subjects. Many of these are satisfying, especially in their contexts. Two poets stand out for this reader: Joan Crate and Daniel David Moses. Crate's "Shawnandithit (Last of the Beothuks)" describes the bitter story of a woman's death from tuberculosis:

> And so Shawnandithit, with Mother and sister dead
> and none of your people left beating against winter,
> it is your turn, the last Beothuk, broken
> and barren, beautiful as loose feathers on stone.
> In the whitemen's steaming kitchen, you falter, look
> to the wall, the clock you can't read, then sketch
> the stories of lingering death, marriage ceremonies
> and hunting parties, love, and your lingering death.
>
> You cough graceful spurts of blood,
> you fly, you plunge, alone Shawnandithit,
> staining the white white pages. (17)

The poem addresses the sacrificed figure, imagining her story as written in blood. In the following poem, "The Blizzard Speaks My Name, " Crate renders the same story in Shawnandithit's own voice.

If Crate's poems suggest the great vitality of Native Canadian historical imagination, Daniel David Moses stands firmly in the contemporary world. "Song on Starling Street" makes no particular reference to Native Canadian experience, but it speaks of a world without charity in the voice of homeless poverty, out in the storm. "Breakdown Moon" calls on Native tradition more explicitly in its most moving stanza:

> *Grandmother*, you say.
> *What can I do? What's*
> *left of your daughter's*
> *full face is falling*
> *through my arms like snow*. (227)

Moses' third poem, "Blue Moon," also finds a consolatory image in the skies, this time not for the troubles of a sibling, but for the loss of elders.

Two more poems also caught my ear on a reviewer's first few readings. Jim Tallosi's "Four Dancers" delicately choreographs the winds that dance through his spare quatrains, and Bruce Chester's "Eagles Caught Salmon" includes a memorable conversation:

> I talk with a raven.
> She is wise but has fallen
> silent
> I trace her throat

with the inverse curve
of a finger
asking to hear more
knowing I will if patient. (182)

Finally, two useful review articles conclude the volume, one an omnibus review of recent histories, fiction, anthologies and poetry by and about Native Canadians, and the second, reviewing an ambitious study of "white" writing on the indigene in Canada, Australia and New Zealand. This second review, "Sucking Kumaras," by Gary Boire, impressed me by its remarkable capacity to discuss authoritatively not only the works treated in Terry Goldie's study, but to control the theoretical ideas supporting Goldie's search for political ideologies in three literatures. Boire, like Bringhurst, is a writer I would like to read again.

This review should make it clear that *Native Writers and Canadian Writing* is an indispensable volume. In searching for its equivalent in south-of-the-border Native American literary criticism and poetry, one would have to assemble a whole shelf of books. Brian Swann's *Smoothing the Ground* and Swann and Krupat's *Recovering the Word* are focussed wholly on recovery and interpretation of oral tradition materials, a task only two essays in the Canadian volume undertake. Several modern works take up white images of "Indians," notably Roy Harvey Pearce's *Savagism and Civilization* (1967), Richard Slotkin's *Regeneration Through Violence* (1973) and Nancy B. Black's and Bette Weidman's *White on Red: Images of the American Indian* (1976); numerous anthologies provide poems and prose, even by region, as in the recent *Dancing on the Rim of the World: An Anthology of Northwest Native American Writing* (1990), edited by Andrea Lerner. The Canadian volume pays ample attention to contemporary Native Canadian women writers, for which our equivalent is Rayna Green's *That's What She Said* (1984) and all the work of Paula Gunn Allen in criticism. But the Canadian volume is unique in two ways: its confident employment of literary theory as it applies to Native literature in essays and reviews, and its interesting development of new genres of reportage, as in the Ridington piece discussed earlier and Victoria Freeman's presentation of the Baffin Writers' Project. This book is evidence of great critical intelligence and high morale and promises a healthy future for the study and production of Native Canadian literature.

Bette S. Weidman

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Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak. Ed. Laura Coltelli. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1990. $22.50. ISBN 0-8032-1445-6.

Gerald Vizenor tells his interviewer Laura Coltelli: "There isn't any center to the world but a story." In this statement, Vizenor captures what eleven American Indian writers say in different ways as they answer the queries of an Italian scholar who journeyed to the United States to interview them. Each interview is preceded by an introduction which places the writer in a geographical and critical space as well as a spiritual place, a context to assist the reader's understanding of the questions and the answers.

Laura Coltelli teaches American Indian literature at the University of Pisa, and she is a voracious reader. Her questions are probing and insightful, tailored to each of the writers she interviewed. In this collection, we hear the voices of Paula Gunn Allen, Louise Erdrich, Michael Dorris, Joy Harjo, Linda Hogan, N. Scott Momaday, Simon Ortiz, Wendy Rose, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, and James Welch. Each responds to the general questions about working habits, the responses of non-Indian critics, and pan-Indianism and influences on their own work as well as to specific questions designed to elicit explications of their own fiction and poetry. In the Introduction, Coltelli summarizes the issues raised in the interviews; however, it is in the voices themselves that the reader becomes aware of the variety of personalities and the insights each writer brings to the poetry, novels, or essays.

If all of these writers could be assembled as a panel, speaking together of the issues confronting contemporary American Indian writers, many of them would raise the same issues. The audience would have the opportunity to hear both the variety and the similarity of responses and might be surprised by both. N. Scott Momaday argues that all "modern American Indian writing . . . proceeds from the same national experience" and that "[o]ral tradition is at the root of modern American Indian literature." The expressions and reactions to those experiences, however, are varied and reflect the intersections of individual experiences and national histories. Simon Ortiz echoes Momaday's assertions of common origins, and generalizes that American Indians have "compassion and love for land, for people, for all things."

In spite of all the similarities, these writers demonstrate that contemporary American Indians are wonderfully different, and each constructs a modern reality from an individual response to a common past. These are writers who have responded to their Indianness differently, and these distinctions are reflected in their writing. Wendy Rose tells of her urban background, and Simon Ortiz emphasizes the

oral tradition which was so much a part of his growing up in a more traditional setting. Both Paula Gunn Allen and Gerald Vizenor express their concerns about image-making by outsiders, Gunn arguing that Indians must take control of the "image making," and Vizenor taking anthropologists to task for "inventing cultures." Wendy Rose speaks of "white shamanism," the appropriation of Indian cultures by outsiders who seek knowledge of themselves by stealing the heritage of others. Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris, collaborators in their work, are jointly interviewed, giving the reader some insight into how they write and experiment with their own and each other's visions of character and scene.

What becomes clear in these interviews is that Native American literature is multi-ethnic, that Indian lives, cultures, and worldviews cannot be lumped together. The voices of these writers are important. Joy Harjo quotes Audre Lourde, "Your silence will not protect you," and these writers have responded to this admonition. They are not silent; they speak out about their writing, the influences of critics, and their expectations of the future of Native American writing. These eleven writers are among the best of contemporary American authors, and their successes bode well for the future expressions of diversity in American Indian literature.

Gretchen M. Bataille

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Living the Spirit: A Gay American Indian Anthology. Will Roscoe, ed. New York: St. Martin's, 1989. xiv +235 pp., $16.95, ISBN 0-312-03475-X.

A compilation of contemporary, gay, Native American writers is bound to arch a few eyebrows on first encounter, but with a consideration of several recent developments in American life and letters, readers have little occasion for surprise.

Former Secretary Bennett recently stood in the national gates, like Cassandra prophesying literary and literate doom for the nation in the wake of canonical dilution; Professors Hirsch and Bloom in *Cultural Literacy* and *The Closing of the American Mind* gave textual validity to the new fear, and the academy, at such places as Stanford University, found itself enmeshed in heated controversy, battles and suspicions fueled by such second wave, reactionary publications as *ProfScam*. The warning to America became clear: Johnny still can't read, and, even if he could, he wouldn't be reading Shakespeare or the other "classics."

Two camps have rapidly emerged. Accusations have been leveled at the academy for being elitist—and sexist and racist—for propagating the fiction of a core literary curriculum, a "Great Books" list, texts that form the basis of a liberal arts education. Proponents have argued that measures of greatness are cultural standards and that classics embody universal truth, transcending time and place, speaking to the essence of the human condition; replacing John Milton with Alice Walker is intellectual cowardice, indicative of catering to the unwashed, giving students ephemeral, faddish fodder at the expense of substance. Eve endures while Celie vanishes with the morning dew.

The other view is fueled by various groups, both cultural (Blacks, Gays, American Indians) and critical (Marxists, Feminists, New Historicists), who claim that all traditional canons are revisionist and distorting, subjective illusions of a chauvinistic literary star chamber. The regularly anthologized sweep of American literature, for example, mistakenly (perhaps maliciously) gives the impression that American letters date to European immigration and are the province of heterosexual white males from the Judeo-Christian tradition. This fosters disillusion and despair among those not of such a group and unnaturally locks any notion of accessibility into a distant and fictive past.

Obviously, both extreme positions are themselves distortions, and the Philistines are not quite yet at the gates, but the debate has occasioned a revivifying reconsideration of canonical literature and special attention for the literary (and historical) contributions of women and minority writers. Thus, such a work as *Living the Spirit* might be considered a bellwether of a "third wave" of national response.

A second cultural clue is found in a new consideration of the importance of gender in an assessment of creative expression, perhaps the result of the usually quite different agendas inherent in the recent (one dares not say "postmodern") proliferation of theoretical "schools." Each in their own ways, the Feminists, Deconstructionists, Marxists, New Historians, Semioticians, and Phenomenonologists have asked us to consider the position of the individual, most specifically of the woman, in formulating value judgments, which has also sparked interest in the position of the man, leading to the potential for revaluation of a bipolar gender system.

Third is attention recently focused on the notion of "tradition" in American Indian studies, as such intellectual inquiry has escaped from the rigidly defined methods of anthropology and history as academic disciplines. Sparked equally by concern for recent works in the visual arts as well as by the ascendance of "New Age" theological practice, critics and scholars have begun to question the notion of a fixed and immutable Native American cultural and aesthetic tradition (finally recognizing the diverse and multifaceted nature of American Indian

cultures; a reference to something as "Indian" as opposed to, say, Cherokee or Lakota is equivalent to a reference to something similar as "European" as opposed to Swedish or Italian). The question has loomed: can traditional practice and artifact be more accurately viewed as an organic system, fluid and evolving? If not, are not such writers as N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Gerald Vizenor chief among those destroyers of a Native tradition by diluting it with their choices of Anglo-European forms of literary expression?

What emerges from this primal literary soup is such an ethnohistorical study as Walter Williams' 1986 Pulitzer-nominated study, *The Spirit and the Flesh: Sexual Diversity in American Indian Culture*, and literary criticism such as Kenneth Lincoln's 1983 study, *Native American Renaissance*, and Paula Gunn Allen's *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (1986). Finally, in the baroque manner of American publishing, the horse is put before the cart with the appearance of some primary texts in *Living the Spirit*.

The anthology is commendable for many reasons, but its limitations are equally clear. Its thrust is far more socio-political than aesthetic, and its focus is decidedly and traditionally "traditional," but these are not true weaknesses: more accurately, such limits only indicate a need for other works with other intents.

Living the Spirit is tripartite, the first section concerned with contemporary comments and elaborations on Williams' earlier study of the *berdache* tradition in "over 135 North American tribes." The berdache, long reviled from the missionary perspective as an hermaphrodite (and as recently as in such a culturally sensitive and politically correct work as Evan Connell's 1984 *Son of the Morning Star: Custer and the Little Bighorn*), emerges clearly as specifically third and fourth genders, distinct from the male and female. (The "gay" designation of the subtitle ignores the late 1970s political distinction made between gay men and lesbians.) The essays, documents, and poetry assembled here make a convincing case for the normalcy of variations on sexual orientation, as most else, in Native cultures, while suggesting some provocative new approaches to gender study in whatever cultural context.

Part 2, "Gay American Indians Today," is a collection of imaginative texts, in poetry and prose as well as in the narrative tradition. Among this politically oriented group of uneven literary quality, contributions by Paula Gunn Allen, Maurice Kenny, and Chrystos are striking, particularly in the naked anger of the latter's poem, "Today Was a Bad Day Like TB." Few punches are pulled, if few stylistic innovations are evident.

The final section of the volume lists various resources—political, cultural, and literary—for the reader, fulfilling the stated intent of the

Preface by Randy Burns, President of Gay American Indians: "the chance to build bridges between communities, to create a place for gay Indians in both of the worlds we live in, to honor our past and secure our future."

If controversy and dissent in the world of letters can continue to open such windows and expose us to new and important creative voices, both we and the canon will be far healthier for the experience.

Rodney Simard

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The Light on the Tent Wall: A Bridging. Mary TallMountain. Native American Series No. 8. Los Angeles: American Indian Studies Center, U California, 1990. 96 pp., ISBN 0-935626-34-4.

Those readers familiar with Mary TallMountain's work will be pleased to discover *A Light on the Tent Wall: A Bridging*, and those less familiar with her work should take this opportunity to become acquainted. While selections of TallMountain's poems are anthologized in a variety of places, it is difficult to locate a significant amount of her work in collected form. Her first book of poetry, *There is No Word for Goodbye*, is almost impossible to obtain. I tried unsuccessfully to borrow the book through the university inter-library loaning system but discovered that most libraries will not lend it, as it is either stored in the reference section or classified as a rare book. It's a shame that works by Native American writers go so quickly out of print, and for this reason alone readers would do well to procure a copy of TallMountain's most recent publication. Moreover, as there is not an abundance of contemporary writings available written by Alaska Natives, teachers of Native American literatures will find this a useful book for classrooms. It ties together many of the themes common to Native American writings but also is replete with imagery unique to Northern Alaska village life.

The book consists largely of poetry, some new and some previously published, but is introduced with an essay and interspersed with excerpts from *Doyon*, her novel in progress. A short story is also included. The book is divided into five parts —"Outflight," "Years of Shadow," "The Return," "In Early Spring" and "Matrilineal Cycle," which mark a life that can be viewed as both a continuum and a cycle. The experiences portrayed here are ones in which spiritual courage shines through the most troubling circumstances of adoption, separation

from siblings, tribe and homeland, and bouts of alcoholism—themes all too familiar in Native American history. Yet through it all there is a sense of a quiet confidence among a people, a story held close to the heart.

Joy Harjo, on the book's back cover, aptly comments on Mary TallMountain's poetry, noting that each poem works like a track, making a bridge back to the "light on the tent wall." The title poem, dedicated to the narrator's mother, signifies the narrator's birthplace and a metaphorical and spiritual place of creation and renewal–a vision and a memory that sustains her for "a half century," (19) tying her inextricably to her homeland. The tracks created by Mary TallMountain bridge past with present, and despair with hope. The poetry is framed by the opening essay, entitled "Outflight" and suggestive of one of the book's main motifs—that physical loss does not necessarily equal spiritual annihilation. The narrator's outflight from Anchorage to Nulato on the bush plane represents a leaving and a returning, a journey made again and again, both physically and metaphorically.

Tallmountain's poetry manages to combine the gritty language of village life with the ethereal sense of a woman's spiritual connection to her people. A sense of communal sharing weaves in and out of TallMountain's poetry and prose. In "The Potlatch," an excerpt from *Doyon*, the narrator describes the community coming together to prepare the feast: "The women had cooked all morning. There were three or four hundred birds. Everybody was at Nulato, and boatloads from Koyukuk and Kaltag kept landing from up and downriver. Families came with sacks of sweets and bread along the boardwalk" (16).

TallMountain's background in poetry enhances her narratives in which sights, sounds and tastes are vividly portrayed, making me, admittedly, homesick for Alaska. "Summer Camp" is especially evocative of Alaskan imagery: "Salmon dangled in crimson curtains between old silver-grey posts. Thin blue threads floated out of the smokehouse . . . When salmon were running, black bears lumbered down to the water and hooked them out with thick sharp claws" (81).

With the vibrant sights and sounds of life in interior Alaska, imagery in other pieces is connected to the deserts and cities of the southwest. The final poem, "Out of Distant Time," weaves between the arctic and the desert, suggestive of the link between all Native American peoples.

> all night I expected her approach
> at dawn the mandala moon slipped away
> late in the tense sunset I heard
> banshee wind rose beyond the valley

neighbors lock themselves in
glass patio doors slam
white faces press the windowpanes
caged behind the walls

she straddles the huddled mesas
clouds of her ochre-streaked hair
swirl across the rainless desert
like first arctic snow of tribal memory . . .

in my parka I flatten to the outer door
breathless in her awesome presence
my hair rises in the pulsate air
fast my heart veins swift with blood . . . (91)

Significantly, it is the banshee wind, a female spirit in Gaelic folklore whose wailing warns of impending death, that roars both in the arctic and the desert. "Matrilineal Cycle," the section in which this poem is a found, underscores the role that Native American women play in maintaining cultural strength. It is the memory and strength of women that sustain the narrator in her spiritual quest for wholeness.

In all, an engaging book and one that should be welcomed by poetry aficionados as well as teachers and scholars of Native American literatures. I look forward to the completion and publication of Mary TallMountain's novel, *Doyon*.

Jeane Coburn Breinig

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Fire Water World. Adrian C. Louis. Albuquerque: West End Press, 1989. 69 pages, $6.95 paper, ISBN 0-931122-51-1

The separation of the words "fire" and "water" in the title of Adrian C. Louis' book of poems *Fire Water World* is significant, for it focuses the attention upon the elements themselves, rather than upon the alcohol association when combined into "firewater." Fire and water both purge and cleanse; fire is associated with passion and anger, and water clarifies. Louis' imagery and lyrical language manifest all these associations without omitting obvious references to alcohol and other problems stemming from the damage inflicted by the dominant culture.

The title poem, "Fire Water World," reveals this clarifying and purging quality of Louis' poetry. He addresses an uncle who is "coughing blood / and thinking of thirty years past." He concludes

Your words would flow in endless meaning
if you were whole
but in the stillness of your shrunken soul
you rub your manhood with uneasy breath
and whisper sweet nothings at the jester death.
An owl says hooo . . . Who is not afraid?
My feathered answer is only me.
My balls click deftly in my drawers and I bow
to the endless liquor stores
who have given us courage and death.

The beauty of the rhythms, rhymes and assonances (flow, whole, soul; breath, death [two times], then drawers, stores) lends authority to the unflinching severity of vision, the merciless eye upon the dreadful toll that has been exacted. Louis is eloquent. He utilizes all the skill of his obviously impressive training as a poet to speak of the "Hell" (his word) about him.

Louis realizes to a large extent the lyric potential of the English language without betraying Indian culture at the same time. "Something About Being an Indian" reveals this cultural dilemma which is borne particularly by those who become educated.

Something About Being an Indian

There's something about being an Indian
we say to each other in a Bishop saloon
both of us forty with pony tails

grown down long to our Levi butts.
Yes, brother, it is the heart, and it is
the blood that we share.
The hear alone is not enough.

There's something about being an Indian
we say in soft whiskey voices that remember
many soft, brown women.
We laugh past the window and its vision
of constant traffic, the aimless yuppies
bound for the ski lodges.
Snow must be licentious for such fools:
white sheets to be soiled with temporal chill.
Yes, there's something about being an Indian
we say as we exit into the warmth
of Hell's secondary nature,
a place we call the Fire Water World.

Those "aimless yuppies" who use snow licentiously, "white sheets to be soiled with temporal chill," are at the crux of the cultural difference,

for the whites attack and exploit nature and all those who see themselves in a dependent relationship to the earth, including Indians. Hence the exit in the poem into the "Fire Water World." The Indians, the poem acknowledges, share heart and blood, and cultural identity which whites cannot, and this manages to escape the invasiveness of white culture whose members look elsewhere. The exit at the end is not an exit to oblivion, but to a vision in which Louis's voice continues describing the relentless realities revealed throughout the book.

It is a voice which can be angry, terrifying, and even at times funny. Examples include "a fat, red candle/bitch-bound inside a bourbon bottle," ("The Hemingway Syndrome"), and from "Thanksgiving Feast," a poem about a store-bought turkey, "I cradled you in my arms / and carried your plump body home . . . I didn't want to eat you / but you forced me to . . . / We were the only skins in the neighborhood."

The urgency of such a vision springs from language that realizes the lyric potential of White speech while acknowledging the superficial values often underlying it: "I left the reservation and went to college / and learned that stream of consciousness was passe" ("Near Eighteenth Street"). In the very next poem Louis writes "Then, when I was old enough / I ran back to Indian land. / Now I'm thinking of running from here" (21). "Here" is the Pine Ridge reservation in South Dakota where Louis, a Lovelock Paiute who trained at Boston University, teaches in the English Department at Oglala Lakota College.

In poem after poem Louis's sure eye guides a hand no less sure in making these poems sing: "Namanah, Grandfather, grant me the grace / of a new song far from this lament / of lame words and fossils of a losing game" ("The Sacred Circle"). It is honesty that lends an integrity to this book which deserves a secure place in American literature, an honesty of the elements of fire and water which clarity and purge.

Roger Weaver

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Smaller Circles. Roxy Gordon. Dallas, TX: WOWAPI, 1990. 37pp., $3.50 paper.
Crazy Horse Never Died. Roxy Gordon. Mesquite, TX: Paperbacks Plus Press, 1989. 21 pp., $3.50 paper, ISBN 0-942186-03-6.
Unfinished Business. Roxy Gordon. Dallas, TX: WOWAPI, 1985. 32 pp., $3.50 paper.
Breeds. Roxy Gordon. Austin, TX: Place of Herons Press, 1984. 66 pp., ISBN 0-916908-27-5 (paper), ISBN 0-916908-28-3 (cloth).

Initially this West Texas poet, artist and writer seems very much alive and at times very near the point of verbal explosion, especially when he catches a glimpse of what life might sometimes become. "God Jesus Christ God Almighty! If that's what survival's all / about, then maybe I ain't so interested" ("Unfinished Business" in the volume by that name). The outburst is caused by a visit to a retirement home, but the poem is still about surviving, as well as about an odd-ball woman in his life and about Choctaws in general.

Roxy Gordon's poetry, to me, seems more than usual a poetry of attrition, as though either misfits or members of a lost generation are simply marching blithely towards a sad conclusion. The few who do survive and those who disappear present a somewhat paradoxical situation in terms of overall intent. The former seem influenced by the sleazy sub-culture of the sixties; the latter have disruptive or tragic experience and are never seen again.

The leitmotifs of both Gordon's verse and verse comments seem to be an undefined Choctaw heritage and the cowboy ballads (freely adapted) of the frontier maverick. "Come all you, Texians, / whoever you may be. / I'll tell to you some troubles / that happened to me" v("The Texas Indian," *Crazy Horse Never Died*). The "Texians" may well gather round, if only to hear the line given to the Indians: "The Rangers kept on coming; / Black Eyes led us on. / 'Remember men,' he shouted, / 'We are fighting for our home.'" Replay—yes, an anachronism, but also horny toad, West Texas doggerel. Fortunately, this egregious effort is one of only a few, but it does suggest the outer limits of Gordon's verse—the jaded, young cowboy standing on one leg playing his guitar with two strings missing.

The drugs, the violence, the slight lisp in the verse—so what is my first and final response to this poet's work? The appeal initially seems directed at the young, the half-blind, and the desperate, which necessarily, must leave the rest of us old fogies—the cut-off year must be about twenty-five—out in the cold. Why is this so? Since these acts of violence are mostly unnecessary and the chemicals spoken of are not good for dieting, then *nada*, they must be designed for simplified intellects or to promote king-size headaches. The verse itself does come

across as partly stoned; therefore, there is some consistency.

And strange things do happen in all four volumes, especially in *Smaller Circles*. The title refers to a horse, with someone on it, of course, going in smaller circles: "You ran your horse in smaller circles, / the feather in your hair, / flying in the wind." Unexplained; I gather that it is a symbol meaning disappearance, specifically, the disappearance of an old flame. In these booklets old flames are constantly being extinguished—someone named Judy, who must have the forbearance and stamina of Job—seems to be the one who survives, endures, continues: "Judy threw the feather & earring at me & screamed what an idiot I am. She said Quanah Parker (the old Comanche chief, not my 10 year old kid) might have had 5 wives at once, but they all loved him." She is, of course, right. Instead of tequila and hanky-panky in the back of a pickup truck (which is the subject of one poem—"Love"), where is the honest tribute to Judy?

But sincerity in other areas and a sense of stark reality are qualities associated with Gordon's poetry (which is more effective, I think, than his prose). The poem entitled "I Dreamed I Saw Joe Hill Last Night, Alive As You or Me" can only be called a psychological shocker, the utterance of a juvenile misfit (yet it was written, of course, by a disciplined poet and thinker. If this seems a contradiction, then give some consideration to the superb drawings and remember the maverick factor). In the same volume is a short poem that makes a cryptic philosophical statement: "Los Angeles is an Indian, / New York City ain't." And as the poem comes to an end—"Living is Indian, / expecting to live forever ain't" ("Indians" in *Smaller Circles*).

The fact that *Indians* as a generic term serves as a vehicle for such thoughts is always a bit astounding. Dixie has never stopped harping upon its glory days and Indians have never stopped attacking the wagon train—all in the imagination. Just say Indian and this excuses someone from being a jazzbo, last-of-the-Mohicans fliggertygibbet. Neither group from the past can actually speak for itself. I believe the latter group should be entitled to a question, such as "This umbrella called Geronimo—just how broad is it, after all?"

Mixed bloods traditionally have had an option. Certainly that option applies to the character Lea in *Breeds*. She belongs both to the meagre Oklahoma homestead and to the massage parlors of the big D. Her life comes through as pathetic but real; a person whose only asset is her body. "So we seem," Gordon writes in his first essay, "to be back to Jamake Highwater's definition of Indian as one who declares himself so. Certainly the breed who is driven to choose, of all possible alternatives, the Indian way is likely to be an Indian of some conviction."

I would agree. And it is that choice that finally makes Roxy Gordon worth reading because these poems very possibly speak of a road young

people should get off of as quickly as possible. Can this message be isolated in this poetry? It is a moot question in any case. The dystopian vision which is (seemingly) incoherently projected does have human interest appeal because it is a story-telling, or semi-epic, poetry which already has a certain niche in the marketplace. Since it is the poet and writer's duty to give his or her chosen material persuasive life, the reader must perforce add the moral, or the bottom line. Therefore, this verse, these poems, these stories are not well done but are of interest because they speak for a widespread, disenfranchised group. Since they may appeal to idealistic, unformed minds, teachers, I suspect, will find them useful, while the oldsters for their part may be pleasantly surprised, but perhaps not. Read for yourself, then decide.

Charles Ballard

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Lakota Woman. Mary Crow Dog with Richard Erdoes. New York: Harper Perennial, 1990. 263 pp., ISBN 0-8021-1101-7.

Unless you are reading Malraux or Dostoevsky, you should not expect that love stories make good political sense. Certainly, if you are reading Richard Erdoes' latest, *Lakota Woman*, you must prepare for uninformed political discussion, dishonest cultural and historical interpretation, and the vision of a woman more deeply committed to the reputation of her husband as a Sioux medicine man than to history or self.

Lakota Woman, one presumes, is published for the purpose of adding to the plethora of works about American Indians which pass for scholarship and are generally called "ethno-biography," "ethnographic-biography," or "as told to" autobiographies of native peoples achieved through interview and translation by writers, journalists, photographers, and sometimes even scholars in the fields related to Native American Studies. This book catalogued as "Autobiography/Women's Interest," is the second such work by Erdoes, the Viennese-Hungarian emigre, artist and photographer who began writing about Indians when he came to this country, befriended Stan Steiner of *New Indians* fame, and realized that Karl May's Noble Winnetou was "an anthropological failure" (*Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions, 1972*). The two friends, since then, have relentlessly pursued their interests in Indians, the result being that they have become for much of the reading public in this country and, unfortunately, the scholarly world, the new image-makers

in contemporary Native America.

The chapter headings in *Lakota Woman* reveal a diverse mixture of anger ("We AIM Not To Please"), history ("Canke Pi Wakpala"), injustice and outrage ("The Eagle Caged" and "Two Cut-Off Hands"), and close with a two-page Epilogue which, like that mimeographed Christmas card you loathe to see in the mailbox, brings us up to date: "Pedro just had his 19th birthday. Dennis Banks runs a limousine service in Rapid City." Twenty-one photos are included, most of them taken two decades ago.

The book attempts to define and describe the life of an individual Lakota woman in the context of the American Indian Movement era. Two things obscure its objective.

First, there is little or no information given in this woman's story which assists in the examination of the *REASONS* for the Indian resistance in the sixties and seventies called the American Indian Movement. To suggest, as this writer does, that the movement was the result of not having flush toilets on the reservation or the unexplained appearance at Pine Ridge of white hippies who tell the people about Black Panthers, Young Lords, and the Weathermen, is to reduce one of the most important periods of time in all of contemporary Indian history to cliché.

There is absolutely no mention in the entire text of the Federal Indian Policy of the fifties which brought about the "Termination and Relocation" laws passed by Congress which decimated Indian communities and reduced Indian land holdings all over the country, dislocating thousands of people in an urbanization policy still going on. There is no mention of the federally sponsored projects which harnessed the Missouri River in several hydro-power dams and flooded 550 square miles of Sioux lands, the subsequent economic debacle and its effects upon the people. Moreover, to maintain the idea that the American Indian Movement's significance in the sixties wa religious rather than political makes way for the outrageous desecration of Lakota religious ideals and "plastic New Age" medicine man cults springing up everywhere in the nineties.

The second problem is that there is little discussion by the biographee and no analysis by the biographer of the broad cultural milieu in which the radicalization of young women like Mary—children, really—took place in the AIM decade of the sixties. The male chauvinism of the movement is virtually ignored in this biography, and that makes it dishonest to the core. The concubinage of young Indian women by men, both Indian and White, during this period was an anxious subject in reservation communities and was discussed by important scholars and grass roots people alike at Indian gatherings, meetings, conferences from NCAI to homes and community school boards all over the

country; yet, this writer suggests that the radical behavior of young AIM women bearing nameless children in some kind of warrior-cult was widely accepted as and believed to be a "sacred" business.

Indeed, one of the most sacred events in a Lakota woman's life, birthgiving, becomes a political act and is described as an honorable contribution to the revolution. No Lakota or Dakota who understands the function of a woman's and a man's reproductive responsibility would confuse the sacred with the political in such a way. It is one of the disappointments to this reviewer that Erdoes fails in his obligation as a chronicler and analyst of events, to examine this crucial idea in its appropriate cultural and historical setting. Moral insight is as important to a biographer as are accuracies concerning the lessons of history.

The people Erdoes finds to write about are attractive, courageous people. We empathize with them because they are struggling with their fate, they are trying to escape the poverty of their lives, and we are convinced, in *Lakota Woman*, that the truth of this individual life says something important about the cultural experiences of Lakota women, or Indian women in general. For that reason, we may predict that this book will be exceedingly popular in Women's Studies departments everywhere. Yet, the stereotypes abound: "The best always die young." "Being a full-blood or a breed is not a matter of bloodline." "Even the most white-manized Sioux is still half-horse." "The good Indians die first." "Free enterprise has no future on the res." "We are a good people for dying." The Indians in Crow Dog's discussions often become caricatures of themselves. When she speaks for all of us, she says, "If you are an Indian woman you have to fight all the time against brutalization and sexual advances."

The final pages of the book are taken over by the discussion of "civil rights" issues concerning the aftermath of the Wounded Knee takeover and shootout, sounding more like the voice of Erdoes than his subject. This Kuntsler-Erdoes-Matthiessen-like view of the world gives uninformed readers the idea that there is nothing more important to the Sioux than Crow Dog's incarceration, the unsolved murder of Anna Mae, and Leonard Peltier's trial; that "civil rights," not "treaty rights," compel the Sioux to behave as they do. Dismissed as corrupt or trivial, the Sioux Nation and its attendant tribal governments—whose elected officials today fight off the State Attorney General's attacks upon its sovereignty, actively and strategically resist the exploitation of its resources and the assimilation of its people, and work daily for the return of its stolen lands—fades into the romanticized spiritual redemption of a woman who loves a man.

Indians everywhere were consumed by the American Indian Movement of the sixties and seventies. It was a panoramic, epochal period which we will not see again in our lifetimes. It is truly unfortu-

nate that the most divisive and dangerous years in contemporary American Indian history are so poorly served in this ethno-graphic biography.

Elizabeth Cook-Lynn

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Western Apache Language and Culture: Essays in Linguistic Anthropology. Keith H. Basso. Tucson: U of Arizona P, 1990. 175pp., $32.50 cloth. ISBN 0-8165-1094-6.

Keith Basso began work at Cibecue, a Western Apache Community in east central Arizona, in 1959 and has centered his scholarly life on exploring in increasingly rich and subtle ways the interpenetration of the Apache language and the life and thought of the people of Cibecue. Taken together, the essays in this collection show the author's deepening knowledge of the Western Apache, his increasing skill in showing the reader how he has come to understand, and relating that knowledge to theoretical issues in linguistic anthropology.

During a discussion of the last two papers in this book in a recent class, a graduate student asked "Is this good science? It's so well written, like a good novel." I'm not sure my answer entirely convinced him that good ethnography could be a pleasure to read. But it is Keith Basso's ability to present analyses of a language and culture as a journey of discovery, which the reader shares with him and the people themselves (whose central role in the journey is never obscured), that has made his *Portraits of the Whiteman* and a number of the papers in this book so widely used in anthropology courses at all levels. Those who have followed Basso's work with the Western Apache over the 21 years covered by these essays (1967-88) will welcome their being brought together in this well designed volume. It enables us to appreciate the range of the work, and their arrangement almost entirely in chronological order allows us to follow Basso's development as a writer.

The development begins with the exceptionally clear expository prose of the first three, more technical, articles. It passes through a growing skill at relating richly contextualized ethnographic description and analysis to current theoretical concerns in the next two chapters, both written in the seventies. In these we hear more often the voices of the Western Apache in conversation with the ethnographer. It is in the final two, closely inter-related chapters written in the eighties, that we

see Basso's mastery of ethnographic writing at its peak. He uses a narrative form, rich in dialogue and setting of scene, to unfold for us the ways in which the Western Apache use narratives and the descriptive place names associated with them to teach and reinforce moral precepts.

The introduction, an insightful overview of the contents and purposes of the volume, is followed by a clear and concise guide to Western Apache pronunciation. "Chapter 1: The Western Apache Classificatory Verb System: A Semantic Analysis" uses the methods of componential analysis to arrive at a set of defining features for each of the thirteen categories distinguished by classificatory verb stems in Western Apache. While the topic calls for detailed technical analysis, Basso's elucidation of the processes by which the analysis was arrived at and his clear statement of the results and their possible theoretical implications make the paper a model of expository prose.

"Chapter 2: Semantic Aspects of Linguistic Acculturation" shows how the Western Apache have transferred to motor vehicles not merely individual terms but their language's whole system of naming human body parts. Apache includes under a term for "man's body" two named sets, "face" (nose and forehead) and "insides" (five internal organs plus veins), in addition to ungrouped terms for limbs, mouth, eye and fat. The terms and their organization are applied to motor vehicles. Thus a car has a "face" which has a "nose" (hood) and "forehead" (windshield). It has "insides" (everything under the hood), including "veins" (electrical wiring), "liver" (battery), "stomach" (gas tank), etc. Its "eyes" (headlights) and "mouth" (gas pipe opening) are not part of its face, just as a human's are not. I use this article every time I teach Native American languages and it continues to delight.

"Chapter 3: A Western Apache Writing System: the Symbols of Silas John" is a call for attention to Native American writing systems, echoing that of Garrick Mallery of the Bureau of American Ethnology in 1888. Basso's answer to that plea is a description and emic analysis of a system of writing that came to Silas John (a well known Apache shaman) in a vision in 1905. In the vision he was given by God a set of sixty-two prayers and a writing system to record and teach them to others. Never to be used for any other purpose, and to be passed on to only a small number of people at any one time, it is still in use in just this way among practitioners of Silas John's religion. The writing system is unusual in that its symbols represent, not sounds or syllables or even single words or concepts, but rather individual lines of the prayers and instructions for the physical behavior to accompany the words. It is a closed system both in what it can represent and in who may learn and use it. Basso cites it as a warning that the well known types of writing systems do not exhaust the possibilities.

"Chapter 4: Wise Words of the Western Apache: Metaphor and Semantic Theory" is an exploration of a type of Apache metaphor called "wise words." These metaphors (e.g. "Lightning is a boy," "Carrion beetles are white men," "Butterflies are girls") are based on *undesirable* qualities of *behavior* shared by the two terms of the metaphor. Basso shows this by actual quotation of conversations in which his proffered explanations, based on non-behavioral and/or desirable qualities, were reacted to as true, of course, but not meaningful or relevant if one is using 'wise words' or trying to interpret them. The chapter also relates Basso's exploration in Apache metaphor to a wide range of theories of metaphor, to the inadequacies he sees in then current theories of transformational grammar, and to what he sees as the need for the broader view of language exemplified in the ethnography of speaking.

"Chapter 5: To Give Up on Words: Silence in Western Apache Culture" is probably the best known study of silence and its uses in a non-western culture. It has become a classic in the ethnography of communication. Reading it almost inevitably starts us thinking about how we use silence and how we interpret it in others. Apache young men and women are silent until they have come to know each other, when they can feel comfortable talking. Our young men and women talk to get to know each other, when they can finally feel comfortable with silence in each other's presence. Exploration of how silence is portrayed in the verbal art of different cultures offers rich possibilities.

"Chapter 6: Stalking with Stories: Names, Places and Moral Narratives Among the Western Apache" and its close companion, "Chapter 7: Speaking with Names: Language and Landscape Among the Western Apaches" are, as suggested earlier, the end-point and high-point of this fine book. It came to me last night that one way to give a sense of them would be the myth form.

> *Basso was going along at Cibecue. He heard the people saying many strange things. He heard them say "The land is always stalking people. The land makes people live right." "I think of that mountain called 'white rocks lie around in a compact cluster' as if it were my maternal grandmother. I recall stories of how it once was at that mountain. The stories told to me were like arrows. Stories go to work on you like arrows." Basso went to ask the old man, "What do these things mean?" And the old man answered "Learn the place names first." So Basso went away, and came back next year, and the old man taught him all the place names, how they paint pictures in the mind, of those places. Then one day the old man said: "Now it is time for the stories." And so Basso learned that there are*

stories for all the place-names. Each one begins "It happened at X one time" and ends "That is what happened at X." And what happened is always something that no Apache should do. And Basso was told, "We stalk people with those stories." He learned that when a story is told it shoots like an arrow at a person in the audience. And that person may learn not to do that bad thing. And whenever he hears that place name or passes that place it reminds him and helps him. And the others who hear that story remember it and remember that place where it happened. And that is how Basso learned at Cibecue, from the people, how stories are arrows and stalk the people.

Chapter 7 explores further the ways in which the Western Apache landscapes, the vivid word-pictures of the place-names, the mere quotation of the opening line of a story (It happened at . . .) all work together to unite landscape, language and the moral universe of the Western Apache. And, in the final words of this book, "On the pictorial wings of place-names imaginations soar."

Virginia Hymes

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Black Elk's Story: Distinguishing Its Lakota Purpose. Julian Rice. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1991. xiii + 159pp., $29.95, ISBN 0-8263-1262-4.

Professor Rice would have Black Elk understood on his own terms and not through the filtered interpretation of his commentators, translators or popularizers, no matter how well meaning. Rice knows Black Elk's world and worldview very well. Nothing in the Lakota horizon escapes him—language, history, customs, rituals, family life, belief and traditions. By recourse to traditional rites and texts, we can come to a truer meaning of Black Elk's lifework than has been possible heretofore with his many commentators. Rice does this abundantly well, even though he weakens his case by resorting to caricatures of Christianity (e.g., 65, 74, 126).

Further, he is also familiar with the Black Elk literary industry, beginning with John C. Neihardt. He reviews this literature and meticulously points out where it has distorted the original significance beyond recognition because observers and commentators were either ignorant of the Lakota world or operating from their own agenda, or

both. Rice praises Neihardt as a stylist and poet, for example, but judges harshly his Christian bias. To say that Euro-centered anthropologists and missionaries were less destructive than, say, soldiers and developers by no means exonerates the former.

Native Americans have had to defend themselves on all fronts, including the religious front, which was forever trying to baptize traditional rituals as well as the people when it was not denouncing or destroying the same people and rituals. Just as the Lakota needed warriors on the battle fields, so they needed spiritual advocates.

Rice pictures Black Elk as a defender of his people and insists that it is only in this way that we can understand his purpose in discussing his work. "Spiritual power exists to protect the people" (126). Black Elk and Crazy Horse both defended the Lakota, though they did it differently because they had different gifts.

By examining the central religious ritual of the Buffalo Dance, Rice provides the key to understanding Black Elk within the Lakota world. "Each Lakota person should be a buffalo person in the sense of being consistently generous, brave, hospitable and willing to sacrifice for the people" (138). Like the bull buffalo, Black Elk employed his power to assure the people's safety. By speaking of—and using—spiritual power with non-Lakota observers, Black Elk was playing a traditional role which escaped that audience. "Drawing on a wide range of metaphors, some of them Christian, Black Elk spoke to protect the people" (163).

Black Elk, a towering figure in the history of religions, spoke stories into being with more than words (102-103). Professor Rice allows us to appreciate even more the debt students of religion owe him in this fine book.

Daniel A. Brown

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