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Pragmatism and American Indian Thought

Sidner Larson

In his book *Tribal Secrets: Vine Deloria, Jr., John Joseph Mathews, and the Recovery of American Indian Intellectual Traditions*, Robert Warrior describes Vine Deloria as being committed to pragmatic politics and involved in "a search, at once pragmatic and idealistic, for answers to the problems of Native communities and the world as a whole" (61-62).

In this sense, pragmatism might be thought of as comparable to Plains Indian philosophies that attempt to create a balance between engaging the world as it is encountered and honoring a world of inherited traditions. This sense of balance is perhaps particularly valuable to current problems facing local and world communities.

In 1903 John Dewey, chair of the Department of Philosophy of the University of Chicago, published an extended discussion of what he had named "instrumental logic," more popularly known as pragmatism. Dewey insisted on a precise description of the interaction between the mind and experience, asserting that philosophy was intimately tied to everyday life and that the philosopher had an obligation to society to use his/her training and ability to help other people. This was very different from the western tradition, within which, from Plato to Hegel, intellectual operations of the mind were thought to reflect some sort of ideal principles of a perfect mind or soul. Dewey's ideas referred to concrete situations in the present environment and dismissed any attempt to establish a correspondence with absolute values (Dewey 8).

This basic definition of pragmatism corresponds in recognizable ways to fundamental American Indian notions of family, community, spirituality, and relationship to environment. Such beliefs may be found in texts such as *Black Elk Speaks*, where sufficient Lakota oral tradition was translated into

print to give a glimpse of sophisticated Plains Indian history, religion, and ceremony. Although reflective of but one of many Indian cultures, *Black Elk Speaks* is especially useful in comparative discussion because of the fact it is one of the better known Indian stories in America.

Speaking of his visions near the end of his life, Black Elk said: "I recall the great vision you sent me . . . hear me that [my people] may once more go back into the sacred hoop and find the good red road, the shielding tree" (33). Black Elk envisioned two intersecting realities, the spiritual world, which he called the Red Road, and the earthly world, which he called the Black Road, roads that come together at the heart of the world through a flowering tree.

Lakota tradition is rich in content articulated in complex images, yet it remains very functional in three important ways. First, the medicine pipe forms the core of a kinship system based on the circle, a unified form promoting balance among all things. All that the Lakota see is in the shape of a hoop, organized into finite divisions such as fourths; for example, four colors, four seasons, four times of day. Additional meanings are organized within these divisions, creating an order that locates the Indian world within a preexisting harmony. For example, the color yellow is associated with the east, where day begins with the yellow sunrise; other stories of beginning might feature an animal transformer, such as a light-colored horse, as metaphor for a reminder, lesson, or warning.

Second, the natural world is made sacred by transformations. One important role of transformers has to do with tempering excess, as illustrated by the fact that being "made sacred" often means providing for the black road of material life to be balanced by the red road of spiritual life. In Black Elk's vision such transformation is represented by "interconnected, renewing life forms in overlapping images, from grandfathers who turn into horses that turn into elk, buffalo, and eagle" (Lincoln 89). These images often take the form of helpers, who counsel temperance or warn of danger.

Third, the Lakota social world derives from the natural world. Place-names such as Pine Ridge describe the physical makeup of a particular location; time is pictured seasonally by moons, for example, Moon When the Red Cherries Are Ripe (July) and Moon of the Popping Trees (December); and stories are told in a language of natural signs, as in *Black Elk Speaks*, when Fire Thunder says of the 1867 Wagon Box Fight, "they shot so fast it [sounded] like tearing a blanket" (14). Utilizing the natural world for sources of meaning ties earthly and human worlds together by association. The details contained within Black Elk's story combine to form a powerful narrative, made so by its reflection of complex tribal metaphysics that may prove helpful to serious problems faced by many societies today.

An example of such metaphysics that is emblematic of the majority of

American Indian societies is the Iroquois idea of community. Scott L. Pratt has analyzed the early writings of Cadwallader Colden, who asserts that Iroquois society presented human beings as fundamentally part of a community rather than as naturally separate beings:

> "Individuals" are defined by their place in the community and are judged by their characters as constructive or destructive in the context of the community. In Colden's view the quality of individuals among the Iroquois is a matter of the esteem in which they are held by others in the community for their actions in support of the community itself. (28)

Colden's view differed significantly from that of other early European thinkers regarding the relationship of individuals to communities. Philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke incorporated observations about Native Americans to establish the idea that human persons in the state of nature are fundamentally self-centered.

Pratt's discovery of this particular conflict is part of his larger suggestion that American Indians may have influenced American philosophy, such as in the case of pragmatism. In addition, the study helps illustrate ways academicians are increasingly considering American Indian intellectual history a valuable resource.

It seems practical that the mystery and destiny unique to this continent are best understood through its oldest inhabitants, the Indians. It also follows that familiarity with their outlooks, as well as with history and science written about them, is necessary to any attempt to understand the meaning and character of this destiny. Fortunately, there are well-developed beliefs, such as those of the Lakota and Iroquois, that can help broaden perspectives toward the natural world and human worldviews, especially where human worldviews have become dangerously unbalanced.

In the context of lack of balance, consider for a moment the largely unresolved genocide perpetrated by Europeans against indigenous peoples of the Americas. Perhaps it is possible to perpetrate such destruction without consequences, but perhaps it is not. Creation stories of American Indians suggest inappropriate behavior such as greed-based violence results in the most dire consequences. From the western plains tribe known as the Gros Ventre comes this admonition against such improper conduct.

> An unknown person, perhaps Nix'ant, became very unhappy with the way people were living. He kicked the ground and water came out and covered the earth. All were drowned but The Crow who flew above, and Nix'ant, who floated on buffalo chips with the chief pipe. Crow and Nix'ant became tired of the water, so Nix'ant unwrapped the pipe, which contained copies of all animals. He sent the Large Loon and

> the Small Loon to dive for mud, but they were unable to bring any to the surface. Then he sent Turtle, who brought up a little earth inside its feet. From this Nix'ant made land. From tears he made water, from the new land he fashioned more people and animals.
>
> [Nix'ant] told the people if they were good there would be no more water and no more fire. (Before the water rose the world had been burned; this now is the third life.) Then he showed them the rainbow, and told them it was the sign that the earth will not be covered with water again, it means the rain has gone by. He also said there will be another world after this one. (Kroeber 59-61)

Nix'ant became angry with the early people because they "did not know how to do anything" and they "lived like animals," according to the stories contained in Regina Flannery's *The Gros Ventres of Montana*. From the culture of the eastern Iroquois comes a similar story that further clarifies problematic behavior.

> An intermediary figure in the form of a Sky-Woman arrives in a place to make a dwelling for those who need it. Animals help her by diving for earth, or oeh-da, then bear her down to it on their wings. She is called Ata-en-sic, and is pregnant.
>
> The oeh-da grew rapidly and had become an island when Ata-en-sic, hearing voices under her heart, one soft and soothing, the other loud and contentious, knew that her mission to people the island was nearing.
>
> To her solitude two lives were coming, one peaceful and patient, the other restless and vicious. The latter, discovering light under the mother's arm, thrust himself through, to contentions and strife, the right born entered life for freedom and peace.
>
> Foreknowing their powers, each claimed domination and a struggle between them began, Hah-gweh-di-yu claiming the right to beautify the island, while Hah-gweh-da-et-gah determined to destroy. Each went his way, and where peace had reigned discord and strife prevailed. (Converse 32-34)

In the Gros Ventre story, generally bad behavior is said to have caused the destruction of the world, and the people are admonished not to repeat their mistakes. In the Iroquois story the definition of bad behavior is spelled out as being a devaluation of life: "for any slight offense a man or a woman was killed by his enemy. . . . At night none dared to leave their doorways lest they be struck down by an enemy's club" (Parker 17).

According to their stories, the Iroquois were eventually able to recover equilibrium when the good brother was able to defeat the bad brother by singing him a song of peace, but overcoming self-interest and violence in

order to restore harmony was an extremely difficult thing to do.

These mythic stories are made relevant by parallels in modern times. For example, Philip Gourevitch, in a recent discussion of selfish and violent behavior in Rwanda, Africa, compares Rwanda's social, political, and economic structures to criminal syndicates. Gourevitch describes how, from a workable tribal society prior to German intervention in 1897, Rwanda's postcolonial civil bureaucracy became efficiently organized into pyramids of patron-client relationships, as in what has come to be known as the mafia. This organizational pattern was so rigidly structured that when its chief patron was assassinated, there was nobody else to assume leadership, and Rwandans insanely murdered what is thought to be nearly a million fellow-countrymen.

This genocide happened, Gourevitch concludes, because, "far from being part of the failed state syndrome that appears to plague some parts of Africa, Rwanda was too successful as a state" (87). It is ironic that a society can actually be too successful; it is tragic that Rwandan transformation from a reciprocal and distributive people to worshippers of private ownership and consumption has resulted in mass murder.

A primary vehicle for the transformation of reciprocal peoples into worshippers of private ownership and consumption is a corresponding violent transformation of reality by language. One outcome of this kind of fundamental disrespect for language is explained by a Rwandan lawyer, who said, "He loved the Cartesian, Napoleonic legal system, on which Rwanda's is modeled, but he said that it didn't correspond to Rwandan reality" (93). The Rwandan system is "petty," the lawyer explained, full of chronic liars who try to tell everyone what they imagine they want to hear in order to maintain their own game and get what they are after.

There are disturbing similarities between the situations of Rwandans and other contemporary societies. For example, America lives with chronic misinformation generated by the advertising of rapacious capitalism, and, most unfortunately, by the stories of its own leaders. Although there is no mistaking misuse of the power of words when businessmen and other leaders lie openly to get what they are after, it is encouraging to know that such power can also be used for good.

A pragmatic approach to this duality suggests engaging the world as it is found today, on a level equal with that of the world of inherited presumptions. To do so, we must also disengage from the mystifications, creeds, and dogmas that have blinded us to the full potential of the present moment in its unfolding and infinite possibilities.

A striking example of disengaging from mystification is found in a recent dialogue between a formerly high-ranking representative of Soviet Russia and an American journalist. When the former head of the Russian

K.G.B. was asked if he felt Russia should repent for past injustices, he replied, "If there has to be repentance, then let everyone repent. . . . You should repent for what you've done to the Indians. I haven't heard that from you. If you repent, we will, too" (Remnick 43). In this instance, face-to-face communication penetrated decades of mystification, creeds, and dogmas to reveal one of the reasons for Russian distrust of America.

Another instance of pragmatic analysis of dogma is explained in accounts of arguments of so-called revisionists, who claim that the Nazi gas chambers never existed. Ian MacKenzie has observed that while such outrageous beliefs may never be fully understood, they can be clarified and countered, rather than being rationalized as part of the uncontrollably figural nature of language.

MacKenzie begins with Paul de Man's conclusion that knowledge is contained in written texts rather than empirical facts (284). Because such knowledge is written, it is vulnerable to re-writing. The self-fashioned symbols that form the language of knowledge, the primary way of knowing whatever there is to be known, thus exist as what Wallace Stevens called a fiction—a coherent and meaningful, but all-too-human, construction.

Continuing a line of de-emphasis of Enlightenment rationalism is Richard Rorty's pragmatic acceptance of the necessity of constant re-descriptions of the world. Emphasis is placed on how these redescriptions function and how they are an effective tool for those who would hope their redescriptions will be taken up by others. Imagination, metaphor, and self-creation, in contrast to rationality and argument, are offered as the most effective methods of redescriptions with potential for cultural change (285).

Examples of redescriptions are described thus: "The major narrative forms of Holocaust texts are the diary, the memoir, the historian's 'factual' text, and the novel" (288). The diary is said to impose the temporal order of hours, days, or weeks; the memoir is contextualized by its ending; and novels of the Holocaust incorporate memoirs as documentary material because of their quality of authority.

In addition, in support of autobiographical forms, ideas that selfhood and will need to be eliminated as a means of avoiding gratuitous and irresponsible texts are subordinated to the value of constituting and preserving self as a moral force through writing. MacKenzie emphasizes this by strongly suggesting the technicalities of argumentation, a strategy used by revisionist historians of the Holocaust, can be overcome by similarly strong redescription stressing "the necessarily narrative nature of understanding and how this determines expression" (291).

MacKenzie's discussion of the significance of stories and how they are told, and of imagination rather than reason as the central human faculty, echoes the work of many contemporary American Indian writers, especially

writers of disturbing memoirs, such as Wendy Rose and Janet Campbell Hale. Also, consider Leslie Marmon Silko's pragmatic account of language in her 1977 novel *Ceremony*:

I will tell you something about stories,
[he said]
They aren't just entertainment.
Don't be fooled.
They are all we have, you see,
all we have to fight off
illness and death.

You don't have anything
if you don't have the stories.

Their evil is mighty
but it can't stand up to our stories.
So they try to destroy the stories
let the stories be confused or forgotten.
They would like that
They would be happy
Because we would be defenseless then.

He rubbed his belly.
I keep them here
[he said]
Here, put your hand on it
See, it is moving.
There is life here
for the people.

And in the belly of this story
the rituals and the ceremony
are still growing. (2)

It has been the stories of American Indians, more than anything else, that has allowed them to survive in the face of such destructive forces as policies of extermination, allotment, and assimilation. Richard Rorty has captured the essence of such survival in his observation that "a talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change" (7).

Examination of existing American Indian literatures reveals a pragmatic and humanist authorial personality determined to constitute and preserve American Indians by writing. In addition, however, much critical work remains to be done. First, narrative history written by and about American Indians needs to be reviewed. To continue to avoid truly reckoning with the genocide perpetrated upon the original inhabitants of the Americas is to perpetuate dangerous falsehoods. To accept the band-aids offered by

superficial legislation and a few token legal decisions as a palliative to such destruction is to become even further deluded.

Second, those works received as fiction need to be analyzed far beyond the usual structuralist and romantic concerns used to legitimize them to mainstream audiences. They then need to be put into current context, and interpreted as part of a coherent body of work. There is a rich vein of American Indian fiction that has done a superb job of recovering important elements of cultures and identities. As suggested by Jack Forbes, however, there has not been a set of criteria generated from that body of work that is also forward-looking in terms of being responsive to the political needs of indigenous peoples.

Third, hard questions need to be addressed concerning the responsibility of Indian intellectuals to indigenous people living less fortunate lives in reservation and urban communities. Within this process special attention needs to be paid to the questions articulated by Robert Warrior: 1) what should the roles of intellectuals be in the struggle for American Indian freedom? 2) what are the sources we should use in developing an American Indian criticism? 3) do these approaches allow us to reflect in our work the actually-lived, contemporary experiences of American Indian people? (84).

Political needs may be better understood in light of Jonathan Boyarin's analysis of the relations of Jews and Indians in *Storm from Paradise: The Politics of Jewish Memory*. Boyarin discusses how European and American mainstreams create fascinated images of and eulogize the other's victim, and the juxtaposition of "native" voices inside the respective empires as a way of resisting (9-10). Boyarin does not mince words, stating that contrasting fictions by French Jew Patrick Odiano and American Indian Gerald Vizenor are "the voices of survivors, written after genocide, on the soil of genocide" (12).

The problem of the genocide perpetuated against the indigenous peoples of the Americas, to say nothing of the scope of that genocide, as documented by David Stannard in *American Holocaust,* has yet to be fully understood. Nor has there been sufficient discussion of the continued genocide under which most of the survivors of the American Holocaust still exist. Until American Indians can speak of such things as directly as does Jonathan Boyarin on behalf of Jewish people, they will not have fully recovered their sacred duty to community, and their discourse will be incomplete.

Robert Edwards has observed similarities in the thinking of Tolstoy and the American pragmatist John Dewey: "Tolstoy claimed that the masses of working people have been living according to the true teachings of Christ, Confucius, Moses and other spiritual masters. They have known all along to seek happiness by putting first the good of others" (22). Edwards also notes Dewey's goal in educational reform was to transform education by

basing it in lived experience (26).

Seeking individual happiness by prioritizing the good of others echoes the manner in which Iroquois society emphasized the role of human beings as part of a community rather than as individuals. John Dewey's educational goal of balancing the world of ideas with lived experience is similar to much older Lakota notions of balancing the black and red roads of earthly and spiritual existence.

The rampant decline of concepts of community, with attendant devaluation of life, runs contrary to the most strident warnings of our oldest literatures. One way this trend can be countered and redescribed is to instill in intellectuals an obligation to use their observations and investigations to help effect the good of the human community.

Black Elk's wish that people once more go back into the sacred hoop and John Dewey's admonition, "The saint sits in his ivory tower while the burly sinners run the world" (Edman 23), are both expressions of pragmatic thought. Such pragmatism is hopeful not only in the ways it illustrates connection between two disparate cultures, but for the methodology it might provide to conduct a search, at once pragmatic and idealistic, for answers to the problems of Native communities and the world as a whole.

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Walking with Jim Northrup and Sharing His "Rez"ervations

Roseanne Hoefel

After walking and talking with Jim Northrup during his visits both to LaVonne Brown Ruoff's 1994 NEH Seminar, "American Indian Literatures: Cultural and Literary Contexts," and to Alma College campus the following year, I have come to believe one of Northrup's main goals is to tell his story from the inside out. Too often his people's story has been uttered or constructed—falsely or partially—from the outside in. According to Northrup, the discrepancies in the Anishinaabe story accrue to the sad fact that those who've actually lived it have not had the opportunity to tell it or to be heard. "What I want to do is tell the real stories, the real pain of my people," he told my American Indian Literature classes in February, 1995. In his poetry and short fiction collection, *Walking the Rez Road*, Northrup voices these stories: of surviving the Vietnam War; of the fishing and ricing custom on his Fond du Lac Reservation where he leads a traditional Anishinaabe life; of their recreation, as in "Bingo Binge"; and of their relationships, as between Luke and his wife Paneque, who mutually don "their listening faces," modeling for readers the attentiveness and respect these testimonies merit.

"Testimonies" is a term I use advisedly, for Northrup employs everyday language and rejects conventional euphemisms in ways that allow the reader to bear witness to crucial moments, through such pivotal characters as Luke Warmwater (allegedly named for the author's promiscuous uncle who signed into hotels under this pseudonym) and Ben Looking Back (whose name is rich in suggestion and double entendre). For example, in "Holiday Inndians," Luke and his cousin meet an overweight woman named June. Butch

thinks she is so big "she could be called June, July and part of August" (65). Unspoken yet authentic, this candid thought suggests the disbelief on his face as he reaches for another beer. In "War Talk," one of the many interspersed poems that punctuate the short stories thematically, a predatory journalist asks a vet how it felt to see friends killed; he replies, "Get the fuck out of my face," conveying his justifiable rage at the increasingly absurd line of questioning. As Northrup informed my classes, he is cognizant and respectful of the power of such language; that is, he doesn't use obscenity, to borrow his phrase, "just to get away with being a potty mouth."

Clearly, Northrup is keenly aware, as well, of the impact of his structural choices. In spite of the fact that his misguided publishing agent had advised him that there was little, if any, market for multiple genre work, he submitted his manuscript of poems and short stories a day before the deadline, knowing full well such timing would not permit the press's alteration. The prefatory poems invite reader input, especially open and conducive as they are to varied interpretation, yet impressing upon the reader an underlying theme embedded and developed in the story that follows. This format fosters new ideas and the consideration of related issues; in "shrinking away," the poem that opens the collection, for instance, the speaker has "survived the war, but was / having trouble surviving the peace" due to "nightmares, daymares / guilt and remorse" and the V.A. saying that "Vietnam wasn't a war" (8-9). Exploiting the rich ambiguity of the title, Northrup's speaker is referred to a psychiatrist who charges $50/hour, when he is making a mere $125/week, to tell Luke *his* problems and then, later, to burden Luke with the renewed guilt of the psychiatrist's suicide after Luke stops seeing him.

Realizing in the penultimate line that "surviving the peace was up to [him]," Luke launches into a graphic and bone-chilling, nightmarish flashback entitled "Open Heart with a Grunt," wherein we are confronted with the blood and gore and excruciating agony of war, its victims, and its helpless witnesses, embodied in the "gray marine" who frequently visits Luke's nightmares. Herein, in addition to the unforgettable depiction of the grunt's instruction to pump and pulse a dying comrade's organs, we learn that time stops during the insanity of such moments indelibly etched in the future veteran's mind and heart, "trapped inside their minds with the memories of what they saw,heard and felt," creating his dire need for intense coping skills. What's new here, perhaps only hinted at in the preceding poem, is the gross injustice of domino-effect death, which does not permit the outward expression of mourning. Death's relentless immediacy necessitates that the grief and loss be internalized (and repressed), even when "[t]ime returned to normal as the doctor came out and told them the gray marine died on the table. They got back into the chopper for the return

to the scene of the firefight" (13).

Not surprisingly, Northrup elaborates upon such endless horrors in two poems and stories that follow. "Wahbegan" is a eulogy to his brother who "died in the war / but didn't fall down / for fifteen tortured years," finally relieving himself of his misery by walking into traffic. "How about a memorial," the speaker asks, "for those who made it / through the war / but still died / before their time?" (14), particularly since almost two times the number who died in the Vietnam War met their end through suicide.

In the second of these two,"Mine of Mine," readers are on the edge of their seats as Luke walks point, "a pedestrian's nightmare" Northrup's ironic wit interjects. Moreover, this is a nightmare reserved especially for Native American pedestrians, the white self-serving stereotype of whom claims they are allegedly genetically predisposed to negotiate minefields. Northrup reminds us here that both World War II and the Korean War incurred a disproportionately high incidence of Native casualties due to walking point. We are, alternately, gripped by stunning bylines like "He was staring down at his own funeral," jarred by such sobering passages as "Luke's morals were on hold, so were his feelings. He thought of his trigger finger as the judge, jury, and executioner. Luke was a young killing machine trying to stay alive "(15), and riveted by the pitiable comic relief of such subtleties as the telling absence of the refrain "that wouldn't work" at the close of the following passage:

> Now what? he thought. Out in the open pinned by a mine. He started to think of ways to get off the mine. Let's see now, I could put my helmet and flak jacket over the mine and dive away from the blast. That wouldn't work, he might be diving on another mine. I could just stay here and live out the rest of my life anchored to this mine, he thought. That wouldn't work, the sniper might forget his third person rule. I could shit my pants, he thought. (16)

Northrup proceeds to walk us haltingly through this danger zone, delineating his character's otherwise intricately unfathomable sensations, including his disbelief when he is safely delivered of the wire and his instantaneous shock when his fellow marine "disappeared in a cloud of dirty smoke [h]is crumpled body thrown to the ground" (17), and Luke holds his dead hand until the chopper arrives. Here, the chopper aptly serves as the daunting auditory motif which links him and us to the present moment as the reader becomes aware only now that this entire story was yet another vivid flashback incurred by his visit to "the Wall, the Vietnam Veteran's Memorial" after he'd read "the book of the dead":

> When he found the marine's name, he reached up and

> touched the letters cut into stone. When he did, he felt relieved, almost like he had been carrying a pack for the past twenty years and could now take it off. He offered tobacco as his eyes began to burn and fill with tears.
>
> A bearded vet came over. He wore a faded camouflage jacket. His baseball cap proudly proclaimed that he was a Vietnam vet. He hugged Luke and said, "Welcome home, brother." (18-19)

Understandably, the reader is eager for the comic respite his gut-honest opening lines of the following poem provide as we begin "walking point" with him: "his asshole puckered up tight" (20). This brief relief replenishes the courage we need to absorb the understated message of the fifth stanza: "He sang to himself as / his senses gathered evidence / of his continued existence" (20), the intensity of which the speaker likewise alleviates with a momentary lapse into humor: "He amused himself as he walked along. / The old story about bullets, ha, / don't sweat the ones that got your / name, worry about the ones addressed: / to whom it may concern" (21). After he puts his training into practice, he reflects: "The shooting is over in five seconds / the shakes are over in a half-hour / the memories are over never" (21), in this instance *not* followed by a joke to spare us the implications of this terrible and shameful reality.

We continue our excursion with Northrup, this time over the literal and figurative bridge that links the strategic opening Vietnam theme—strategic because even the most resisting or biased reader can't help but be hooked by Northrup's moving rendition of a universally potent subject—with the stories and poems of everyday reservation life. In "Veteran's Dance," Luke's cousin, Lug, attends a powwow and visits his concerned and supportive sister, complete with comforting cornbread, both of which prove, again literally and figuratively, instrumental to his healing. "Ever since the war he felt disconnected from the things that made people happy" (22). Familiarity grounds him in recovery, not only of his roots and origins, but of his sense of belonging:

> Sitting in a red-and-white-striped powwow chair was an old lady who looked like his grandma. She wore heavy brown stockings held up with a big round knot at the knees. She chewed Copenhagen and spit the juice in a coffee can just like his gram. Of course, Lug's grandma had been dead for ten years, but it was still a good feeling to see someone who looked like her. (23)

Therapeutic humor surfaces, as well, when Luke's cousin stops "at a food stand called Stand Here" (23). When Lug confesses to his sister the grueling accidental shooting of an incognito female enemy soldier, Judy tries through

her trembling and tears to console him with the fact that he won a Purple Heart. We learn vet lingo, then, for Lug and his comrades disdainfully termed the Purple Hearts "Idiot Awards. It meant that you fucked up somehow" (29). Judy facilitates Lug's and the reader's relief through a visit to a spiritual man's house, attendance at a Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Program, and her generous offer to him of her MIA husband's ceremonial regalia. This contemporary blend of recuperative gestures evokes the *midewiwin*, whereby shamanic insight and a drum ceremony combine to offer a mystical cure (Grim 56-73). Northrup dances us through to healing humor with cousin Fuzzy's "new flavor for Vietnam Vets: Agent Grape" joke at which "both [men] laughed at themselves for laughing" (34).

We join the laughter with the undeniably "poetic" description of the quintessential "rez car" which follows. This is our official vehicle to the rez road where we come to understand both what it is to be "broke" and to live rich, that is, surrounded by relatives. The most comprehensive journey manifests itself in this used, loud, steering wheel-less, defunct-radio car for which none "of the tires are brothers"; yet, like the survivor it represents, it still stops and starts, and thereby demonstrates survival strategies from the survivor's point of view: "What else is a car / supposed to do?" is the closing question, one which resonates almost nostalgically in Northrup's claim that casino profits may make rez cars an endangered species.

Likewise, what else is this Anishinaabe, Vietnam vet, brother, husband, father, tour guide of the rez supposed to do, except sustain the reader's own journey, through such casual conversation as the opening question of the eulogy to his brother: "Didja ever hear a sound?" Our walk with him is comfortable and non-threatening yet simultaneously powerful and effective. We are not embarrassed by his stated goal in this collection, for his "brain to take a shit," which is part of the book's universal appeal. While stories about ricing (e.g., "Work Ethic" and "Ricing Again") are specific glimpses into traditional Fond du Lac lifeways, largely the selections are about being human. How many of us nod in laughter to "Bloody Money" which is reminiscent of a time we were so broke we sold our plasma? How many of us revisit memories so vivid we are all but transported to past faces and locales? Ingeniously, even Northrup's specific allusion to the once-popular denial of the Vietnam War's existence and ramifications subtly bespeaks a similar pattern of willful ignorance and omission from consciousness surrounding the near genocide of Native peoples. Readers can't help but draw parallels between these two tragedies. This unconventional coupling is but one didactic tactic.

As one student, a police officer and older, attested in his journal for the American Indian Literature course I taught in 1995:

> [O]ne of Northrop's main purposes for writing is to educate . . . us stupid white folks on his culture. When he was reading the questions that people ask him, and answering most with cutting sarcasm and humor, I thought that what bothered him most was that white people still have not learned diddly squat about Native American culture. We still believe the stereotypes and the John Wayne films. In *Walking the Rez Road*, we get a no nonsense work which highlights just what it is like to be a Native American in today's society. It means to be poor and treated like a criminal. The way he does this educating is humorous and entertaining, but it is also sad.

His stories are funny, but they have a bite to them. When I read his accounts of life, I was filled with remorse and guilt. One story which spoke to me was "Culture Clash," when Luke came across his brother Almost and rushed him to the hospital. Then Luke ended up in jail and his brother joined him. The tendency for the police to assume the worst and the ready way they beat the Natives up depressed me, especially when I remember that most of the stories are true.

Northrup also wants things to change. He wants understanding, and the first step is education. We have to realize there is a problem, then we can change things. To be sure, other readers recognize the symbolism of that sobering story, "Culture Clash," and "Wewiibitaan" (which means "Hurry Up"), even amidst our laughter at the absurdity of a kneejerk, if not hysterical, reaction by police officers who establish a roadblock for one Indian youth who resisted the ego-gratifying authorities' abuse. Another effective teaching tool is the unadulterated expression of anger. Meriting the poet's wrath, for example, is the popularization by Hollywood and 1980s presidents of the Vietnam War. Too little, too late, after two decades of neglect, abuse, or sheer indifference, according to "time wounds all heels." In this poem Northrup catalogues the manifestation of what he refers to in "ogichidag" (warriors) as "the bitterness of / the only war America ever lost" (164). Written on the eve of Northrup's own son's potential debarkation to the Gulf War,the poem offers a litany of the twentieth-century wars that have painfully informed the lives of the speaker's male relatives, the war stories a trademark of the surviving warriors.

In similar fashion, Northrup tells other stories of survival. In "Work Ethic" Luke seeks a means to paying his bills and to evading imprisonment due to delinquent child support, though he is not willing to compromise his sense of self in the process. For example, when he begins to cast the same "vacant" smiles of his co-workers at the pizza shop, he seeks employment elsewhere. Unfortunately losing his "dream job" due to the indiscretion of sleeping on a waterbed as a promotional gimmick, Luke works in a machine

shop until he realizes he'd become an extension of it. In every case, other "ethics" take precedence over the blind subservience which the dominant culture designates as "work."

Significantly, the job Luke most enjoys is culturally based, as we discover in "Ricing Again." Here we glimpse the culmination of Northrup's summer rice-fanning basket-crafting, to which he pays tribute in the poem "Weegwas" (birch bark), "another gift from the Creator" (78), an art that has been passed down from grandfather to grandson for centuries. As Northrup puts it, for the Anishinaabe, "ricing is never more than eleven months away." Ricing also serves as an incentive to halt the community binge that Northrup depicts in "Your Standard Drunk" as being fueled by whites who still bring alcohol by the truckload to the rez. Ricing's social and practical benefits make this pivotal activity a community favorite:

> He knew the people enjoyed ricing and there were good feelings all around. As he drove to the lake, memories of past ricing seasons came to him. His earliest memories were of playing on the shore while his parents were out ricing. Years seemed to melt from people. Grandparents moved about with a light step and without their canes. Laughing and loud talking broke out frequently. The cool crisp morning air, the smell of wood smoke, roasting meat, and coffee were all part of these early childhood memories.
>
> When he grew older, his responsibilities increased. He took care of his brothers and sisters. He cleaned the canoes and rice boats of every last kernel of rice. He learned how to make rice poles and knockers. He learned how important ricing was to the people. (94)

Reciprocal giving rules the day, and the rhythm of the falling rice "made Luke feel good" (95), as does the echo of laughter throughout their ritual. The rich tradition that accrues to this practice, described by awestruck ethnographers as early as the 1900s (Densmore 128), Northrup vividly evokes in his warm and moving poem "Mahnomin" (wild rice). From the tobacco offering of thanks and the personification of calm water, rice heads, wind, and smiling sun, to the "talk of other lakes, other seasons / fingers stripping rice while / laughing, gossiping, remembering," the ricers feel good and contribute to another canoeful of memories that constitute the natural progression of generations (98).

Indeed it is the strength born of being one of the Anishinaabe generations, in "brown and white peek," that enables the stamina and spirituality essential to overcoming the "manifest destiny dominant society" (105) and avoiding its excesses. Replete with the ironies that accompany the persistence of myth and stereotype which spawn such lame questions as the

voyeuristic one that opens the poem, "What's it like living on the rez?," the reply offers some poetic justice, finds "something good / in something grim" (104), by redeeming chronic unemployment "when the white guys get lung cancer / from breathing asbestos at the mill."

No wonder, thus, that Northrup's fiction walks the reader "a mile in [his] moccasins" (105) surrounding the un(der)employment scene alone. For example, "The Odyssey" is another comical job hunt story, this time involving a "rez truck," the back of which is filled with exaggerated coup tales, including those involving jail time. A series of mishaps—the truck door and fan belt falling off, the engine catching fire—ironically brings the aspiring laborers three weeks' work and even more joke material than they'd anticipated. This is the case as well in "The Yellow Hand Clan," where Luke and his friend, Rod Grease, do hard summer labor building basements, complete with slapstick antics, long enough to collect unemployment through the winter months.

Also laced with slapstick is "Fritz and Butch," who entertain media personnel and themselves at the Duluth Radisson Hotel by performing Nixon impersonations and signing autographs as then-Vice President Mondale must have. Here, rather than steady work, it is the familiar, the fun, the effort to "snag" three White Earth reservation women that warms Luke with a smile and assures him that "Life was back to normal" (52).

To maintain that normalcy or stability, the speaker in the "end of the beginning" poem proffers, one must heed the wisdom of the oral tradition. "Someone said" and "Another old saying says" are phrases calling readers back to oral wisdom, the central message of which is to live like each day is one's last (68). This wisdom of the ages literally takes the shape of a tipi in "tipi reflections," which the speaker joyfully and peacefully inhabits, observing both current and timeless miracles and images that signify his origins:

> The smell of wood smoke
> clings to me when I have to
> go to the city, it is a
> reminder of where I come from
> and where I'm going. (62)

This caution would have been sound advice for the "three skins" in the vignette that follows, "Coffee Donuts" (69-71). Happy to be alive, free, and "cashy," these riders are revelling in their day of mobility and fun, anticipating hunting or reading O. Henry stories, completely oblivious to the grain truck with sleeping driver barrelling toward them—a frightful scenario Northrup had foreshadowed thirty pages earlier in his poem "death two." A cautionary poem of a different nature occurs in the center of the collection,

"Lifetime of sad." This poem originated, according to Northrup, as an alternative to becoming angry or hurtful toward the lonely, alcoholic, 50-year-old woman it sympathetically portrays. As the title suggests, her eyes tell the heart-wrenching story of a wife, widowed twice over by "the white man's wars," of a mother left behind, and of a cancer survivor who is losing a more insidious "battle with the bottle" (84).

Poetry serves a different function in "where you from?," which Northrup cited as a question "Shinnobs" always ask each other upon meeting, as a way to connect or to discover if there's any relation. This poem, then, is his artistic effort to respond by describing Sawyer with its wild rice lakes, abundant sugar trees, sacred ceremonies, other natural beauties, and, interspersed throughout, rich survival humor: "Hocking a satellite dish for bingo / is possible but difficult" (91).

Another poem addressing the speaker's identity is "barbed thoughts," which resonates with the pride of his spear-fishing heritage and defiance of redneck opposition to their hunting, gathering, and eating rights, which troublemakers dismiss as "Treaty" rights. This understandably angry poem spits at the indignities of "threats, gunfire, and bombs," of state-proposed "buyout[s]," of greedy and insensitive media columnists and newscasters (136), the entire complex of which tries to deracinate Anishinaabe from "their generational wisdom."

Less terse, the story which follows, "Jabbing and Jabbering," exposes more fully the hinted-at corrupt reservation government that is willing to put a price tag on heritage. Northrup describes the Reservation Business Committee's conspicuous consumption, gluttony, betrayal, and deceit—the latter, for example, in pacifying the "renegades" who would resist the leasing of property rights by fabricating some makeshift work project. In contrast to the cynicism with which the author develops such scenes, he delivers the actual spear-fishing expedition with grace and poetic imagery, including the good-hearted donation of their productive night on the water to the Elderly Nutrition Program. The RBC's main concern in the face of the pervasive protest that ensued from the disclosure of their treaty-leasing is the potential effect upon their re-election. Their feeble and insincere attempt to save face by spear-fishing with Tuna Charlie and Luke backfires when the latter alert the media. Sweet and subtle revenge results from the RBC Chair and District Two Representative's comedy of errors, which leave them capsized, dripping wet, and fishless in the glare of TV cameras panning the ridiculous scene.

A more biting indictment pervades "1854-1988," the poem that follows; in this case, the just reward for bureaucratic sellouts is their grandchildren "piss[ing] on their graves" (148). The sardonic and frequent refrain, "The bottom line is the bottom line," mocks the platitudes tribal government, such

as the one which chastised Northrup for the criticism in this poem, spouts to placate the people they diminish in what the author portrays as their materialistic and egocentric inclination.

Northrup's collection is about survivors of oppression, trying to outlive the circumstances to which they've been sentenced and attempting to withstand acculturation, or alcoholism, or the struggle to obliterate someone else's oppression yet furthering their own in the process. Northrup skillfully debunks one superficial museumgoer's desire to reify Indians as safely antiquated relics of the past, learning *about* them through objectification rather than *from* them through interaction. This scenario is hilariously depicted in the story "Looking with Ben": here, Ben Looking Back makes a "contemporary Chippewa" sign, stands beside it, and then leaves, resulting in an empty display which poignantly drives home to the rez and our minds the idea that Natives have been excluded from common consciousness. It is no surprise that Northrup drafted this, in my view, now perfect piece six times in order to be able to play with language, as he so ably achieves in the scene where Ben tells Luke of his charades:

> "With some of them, I was a Chippewa, with others, I was a Sioux. Sometimes I'd be a Comanche, and right at the end there, I was telling them I was half Chippewa, half Ojibway, and the rest was Anishinaabe. Some of the tourists were writing this stuff down as I talked. I had a good time with the tourists," Ben concluded. (159)

Here, Northrup enacts his credo that whites were put here to amuse Indians. Neither an apology or plea, this saga of triumphs and failures, from the pain of familial loss to the slapstick of Ben's Smithsonian escapades, guides the reader intimately through the lifestyle and problems that accrue to Rez inhabitants: high unemployment, scarce funds, and government difficulties, largely the result of white negligence and ignorance.

Luke, like Ben, never loses his vital sense of humor, laughing and crying in the same breath, yet resoundingly choosing laughter as a remedy to turmoil, to the death and prejudice inhering in what Northrup refers to as "the hate circle" of racism that surrounds them and makes the rez a haven for rejuvenation and solitudinous grace. In this way and others, he is an ideal embodiment of what Craig Womack advocated at the 1995 Modern Language Association conference: one who writes to and for his people, in a variety of genres and venues. For example, Northrup linguistically circumvents this hate circle by translating into Ojibway most of his poems; he continues to write bilingually as a sign of silent yet poignant protest. More vocal is his "Fond du Lac Follies" column wherein he writes on various minority issues such as Indian gaming and gambling, the latter of

which he views as a current test of Indian spirit and integrity, a mixed blessing and curse as both a source of employment and income, yet a locus for corruption.

Northrup is among 50,000 Natives in Minnesota, one of five or six among 300 or so Native Minnesotan authors who write for a living, maintaining a question-of-the-month catalogue since, as he claims with a grin, "whites are such slow learners." Here, he deploys such unforgettable zingers as: "How long have you been an Indian?" "46 years. It would've been 47 but I was sick a year"; and "Do you speak your language?" "Yup, yours too"; and, my personal favorite: "Are Indians really psychic?" "I *knew* you were going to ask me that, I just *knew* it!" (campus reading, 15 February 1995). With such wit and multiple gifts, it's not surprising that Northrup's work is award winning, securing both the Sixth Annual Northeastern Minnesota Award, which recognizes books that best represent Northeastern Minnesota's history, culture, heritage, or lifestyle, and the Minnesota Book Award in the personal voices category, having been chosen from 68 nominees in 14 categories.

Northrup is generous to walk readers through not only the minefields he and the Anishinaabe have already negotiated and continue to negotiate, but also through the veritable gold mine of riches they inhabit. A poem that embodies this strolling metaphor, "Walking through," shows poetry in yet another light. Here the speaker metaphorically pays tribute to his wife and the solidness of their loveship, for instance as they trudged through swamps, content to experience "the trees, the tracks, the quiet" (112). Readers, too, are enriched by the journey in his moccasins, through landscapes and soundscapes we won't soon forget. Clearly, then, we would do well to heed Joy Harjo's wise advice on the dust jacket: "These stories are full of laughter and the wisdom that is gained from heartbreak and loss. Pass them on!"

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Shaman or Showman

Mace J. DeLorme

Hay Bro, what's it gonna be,
A shaman or a Showman?

So, I see you're a spiritual leader now.
Lots of Indin groupies following you round

Most of them New-Age Wha-na-bees,
maybe they just wha-na Indin baby

Ahhhhhhhhhhh

So, I hear you're healing folks now
Got all kinds of p-ooo-wer

Guess you must really be connected to the spirit,
Huh?

So, I saw you at the Pow-wow
wearing your slick dark shades
Your hair in two braids
You were floating above all the other Braves

Is the air fresher up there?

So, I was walking on that dusty, dirty, common ground
Sharing common air
Watching the show from down here

So, I decided to stay down here
Close to that dusty, dirty ground
Where I can remember who I am
where I came from, Bro!

Stories, Humor, and Survival in Jim Northrup's **Walking the Rez Road**

Chris LaLonde

Crossblood Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor takes part of the title for *Wordarrows: Indians and Whites in the New Fur Trade*, his 1978 collection of narratives, from N. Scott Momaday's retelling of the traditional Kiowa story of the arrowmaker. A Kiowa was making arrows one night when he noticed someone looking in from outside. He continued his work, straightening an arrow with his teeth and fitting it to his bow to be sure it would draw true, all the while talking with his wife as he aimed the arrow at random. As if addressing her, he said, "I know that you are there on the outside. . . . If you are a Kiowa, you will understand what I am saying, and you will speak your name" (qtd. in *Wordarrows* viii). Receiving no answer, the arrowmaker had his aim fall upon the enemy outside, let the arrow fly, and killed him. The story is important for Momaday and Vizenor, and others, because it indicates that language can be used as an effective weapon in the struggle for survival.

In the written tradition of the Anishinaabe we can see this awareness of language's power at least since the mid-nineteenth-century writings of George Copway, or Kah-ge-ga-gah-bowh. For instance, in *The Ojibway Conquest* (1850), a long poem written in heroic couplets, Wen-di-go tells Me-gi-si that, while he could easily have taken his life, he has "a tale will pierce thy heart / Worse than a foeman's dart,—" (29). Over a century later, contemporary Anishinaabe writers Vizenor, Gordon Henry, Jr., Louise Erdrich, Kimberly Blaeser, and others indicate a similar understanding of language's power and use words to craft poems and stories in the name of survival. Blaeser, for instance, puts the case clearly: "Like many Indian people, I write partly to remember, because remembering, we recover;

remembering, we survive" (xi). Such is also true for fellow Anishinaabe Jim Northrup, the author of poems, stories, newspaper columns, a play, and the 1993 collection *Walking the Rez Road*. Contrary to the ethnographic and historical studies of the Anishinaabe that Vizenor takes to task in *The People Named the Chippewa* for inventing tribal people and culture, Northrup's book is a striking imagining and rendering of contemporary Anishinaabe life. And in the tradition of works by Copway, Vizenor, and others, *Walking the Rez Road* stresses the importance of language, stories, and humor to survival.

Walking the Rez Road is a collection of twenty-one poems and twenty-one stories whose subjects include the Vietnam war, Anishinaabe culture and history, and contemporary reservation life. The overall picture created for the reader is produced in part by the order of the pieces that Northrup stipulated contrary to his publisher's suggestion. It is worth remarking that Native scholars and storytellers have recognized the importance of sequence in Anishinaabe storytelling sessions. In thinking about stories told concerning the tribal trickster and culture hero Nanabush, for instance, Ridie Wilson Ghezzi notes that "the way they are joined together depends on the artistry and the intentions of the narrator" (445). Skill and intent, then, shape the sessions in a fashion Ron Evans sees as akin "to a piece of beadwork: one could create a different picture depending on how one strung the beads together" (qtd. in Ghezzi 445). In *Walking the Rez Road* Northrup begins stringing texts together with a poem whose first word, "Survived," highlights the subject of survival which resonates throughout the book (8). Like Abel in N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Tayo in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*, and Whirling Soldier in Joy Harjo's "Northern Lights," the poem's narrator has "Survived the war" but is "having trouble surviving / the peace" (8). He turns to a psychologist to help him deal with the "Nightmares, daymares / guilt and remorse" (8). He stops seeing the "shrink" both because of the expense and because it was not doing him any good, experiences more guilt when the psychologist kills himself, and finally realizes "that surviving / the peace was up to me" (9).

Walking the Rez Road is concerned with far more than a veteran surviving a war and its effects on the psyche, however, whether that veteran is the nameless narrator of the war poems in the text; Lug,whose story is told in "Veteran's Dance"; Lug's cousin Luke Warmwater, ostensively the protagonist of the book; or Vietnam vet Northrup himself. Rather, *Walking the Rez Road* makes clear that the veterans are only a part of the greater Anishinaabe population that has been and is continually faced with the problem of survivance.[1] Like Blaeser, Northrup would have his readers remember, or learn and remember, and two poems in particular up the ante

to include not just the survival of war veterans and contemporary shinnobs, but all the people at least since the signing of the 1854 La Pointe treaty which ceded Anishinaabe homeland in the arrowhead region of Minnesota to the United States Government: "1854-1988" and "ditched."

"1854-1988" links the original treaty signers with contemporary tribal government leaders acting contrary to the best interests of the people. The La Pointe treaty signers gave up the land even though their people told them not to sell. Placing a dollar value on the land and traditional lifeways is at the heart of the outrage:

> You sold our birthright, you paleface Indians.
> Faces pale from kissing the white man's ass.
> The bottom line is the bottom line.
> The State flashes chump change,
> indigent Indians are buffaloed.
> Hunting, fishing, and gathering
> now have a dollar value.
> The bottom line is the bottom line. (148)

The repetition of "The bottom line is the bottom line" throughout the poem accentuates the disabling truth at its heart: "Money talks, whispers, threatens, / and finally seduces" (148).

Vizenor notes in his introduction to *Summer in the Spring* that "The fur traders learned the languages and stories of the woodland and enmeshed tribal families in the predatory economics of peltry" (7). Money, alcohol, and material goods were the tools of seduction used to lure the Anishinaabe away from traditional lifeways and enmesh them in a fur trade that "interposed economic anomalies between the intuitive rhythms of woodland tribal communities and the spiritual equipose of the traditional *anishinaabe*" (*Summer* 7-8). The people were indeed "buffaloed": literally and figuratively slaughtered by the United States Government thanks to its plan of relocation to reservations like White Earth and Fond du Lac, and assimilation once there.

The narrator of "1854-1988" refuses to succumb to despair, however; rather, we are reminded that "Anishinaabe have survived / missionaries and miners, / timber barons and trappers," and told they will "survive the bureaucrats / and policy makers" (148) as well. They will also remember their ancestors who sold out:

> Bury the sellouts deep, their
> grandchildren will want to
> piss on their graves.
> The bottom line is the bottom line. (148)

The poem closes on a note of appropriation rather than assimilation, as the

bottom line is transformed from an economic phrase to a moral one and becomes the grandchildren's graphic indication and indictment of the immorality of their grandparents' actions.

"Ditched," a poem focusing on the plight of a young Anishinaabe at the Pipestone federal boarding school, makes clear one of the primary difficulties faced by subsequent generations after the signing of the La Pointe treaty, a difficulty which if not overcome would mean there will be no grandchildren able and willing to urinate on the graves of wrong-minded tribal leaders. The system of boarding schools set up by organized religions and the Federal government in the nineteenth century was designed to accelerate the process of acculturation and assimilation by breaking the connection between Anishinaabe youth, their families, their sense of place, their language, and their stories.[2] The poem's protagonist receives only an "icy blue-eyed stare" when he says hello to a white in Anishinaabemowin and a beating from a second grader after crying about the icy stare. The boy runs away, gets caught, and is beaten by both the whites for running and a second grader for crying about the beating he has received. As is the case with "1854-1988," however, "ditched" does not end on a despairing note. Rather, we learn that the young Anishinaabe "Toughed it out / Survived" (72). We do not learn specifically how the boy "toughed it out," which is in keeping with a Native tenet of having the story resonate beyond the words in the imagination and experiences of the audience,[3] but we know that he survived. The lack of terminal punctuation at the end of the poem, moreover, indicates that the struggle for survival continues for the Anishinaabe today.

The reality of Native life on the Rez road makes survival difficult, of course, and Northrup does not shy away from presenting an honest picture of the reservation. For instance, the narrator of "brown and white peek" responds to the question "What's it like living on the rez?" by pointing out that "The word reservation is a misnomer / reserved for who? / The white man owns 80 percent of my rez . . ." (104). The Anishinaabe are nearly as jobless as they are landless: there is "70 percent unemployment on the rez / go down the road a few miles, it's 5 percent" (104). Anishinaabe writer, educator, and activist Winona LaDuke uses statistics from a study done at the White Earth reservation to show the importance of a "land-based economy and way of life" in the face of seemingly staggering economic hardship. "While unemployment was listed by the Department of Labor at approximately 75 percent, most people were 'employed' in a land-based economy" (xiii-xiv) that features such traditional activities as sugarbushing and the harvesting of fowl, small and large game, fish, and wild rice. Using White Earth as her example, LaDuke concludes that "in many Native communities the traditional land-based economy, and in fact this way of life, remains a centerpiece of the community" (xiv).

Perhaps more so than any of his contemporaries, Northrup celebrates in poetry and fiction the traditional land-based economy and material culture of the Anishinaabe. Poems like "end of the beginning," "weegwas," "mahnomin," and "walking through" highlight both the traditional lifeways and the essential connections between the individual, ancestors, and the natural world which they help to establish and maintain. For instance, in "weegwas" the narrator points out that in gathering birch bark s/he is "Just doing what grandpa did / like his grandpa before him" (78). In "walking through," being awakened by the sun, walking in the woods by "an old sugar bush" with a loved one, and recognizing that "the wigwam frame is in a good location" (112) bring together past, present, and future, the Creator, and a wife and husband in a fashion that has nothing to do with capitalist economics and money and everything to do with the traditional lifeways of the people. Those lifeways, as Vizenor points out, are intimately connected to the strong woods of northern Minnesota, where

> The *Anishinaabe* learned to hear the seasons by natural reason, and tribal dreamers heard the stories of creation in *bangishimog noodin*, the west wind, their relations to the animals, birds, stones, the heat of visions, and the everlasting circles of the sun and moon and human heart. The first tribal families trailed the shores of *gichigami* to the hardwoods and marshes where they touched the maple trees for *ziizibaak-wadaaboo* in the spring, speared fish on the rivers, and then gathered manoomin, wild rice in the late autumn. (*Summer* 5)

"Mahnomin," Northrup's poem about the annual gathering of wild rice, indicates how taking part in an aspect of the traditional lifeways of the Anishinaabe reaffirms the essential connection with place and family. The poem opens with an image of spirituality and thanksgiving and proceeds with language which makes clear that the relationship between the people and the place is reciprocal, genuine, and sensuous. The lake "welcomed" the people, the rice "nodded in agreement" with the lake, and the "sun smiled everywhere" (98). The people, in turn, "caressed" the ripe rice heads in loving thanks for the gift. "Ricing again, megwetch Munido" (98) explicitly thanks the Creator for enabling the people to gather the rice; the people are as thankful for the reaffirmation of the lifeways and the connection with place given by Munido as they are for the rice which will help them survive the coming winter.

Ricing connects people with place, with Munido, with each other, with past generations, and with the future:

> Relatives came together
> talk of other lakes, other seasons
> fingers stripping rice while

laughing, gossiping, remembering.
It's easy to feel a part of
the generations that have
riced here before. (98)

Northrup's characters can be glad for the natural world unspoiled by "progress," for "the colors of blue and green [that] rest the eyes and spirits" ("where you from?" 91), and—perhaps most of all—for the sense of place and connection established and reaffirmed by the nearness of generations past. Moreover, the "Tobacco [that] swirled in the lake" (98) as offering to the rice and Munido likewise unites the people with future harvests on this lake. Therefore it is small wonder that

It felt good to get on the lake
it felt better getting off
carrying a canoe load of food
and centuries of memories. (98)

Nevertheless, as Northrup points out in "barbed thoughts," attempting to hunt, fish, and gather in accordance with the lifeways and the rights granted by treaty can run contrary to the wishes of the reservation government because "it makes some white people mad" and can lead "rednecks [to] try to stop us / with threats, gunfire, and bombs" (136).

Walking the Rez Road makes clear that stories and humor are important weapons with which to counter threats from what Northrup labels "the manifest destiny dominant society" and insure survival. Again Northrup's poem opening the volume is instructive. For in addition to highlighting the fundamental issue of survival with its first word, "shrinking away" emphasizes stories and suggests a telling juxtaposition between ways of seeing stories and their value. "Shrinking away" is both a turning to the healing power of stories and a turning away from psychoanalysis, a white way of healing predicated on stories. Life stories told and interrogated in the analytic session are the vehicle for the self-awareness necessary for healing to begin. Resolutely focused on the story of the analysand's essential trauma, the interrogation strives to illuminate the ways in which the trauma is prefigured and sought out by the psyche, thereby illuminating the incongruity or lack of harmony between an individual's Self and the projection of self he or she presents. Analysis may be one way of using stories therapeutically, but "shrinking away" makes it clear that it is not the right way.

It is obvious that the analyst violates the analyst/analysand relationship. The narrator tells us that they

Spent six
sessions establishing
rapport, heard about his

military life,
his homosexuality,
his fights with his mother
and anything else he wanted
to talk about. (8-9)

The analyst shrinks from his role as the mostly silent partner in the relationship and instead tells his story and reveals his trauma. Such a perversion dooms the relationship, of course, but that is not why analysis is the wrong way to use stories therapeutically, no matter how professionally sound the analyst. Nor does analysis fail because the analyst is white and the analysand is not; racial identity is not revealed in the poem. Analysis cannot be the right way for the narrator or the other characters in *Walking the Rez Road* to survive the peace because it establishes a false connection. The analyst's fee, which is stated and then twice referred to, is the symbol of that false connection and the means by which it is perpetuated.

"Shrinking away" exposes an inherent liability of the psychoanalytic session and ends with the narrator's realization "that surviving / the peace was up to me," so a reader might conclude that this means the narrator needs to establish and maintain an egocentric position in order to survive. No conclusion could be more comforting. Maintaining that "shrinking away" ends on a note of self-reliance enables a reader to imagine that the poem, written by a Native American, champions one of the fundamental tenets of American ideology and as a result indicates both an awareness of that tenet and an acknowledgement of its importance to surviving and flourishing in contemporary America. As such, one can rest easy knowing, thanks to a convenient extrapolation of the many from the one, that the Native Americans have adopted the "natural" mind set and worldview of the majority culture. They have been, at long last, assimilated. The fact that the narrator dismisses psychoanalysis, traditionally distrusted and discounted by many Americans, is yet another point in his favor.[4]

Walking the Rez Road does not support such a reading, however. Rather, the stories and poems make it clear that, while it is up to the individual to make the effort to survive, survival is predicated upon connection and community as each is established in and through stories. But while stories are integral to healing and survival, they do not in themselves necessarily establish a true connection. In fact "The Jail Trail," a short story describing Luke Warmwater's treatment for alcohol abuse, makes clear that stories can be abused and their power perverted. Treatment consists of storytelling sessions centering on past episodes of drunkenness. The stories will be accepted only "if one could work up a good cry" (87). The hollowness of the stories told in the treatment center is indicated by the disclosure that one must manufacture an emotional response, complete with

"wailing, gnashing of teeth, and heaving sobs" (87), in designated "crying rooms." In perfect accord with the reality of late twentieth-century American consumer culture, at the treatment center image is everything. Luke learns from another "skin" how to act in such a place and begins "to live the role of the drying-out-drunk" (88) in order to survive the treatment center, but that act establishes only the most tenuous of connections because it masks rather than reveals. The connection with the other "skin" in treatment is not predicated on stories which reveal self and articulate connection. Rather, while his ability as a storyteller puts him "ahead of the others in the 'group grope' sessions" (87), Luke is still subject to the misappropriation of stories that determines the nature of the center and its treatment program. Perhaps this is why Northrup opts not to recount the stories with which Luke Warmwater "spills his guts." Luke must have done so in order to "graduate out into the real world," but Northrup refuses to validate such a perversion of storytelling by including it in "The Jail Trail."

The stories told in the group sessions of "The Jail Trail" can be juxtaposed with those in the short story "Veteran's Dance." Suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, Luke's cousin Lug has returned from the war feeling "disconnected from the things that made people happy" (22). Although Lug recognizes that it is his fault that he cannot feel close to anyone (23), when the story opens it is clear that he has been unable to do anything about his predicament. Indeed, he tells his sister Judy that at one point after his return he felt like committing suicide. His response to Judy's joy that he did not kill himself is telling: "Me too, we wouldn't be having *this conversation* if I had gone through with it" (25 emphasis added). Lug's statement stresses the importance of conversation as a means of establishing connection, and therefore as an alternative to the ultimate disconnection of suicide. His conversation with Judy, when he tells her several stories of Vietnam, is only the first of those he participates in in order to "survive the peace." At the VA hospital he and other veterans tell war stories in group therapy sessions, and after talking about their feelings toward the war and their parts in it, Lug "felt like he was leaving some of his memories at the hospital" (32).

While those conversations are certainly therapeutic, *Walking the Rez Road* indicates that they cannot take the place of being home and talking with family and a spiritual leader. After leaving the hospital Lug tells Judy that while he thought it was helpful to go through the Veteran's Administration program, "it felt better talking to the spiritual man" (33); it also "feels better being here with relatives" (33). Thanks to sharing war stories with his sister, the spiritual leader, and other Vietnam veterans, and hospital stories with his sister and the spiritual man, Lug is able to do what he was unable to do at the beginning of the story: participate in the communal celebration of

the powwow and dance the veteran's honor song.

The cyclical structure of "Veteran"s Dance," beginning and ending with a powwow, is indicative of Lug's journey away from and then back to community and connection. It is also indicative of the emphasis and importance Northrup places on cycles throughout *Walking the Rez Road*. Cycles abound in the text, and those of the natural world are indicative of connectedness and help to highlight this truth for the Anishinaabe. In "death two," Northrup writes that "some trees tipped over / showing us the death part / of their life cycle" (42) and thus remind the narrator of the intimate relationship between life and death. Understanding that, the reader can understand the playful nature of the poem's title. "Two" is Minnesota State Highway Two, and it is also "too," for life and death and chance are all connected in the Anishinaabe worldview,[5] and "to," as the poem tacitly pronounces death to any perspective which fails to see the necessary connection between life and death. The reader is thus prepared for the poem "end of the beginning," in which Northrup writes that "Death is a part of life" and "Everything happens in cycles" (68). Recognizing this leads not to paralysis or isolation, but to moral and social awareness and responsibility; the narrator asks "Is there a message here?" and answers "Yah, / treat others like this / is your last day above ground" (42). Northrup returns to natural cycles and reenforces the connection between them and the cyclical traditional lifeways of the Anishinaabe in the final selection of the volume, whose title, "Rez to Jep to Rez," succinctly phrases the cycle the story tracks. Luke Warmwater and his wife Paneqwe return home after traveling to California and auditioning for a spot on "Jeopardy" in order to finish the already gathered wild rice while birch and popple leaves are falling and "Another yearly cycle was ending" (175).

Cycles are not confined to the natural world and the traditional lifeways of the Anishinaabe, however. They are a part of all life in general and Luke Warmwater's life in particular. In "Bloody Money," a story about being so broke that one is forced to sell blood plasma, Luke thinks about buying food with the money he'll get for his blood; he recognizes that "This completed the cycle somehow" (45). Fortune frowns and then smiles after he finishes the process of giving blood: Luke first gets a traffic ticket, he'd "been hooked up to corporate America too long" (46), and then receives both an insurance check for a barely remembered accident from several years ago and two hundred dollars owed him by his brother-in-law. His $1,906.00 profit is "not bad for one day," but he knows better than to think that his luck has turned for good. Rather the story closes with Luke "wonder[ing] how long the prosperity part of the cycle would last" (46). Two stories later Luke is once again out of work and short of cash and we are reminded that "these things worked in cycles" (55).

Just as the story "Bloody Money" enables the reader to see the relationship between cycles and the traditional Anishinaabe worldview, stories within "Bloody Money" enable Luke and his cousin to divert their attention from both a dehumanizing and impersonal documentation procedure reminiscent of a "jail booking" and the bloodletting done in a large "barnlike" room where there are "green vinyl beds" instead of "cow stanchions" and the workers treat donors like "some kind of livestock" (44). Throughout *Walking the Rez Road* the characters tell stories to reestablish and accentuate connection; as often as not, those stories elicit laughter. Luke, Dunkin Black Kettle, and Tom Skin tell stories and laugh together while on a one-day job; Luke and Butch Storyteller "laughed and lied" (64) and told stories on their way to a convention in Minneapolis. Judy can see Lug's "laugh lines as he talked about the month with other vets" (33) at the VA hospital. Luke and Dolly, his ricing partner in "Ricing Again," join "in on the laughing and exaggerating as people told stories about what happened on the lake that day" (96). Luke and his wife Paneqwe laugh together over the various stories centering on Luke's first cousin Ben Looking Back.

The move from stories and laughter to humor is easily made, and it is humor that serves as perhaps the most effective survival strategy for Native Americans in general and the Anishinaabe in particular. The humorist's project is, as Neil Schmitz argues, "to confront reality, to think, real is only" (4). Reality is frequently painful, of course, so humor "transforms the effect of error, the result of wrong, and reformulates pain as pleasure" (9). One would be hard-pressed to find a group of people in America for whom reality has been and is more painful than it has been and is for Native Americans. Rather than despairing, however, the first people frequently turn to laughter and humor. Vine Deloria pointed this out early on: "When a people can laugh at themselves and laugh at others and hold all aspects of life together without letting anybody drive them to extremes, then it seems to me that that people can survive" (167). Kenneth Lincoln's thoughtful work on "Indi'n humor" reiterates the relationship between humor and Native survival: "As expressed by survivors of tragedy, nonvanishing Native Americans, this humor transcends the void, questions fatalism, and outlasts suffering" (45). Consequently, humor is "their psychic wealth and long-term salvation" (46).

Closer to home, Gerald Vizenor emphasizes the importance of humor throughout his work. In a recent interview he remarked at length upon the nature of humor and its role in Native American literature and life—past, present, future:

> Another kind of comedy is fairly well-established stories that intend to be tricky and comical and those are trickster stories which involve transformations of all kinds. And that can be very humorous just in itself, different kinds of transformations.

> I argue that humor is natural, and it's healing. And it also brings people together. They trust each other more. And it's healing. And you have to know each other really well to laugh. So it's bonding in a sense too. But it's particularly healing and it's that part that I focus on. . . . And people expect a kind of liberation of humor from the mind. Playing the word "liberation" in its non-political sense, just that it's enriching and expanding, liberating. (Miller 80)

Humor, then, emphasizes and reenforces connection and community even as it transforms and liberates teller and audience. Therefore, it is both a tool of survivance and an instrument for change. Vizenor also indicates how the traditional lifeways and contemporary situation of the Anishinaabe necessitate the use of humor. The same can be said for Northrup and *Walking the Rez Road*. For it is when the cycle of life is canted toward trial, misfortune, and difficulty in the text that Northrup and his characters use humor to bring to light and make light of the most painful aspects of contemporary Native life in order that they might survive.

Returning to "Bloody Money" helps us begin to understand the role humor plays in the text. The Federal Government used and uses blood to determine the identity of those it has historically defined as other. Such a determination runs contrary to the ways of the Anishinaabe, at least in part, for in their worldview identity is determined first and foremost by clan membership. Blood tells, however, according to the Government and the majority culture, and it was one's blood that first resulted in removal to one of the reservations established in Minnesota for the Chippewa, and then led to timber and land fraud stemming from "illegally obtained Chippewa half-blood scrip" (Danziger 103).

"Bloody Money" also makes clear that blood and identity are bound up in an economic system in which the commodification of the former works to determine the latter. Identity transcends race in such a system, as those selling blood plasma are lumped together and can be identified simply as "have-nots": "They all looked like people who needed ten dollars. That was the common thread running through them. There were hippies, winos, Indians, street people, college students, blacks, and some who defied a label" (44).

Luke Warmwater is one of the disenfranchised, the dispossessed, but, as "Bloody Money" indicates early on, "he was broke, not poor" (44). Both Warmwater and Northrup have the "psychic wealth" of humor, a humor in this case neither as outrageous and shocking as Vizenor's nor as playfully postmodern as Gordon Henry, Jr.'s is at times. Northrup uses the narrative to spend some of his wealth of humor in order that we see the pain even as

it is transformed so that the cause of the pain, the reality of Native life in contemporary America, can be survived. Faced with the need to get money, left with the disturbing option of selling his blood, Luke first wonders where he can go to sell and how much he can get for his spit or ear wax or sperm. Nowhere and nothing, but the lines are worth at least a smile as they direct our attention to Luke's experience in the Blood Donor Center. We learn that it is called Dr. Dracula's Bank by those forced to go there and that the workers are called vampires. Such phrasing constitutes a complex act of transformation. The joke confers identity upon both place and workers, and in so doing turns the tables on a situation in which, typically, the donors are the ones being identified. Furthermore, the phrase "Dracula's Bank" illuminates how the process of selling blood plasma turns one into the living dead, precisely because such a commodification and economic identification of self is deadly. Adding the title "Dr." to Dracula accentuates the painful reality of a profession dedicated to helping and healing others having been transformed into that which here does neither. Finally, the workers are vampires because the process turns them into the living dead as well.

Humor is also employed to confront and transform stereotypic identifications. In "The Jail Trail," for instance, Northrup lets us know that Natives turn to humor in response to the stereotype of the drunken Indian. Luke Warmwater's treatment for alcohol abuse is prefigured by the inclusion of "a story going around that the state hospital was going to rename one wing of their facility. They were going to rename it for one of Luke's uncles because he had been there so many times" (86). The story appears to substantiate the prevailing stereotype: Indians are nothing more than a bunch of alcoholics whose substance abuse and concomitant shiftlessness create a wasteful drain on the state's resources—with no return on the investment. The story also looks squarely at reality: the majority culture is more willing to spend money on a consequence of the problem of the Native American's place in contemporary America than it is willing to address the problem itself. The story of the story, Luke's reading of it as it were, makes the turn to humor, for the Sawyer Indi'ns and for us, and transforms the pain while exploding the stereotype: "Luke thought the story was slightly exaggerated because he had another uncle who had been there just as many times. They were not going to name anything for him. The story was good for a chuckle though" (86).

With that chuckle echoing, we move with Luke Warmwater through the "door of the treatment place" in the next paragraph and into treatment, humorously prepared for the humor necessary to survive the place. The narrative does not disappoint. It first humorously transforms the majority culture's predilection not to see Natives as individuals by turning the tables on the center's confidentiality rule in order to protect the identity of the skin

with Warmwater at the center. It then casts the dispossessed, alienated status of the first people in the United States of America in a humorous light by having both Luke and the nameless skin place "their hands over their livers as they raised the flag" (88).

The Native's status as marginalized other in their own land is reiterated in "brown and white peek." Once again the response is humorous. Northrup writes one of the painful questions at the core of reservation life: "The word reservation is a misnomer / reserved for who?" (104). Who indeed. William Warren's *History of the Ojibway People* indicates that Anishinaabe have been at Fond du Lac from the seventeenth century onward. It was and is their home. Reservation is an identity conferred upon the place by the majority culture. In his introduction to *Touchwood*, a 1987 collection of Anishinaabe prose, Vizenor notes that Northrup's "direct and humorous stories are inspired by the rich language that people speak on the reservation" (vii), and "The *word* reservation is a misnomer" (emphasis added) fittingly places the stress on that rich language. Northrup then offers the reader two different, humorous, words for reservations in general and the Fond du Lac reservation in particular: "rez" and "Fonjalack." The former is the typical Native name for reservations; the latter is a phonetic Native phrasing for Fond du Lac. With each word speech, particularly Native speech, is being emphasized, and such an emphasis is one of the hallmarks of humor: "In effect, humorists must wrest their writing from proper writing, and this they do in a style that enhances speech values and sets those values against the prescriptive values of writing" (Schmitz 27). Northrup uses both "misspelled" signs in a line disclosing a painful truth of the Fond du lac reservation: "The white man owns 80 percent of my rez, Fonjalack" (104). His turn to humor makes perfect sense, of course, both because the traditional culture of the Anishinaabe was and is predicated on the oral tradition and because the act of coopting the word, transforming it, and making it his own enables him to address the painful issue, laugh, and survive. Using the rich language spoken on the reservation, then, highlights how, with language, Northrup and others have found "something good / in something grim" (104).

The relationship between language, alienation, and humor is also articulated later in the poem when the narrator tells us that the Rice Crispies "commods" are packaged in boxes and cans with the labels, advertisements, and instructions in Spanish. The commodities originally packaged for foreign consumption establish a connection between Natives and the peoples of Central and South America that brings to light the at best dubious citizenry given the first peoples by the Federal Government. The narrative makes light of the connection by declaring that the "commods" offer food in addition to the free "Spanish lesson printed on every box and can" (105);

here too, Northrup finds "something good in something grim" with the joke.

Vizenor states that "The wild and wondrous characters in his [Northrup's] stories are survivors in the best trickster humor, no one is a passive victim" (*Touchwood* vii); this is especially true of Ben Looking Back in "Looking with Ben." In fact, nowhere in *Walking the Rez Road* is the use of humor as a survival strategy more necessary than in this short story.

Looking Back's experiences in Washington DC, the nation's capital and home of the National Football League Redskins, indicate the degree to which Natives and Native cultures have been collected and documented without being understood. Looking Back had read about the collection of American Indian remains held by the Smithsonian and figures that "Since they collect Indians, I decided to collect Smithsonians" (158). He gives Luke Warmwater a present from Washington, a piece chipped from a Smithsonian museum, and says that if each Native who goes to Washington collects a piece of the building then "we can build our own Smithsonian, right here on the rez" (158).

Tourists are too often no better than the worst museums; they, too, wish to collect Indians. Ben tells Luke that tourists on the Mall asked if they could take Ben's picture. After posing at no charge for the first dozen pictures, he starts charging five dollars per shot and makes more than two hundred dollars in slightly over an hour. When asked his tribe, Ben tells some that he is a Chippewa, others that he is a Sioux, and still others that he is a Comanche. Then, in this scene illuminating the majority culture's tendency to preserve the Native as an artifact and/or turn him into a tourist attraction, Northrup turns to humor. Ben says that toward the end of the photo session "I was telling them I was half Chippewa, half Ojibway, and the rest Anishinaabe. Some of the tourists were writing the stuff down as I talked. I had a good time with the tourists" (159). What can one do when it is clear you are not being heard, are not understood? How do you respond when people thoughtlessly take in that you are half one tribe, half another, and the rest (*the rest?*) a third tribe? What recourse do you have when they write down without question that you are Chippewa (the Federal Government's official designation for the Anishinaabe), Ojibway (the English approximation of the name given the Anishinaabe by neighboring tribes), and Anishinaabe? Ignorance may be bliss for the tourists, and for the majority culture as a whole, but how best to survive the ignorance of a culture that has identified you without attempting to understand you? You make a joke, find the humor, laugh in order to survive.

Pain and humor reach their peak when Ben Looking Back goes inside the Smithsonian and discovers the displays and dioramas of Indian history and material culture. Finding an empty diorama, Looking Back makes a "Contemporary Chippewa" sign for the space, props it up, steps over the

rope separating the audience from the exhibit space, and strikes a pose. The various responses are telling: some of the museum goers stop and examine the diorama, some give strange looks as they try to make sense of the incredibly lifelike exhibit, some do not even see Ben, and one woman takes a picture. At that moment, Ben breaks the pose, asks for five dollars, and then steps back over the rope to leave the museum before a guard comes.

The setting and the responses to the Contemporary Chippewa exhibit disclose the painful reality of how most see Natives in America, if they look at them at all. Ben's decision to become an object of the gaze of the majority culture by crossing the boundary and creating the exhibit is his, and Jim Northrup's, way of transforming this painful reality into something pleasurable. He looks back at the tourists, as does Northrup, in good humor; indeed, Ben tells Luke that he "had the most fun" (159) in the museum. The painful reality is accentuated when Looking Back leaves the Contemporary Chippewa sign in place to designate the space he has left. Ben tells Luke that "As I was walking away, I saw more tourists reading the sign and looking at the empty space" (160). Earlier, in "brown and white peek," Northrup writes that "We have TV, that window to America / we see you, you don't see us" (104). Given this painful truth, it is perfectly fitting that the Contemporary Chippewa exhibit is, finally, empty. The majority culture's appropriation and identification has historically been a misappropriation and misidentification. It is equally fitting that by the time Ben Looking Back finishes the story "Luke was laughing so hard he had to pull the car over on the side of the road. After he settled down and wiped his eyes, he was ready to continue the ride home to the rez" (160).

Luke Warmwater's tears of laughter born of humor make it possible to continue. Anishinaabe know this truth. Louise Erdrich has spoken of humor as "one of the most important parts of American Indian life and literature . . . and when it's survival humor, you learn to laugh at things" (qtd. in Coletti 46). Of her own people Erdrich has said that they "have the best sense of humor of any group of people I've ever known" (qtd. in George 242). In Laura Coltelli's volume of interviews with Native writers, Vizenor returns again and again to humor: "You pick the moment, the second, and you want the world to change with you, and it isn't going to do it. In fact it's going to say to you 'Too bad. Stay a victim'" and is when you turn to humor "as an act of survival, humor as balance, and play as imagination" (168). Bonnie Wallace, Anishinaabe writer and educator, said "We are humble people, sometimes, but what saves us is our humor. . . . We hit bottom, laugh, and go on" (qtd. in *Crossbloods* 32). That is, to close with the words of Jim Northrup, "you can't hold a good story down" (87), because those good stories, told in all good humor, are what enable Northrup's characters in *Walking the Rez Road*, Northrup himself, and—ultimately—the Anishi-

naabe to survive. At the same time, they liberate characters, author, readers, and Natives from stereotypes and misunderstandings so that a healing change can occur.

NOTES

[1]"Survivance" is Vizenor's term to capture the nuances of Native American survival. For instance, in "Manifest Manners: The Long Gaze of Christopher Columbus" he argues that "Ishi is the representation of survivance" (226) in no small measure because it is a nickname. As such, it harkens to and highlights the importance of oral tradition, community and communal stories, and memory and remembrance.

[2]See Edmund Danziger, esp. 91-134, for the standard historical perspective on this issue. See Ignatia Broker for the issue from an Anishinaabe perspective.

[3]This is also true of much contemporary Anishinaabe poetry and fiction. Vizenor's haiku and his thinking about that form highlight a text's capacity for resonance and the importance of audience and imagination. His prose, particularly at the level of the paragraph, is similarly crafted to necessitate audience engagement. Also, Blaeser writes, "I think the best poems might be nothing more than a list of names of people, animals, places, plants, sounds, seasons, because poetry is connections and these are the connections—the poetry—we all carry in our soul, the poetry that writers try to bring to the surface" (xi).

[4]Even those familiar with the traditional lifeways of the Anishinaabe of northern Minnesota might imagine that the last note sounded in "shrinking away" is in keeping with the philosophy implicit in the isolation families endured each winter in order to survive. The length and severity of the northern Minnesota winter, coupled with the small amount of readily available game, prohibited the Anishinaabe from maintaining their small summer villages once the weather began to turn; rather, families left the summer encampments and settled by themselves in the strong woods in order to weather the winter. While the families were by necessity self-reliant for much of the year, due to the impossibility of maintaining a village community, individual family members had to rely on each other for survival.

[5]The Anishinaabe creation story that opens Basil Johnston's *Ojibway Heritage* speaks of Kitche Manitou having a vision of the earth and universe in which he sees birth, growth, and death; chance and constancy. In a completely different context, that of issuing a call for environmental activism, Winona LaDuke emphasizes the importance of cyclical thinking to sustainable communities modeled after those of the Anishinaabeg (see "A Society Based on Conquest Cannot Be Sustained"). Also, Vizenor has been interested in the relationship between life, death, and chance. See *Summer in the Spring*, his interpretation of traditional Anishinaabe dream songs, lyric songs, and trickster tales, especially "Naanabozho and his Father" and "Naanabozho and the Gambler," for his articulation of the relationship. One should also turn to

Vizenor's novel *The Heirs of Columbus*, which concludes with a moccasin game between the protagonist Stone Columbus and the wiindigoo in which life or death is at stake.

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Irony and the "Balance of Nature on the Ridges" in Mathews's Talking to the Moon

Lee Schweninger

When he returns to live at the blackjacks in Osage County, Oklahoma in 1929, John Joseph Mathews (c. 1894-1979) brings with him a maxim (chiseled in stone), which he assembles in his new home as the mantle piece: "TO HUNT, TO BATHE, TO PLAY, TO LAUGH—THAT IS TO LIVE" (194). Although he does not share that motto with the reader until late in the account of his ten years on the ridges, its Westernness informs the entire book. The words, translated from Latin, reflect a Western sentiment.[1] As Mathews tells the reader, he found the pieces of the mantle at the ruins of a Roman "officers' club" in North Africa (194). The soldiers were protecting Rome's imperialistic interests from the native Africans. Thus, much like the Romans in Africa or the Europeans in the Americas, the author of *Talking to the Moon* recounts how he invades, settles, and justifies protecting his new homeland from enemies.

Characterized as a settler, Mathews, the subject of the autobiography, becomes an ironic embodiment of the progress of "civilization" across America and onto the land of the Osage. According to recent theory of autobiography, one can establish that there is a distance, a separation of identities, between the narrator and his subject (the author himself). Not even the best intentioned autobiographer can recreate the subject as it was; rather he must construct the subject (the self) from memory. Theorist Paul John Eakin writes that "autobiographical truth is not fixed but an evolving context in an intricate process of self-discovery and self creation" (*Fictions* 3). According to Philippe Lejeune, the failure to make a distinction between the *I* of the narrator and the *subject* of the narration "causes the greatest confusion in the problematic of autobiography" (*On Autobiography* 9).[2]

Acknowledging this distinction allays confusion, yet it also creates the potential for irony, an irony that lies in the space between the narrator and his subject, between the reconstructed subject and the actual historical figure. That is, the author (Mathews as Osage, as historical person) and the reader can perceive a clash between their own sense of history and the narrator's account of that history. The narrator claims that he lives in harmony with nature as he extols the virtues of hunting, yet at the same time the text itself insists that the disruption of the balance of nature and the practice of sport-hunting cause long-term ill effects on Osage culture and on the Osage landscape. The term *irony* as I use it here thus names the unspoken compact between the historical John Joseph Mathews and the reader, *against* the narrator (as it were) who tells the story.

The book's irony is perhaps most poignant in two specific contexts: (1) the autobiographical text deemphasizes the Osage heritage of the historical Mathews and his historical involvement in Osage politics and tribal affairs during the 1930s; and (2) the text emphasizes ways in which the balance of nature is disrupted through the building of the house on the ridge, the introduction of domestic animals, and the settler's hunting practices. The narrator describes his coming to live in the blackjacks, promising to maintain the balance of nature, yet disrupting that balance at virtually every turn. In short, he plays the part of settler in a book that decries the results of settlement.

In the context of such a discrepancy between the historical Mathews and the narrator's self-depiction, the autobiography takes on a function beyond merely relating a life; through its ironic distancing it assumes the role of social critique. My contention is that the book constitutes protest literature and that it achieves that protest primarily through irony. That is, by exposing the complex and paradoxical life of the settler on the ridge, Mathews creates a narrator who forcefully demonstrates the problems that the Osage face in attempting to retain cultural distinction and survive despite the machinations of the dominant culture represented by that settler.[3]

Author of *Wah'Kon-Tah* (1932), *Sundown* (1934), and *The Osage* (1961), each dealing with the history and culture of the Osage, Mathews, one-eighth Osage himself, was raised at the Osage agency, Pawhuska, Oklahoma. After schooling at the University of Oklahoma (B.S. in 1920) and Oxford University (receiving a B.A. in natural science in 1923), he returned to Pawhuska where he built a stone cabin and lived throughout the 1930s. It is the ten years at this cabin that he recounts in *Talking to the Moon* (1945).

Although the autobiography presents the life of a settler, Mathews's Osage heritage does inform certain aspects of the text. As A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff demonstrates, the purpose, structure, and content of the book

are informed not only by Mathews's familiarity with Thoreau and Muir but also by Osage tradition and belief. Underlying the book's structure, for example, is the incorporation of the Osage concept of duality that consists of thought or imagination (Chesho) and war or physical action (Hunkah).[4] Robert Warrior also notes the Osage connection, calling the book "an interpretation of the ecological and social history of the Osage land and people" (58). Guy Logsdon further identifies the importance of the Osage to the autobiography, noting that in it Mathews expresses unique observations of nature through the cultural dimensions of the Osage.[5]

Despite the Osage connection and Mathews's historical interest in preserving Osage heritage and tradition, he omits from *Talking to the Moon* his part in Osage history of the 1930s.[6] Indeed, the narrator assiduously avoids exploring or even identifying his own Indian ethnicity. That is, he writes not as an Osage but as an American of Osage descent. Perhaps this silence enables him to embody the progress of civilization unhindered by his Indian heritage.[7] Having grown up at the agency, the historical Mathews was highly aware of and involved in Osage concerns. He knew, for example, that in 1871, twenty-three years before he was born, the Osage were forced to move from their reservation in Kansas, which in 1808 had been promised in perpetuity.[8] They removed to Indian Territory, Oklahoma, where they bought land and settled in what became Osage County.[9] He knew that the Osage had fought off allotment until 1906[10] and that despite allotment they retained their mineral rights. As a beneficiary himself, he knew that when oil was discovered, many Osage individuals and families became rich during the following boom. He knew too well that this wealth invited exploitation from the outside.

Despite Mathews's awareness of the insidious exploitation, political conniving, racist and even illegal actions against the Osage, very little comment shows up (directly at least) in the autobiography. In only two specific instances does the author recall his "attending to the business of the Osage," and even then he only says that this work took him occasionally from the blackjacks. He describes neither the work nor the issues themselves. (See *Talking* 125, 212-13.) The autobiography thus appears surprisingly unpolitical for having been written by an extremely active member of the Osage Council from 1934-1942,[11] by a man who travelled often to Washington DC on the Indians' behalf and who was actively involved in acquiring materials for the Osage museum (whose creation he spearheaded). Mathews had just written *Wah'Kon-Tah*, a fictional history of the Osage in the nineteenth century; while living in his blackjacks cabin he wrote *Sundown*, an Indian-centered, autobiographical novel; and during the 1930s he was an outspoken advocate of John Collier's Indian reform proposals. This active, involved Mathews is left out of the autobiographical

Talking to the Moon, however.

Also left out is any description of the corrupt world Mathews enters when he returns to Pawhuska. The oil boom of the 1920s had died down substantially with depressed oil prices, but the exploitation of the remaining wealthy Osage people continued through the 1930s.[12] Mathews cites 1932 as the date the "great frenzy" ended, but he knew that the exploitation of the Osage did not stop then. As Terry Wilson records, for example, alcohol selling stayed prevalent, both bootlegged and legal. Use of addictive narcotics, especially morphine, was widespread, much of it prescribed by non-Indian doctors. Using a bail/bond scam, bondsmen swindled Osages accused of crime. Legal graft continued as the lawyers created lawsuits to force Osage to pay fees to avoid going to court. Lawyers would represent two opposing parties in the same lawsuit, collecting fees from both. And a disproportionate number of thefts were committed against Osages (*Underground* 158). Well aware of this crime and exploitation, Mathews spoke out in 1935, saying that "the Osage people . . . became industry, and flocking to them from all ends of the earth came every type of person, rats as well as fairly decent citizens. . . . If the . . . payments were stopped tomorrow there would be nothing here in six months, there would be coyotes howling in the streets" (quoted in Wilson, *Underground* 155).

In response to the fact that Oklahoma Indians were essentially left out of the major New Deal policies of the 1930s, Mathews blamed "self-interested whites, especially 'that group that have always lived off the Indian'" (quoted in Wilson, *Underground* 166).[13] The historical Mathews accused the politicians and journalists of being biased against the Osage in their accounts concerning the Indians' interest in the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) which essentially ignored the Osage.[14] Despite this intense political activity and outspokenness, the Mathews of the autobiography is silent on that and many other such issues. In a sense—insofar as any such generalization is valid—one can argue that the silence exemplifies how *Talking* is characteristic of Native autobiography. As Kathleen Mullen Sands suggests, for instance, American Indian autobiography "tends to be retrospective rather than introspective. . . . There is little self-indulgence on the part of Indian narrators" (61). Nevertheless, as this silence makes clear, the narrator selects and omits facts to the particular end of relaying a coherent and patterned life.

The narrator is a settler who builds his house, introduces domestic animals, and hunts the native animals, some to near extinction, while contending that he has returned to the blackjacks to climb "out of the roaring stream of civilization" (11).[15] The implicit irony is that in attempting to climb out of civilization, he brings civilization to the blackjacks.

Before he brings in domestic animals, the introduction of which breaks

the truce between himself and the other animals on the ridge, he acknowledges that he disrupts the balance. The settler's first disruptive act is to drill a well.[16] He seems oblivious to any disruption caused by the drilling despite his awareness of a well's adverse effects and despite the distinct similarities between drilling for water and drilling for oil. In emphasizing how drilling for oil desecrates Osage land, Mathews describes the spots "where holes were sunk for oil," and he notes that "Some of these spots have been barren of vegetation for twenty-five years." An old boiler "was like a wart on the prairie" (189). The reader thus discovers an ironic, a complex, even a contradictory, situation. Although not mentioned in the text, oil money enables the historical Mathews to build the very house he lives in, and provides him freedom from work.[17] He does not actively participate in the oil drilling, but he does drive his station wagon across the valley, without commenting that he consumes the gas and oil that the wells littering the landscape pump for him. And he does drill for water.

The similarities suggest an ironic parallel between homesteading and the adverse impact of the homesteader's oil enterprise, but the drilling also implies the desecration of a grave. Mathews finds the bleached bones of a horse from his boyhood: "I picked up two of the leg bones and examined them. . . . I dismounted and laid them one across the other" (5). Later, this bone cross marks the site of the well; thus, the drilling for water, symbolically, if inadvertently, desecrates a grave even before the building of the house whose "composition roof" remains "an alien" (17).

Despite this inadvertent desecration, the narrator writes that he returned "to become a part of the balance."[18] He even makes his house out of area sandstone so that it would be an integral part of its environment: "The house with its stone colored by nature was nature's own, and, to bear out the impression, a coyote came trotting across the ridge without even looking up from his hunting" (17). An early encounter with a skunk in the house further suggests the harmonious relationship of man and wild animal on the ridges. The skunk walked into the house while Mathews sat reading; *Mephitis mephitis* and *Homo sapiens* simply stared at each other: "Assured that I was harmless, he went into the kitchen. . . . He stayed so long that I continued reading for some time, then I heard his claws ticking against the cement, and he passed on out into the yard. I got up and closed the door" (59). The incident suggests the early communal relationship between the settler and the wildlife on the ridge.

Despite this peaceful encounter and good intentions, however, the settler soon breaks his truce with his non-human neighbors: "with all my plans to become a part of the balance of nature on the ridges, I brought conflict, after the period of a year" (60). By harboring non-native animals, he takes on responsibility and invites struggle, arguing that he is not part of the balance

anyway. A subsequent encounter with another skunk demonstrates how "disturbed" that balance has become.[19] This time a skunk finds and destroys the mother and some chicks of a "fighting bird" Mathews had imported from England. When the chicken farmer sees the skunk asleep among its victims, he retaliates: "I was so annoyed that I held the muzzle of my Smith & Wesson to his head and emptied the cylinder, glorying in the nauseating musk odor that hung on the heavy air of night, transforming its glory with the sharp explosions that broke the silence of the ridge into a symbol of the mighty power of *Homo sapiens* when aroused and announcing his entrance into the struggle" (65). Disregarding his own action that seems as brutal as the skunk's, the man claims that the skunk is the abnormal one. He writes that the skunk "need not have been the indolent victim of my wrath, but he let his lust,that had nothing whatever to do with his necessity to survive, lead into excessive killing and urge him to remain abnormally with his victims" (65). Even though he admits that the introduction of non-native species had "broken the truce with predators," and caused the skunk to behave "abnormally," he concludes this episode by describing his feelings: "I felt that I had to assume some responsibility, that my interference brought tragedy into my woven-wire inclosure" (66).[20]

Thus the irony: the settler, turned farmer, finds himself both pained by the tragedy he introduced and excited by the power a gun gives him. Like the white European settler, he argues not only that he belongs on the ridge but—ironically—that he "remained a part of the balance through [his] strength to protect [his] flocks." He claims that by breaking his truce with nature he "achieved a greater harmony with [the] environment." At the same time, however, he discards his dream of balance: "there is no place for dreams in natural progression," he admits (60). This rhetoric of rationalization echoes the European settlers' own arguments for clear cutting forests, for depleting particular game (and non-game) species, and for Manifest Destiny.

Mathews makes this irony manifest in his description of an incident with a blacksnake. Discovering the snake with half its body inside a birdhouse he had built, he identifies an enemy, and decides to protect his wards: "I had to shoot holes through the box with the 22-caliber rifle to kill the snake and, in so doing, killed the nestlings" (66). "My feeling of tragedy is keen at such times," he writes, "but there is certainly compensation to the hunter when the long, black body relaxes his hold and falls like a piece of rope to the ground, and the hunter can count the hits which were effective" (67). Now become hunter, the narrator has introduced not only conflict into his garden, but an ironic paradox as well: he kills the nestlings to kill the snake to keep it from killing the nestlings. He disregards the fact that, like the skunk, the snake behaved naturally in an act that had nothing to do with the farmer personally,

nor his domestic critters, nor his diet, nor his survival.[21]

The blacksnake episode is paradigmatic of the irony of the settler as hunter, as maintainer of the balance, and as preserver of Osage tradition. On the one hand he kills for sport and considers hunting a human contribution to the balance of nature; he submits that hunting for food recalls the active instincts of primal man. As such, hunting is not inconsistent with his philosophy of balance. But on the other hand, one could argue, the hunting he does is not for survival, and thus actually further disrupts the balance of nature. Complicating the irony is the fact that Mathews himself laments the passing of individual animals and of species. He especially decries the white hunter's practices though he himself is an active sportsman.

Hunting for sport and the fate of the American bison both vividly demonstrate the irony evident in the disruption of the balance. The June chapter, "Buffalo-Pawing-Earth Moon," begins with this sentence: "The buffalo are gone from the blackjacks and from the head waters of the Cimarron River, where the Osage once hunted them." From this, Mathews continues: "they have been displaced by the white-face bulls" (75). This simple statement recalls the importance of the buffalo to the Osage as it juxtaposes bison and range cattle.

Fully aware of the bison's historical importance to Osage culture, Mathews devotes "Buffalo-Pawing-Earth Moon" in large part to describing individual Indians and recounting Osage traditions. He associates this buffalo month "with the religious and other ceremonies of the Osage" (77), implying a connection between the near extinction of the bison and the passing or disappearance of Osage culture.[22] He describes the Osage as being "part of the balance of my blackjacks and prairie" (86) and connects the natural balance with culture. Through the example of dancing, Mathews maintains that tradition is the vehicle through which the Osage retain their dignity: "Self-esteem comes to the man pre-eminent again when he can give expensive presents on the fourth day of the dances, and a heroic tribal or gentile memory comes when his song is sung" (*Osage* 783). In *Talking*, he writes that "in its dignity and fervency the dance is still a prayer" (83). Nevertheless, he sees reason to lament: disruption of the balance has endangered tradition and tribal memory. Eagle-That-Gets-What-He-Wants is afraid because he "knows that his passing, and the passing of the other older men of the tribe, will be the symbolic passing of the tribe" (89). To allay his fears, Mathews records the old chief's life and thereby symbolically preserves the culture he represents.

Osage religion, too, was part of a delicate cultural balance: "Their religion, their concept of God, came out of my blackjacks, out of the fears inspired by the elements, and it was colored just as the animals were colored for perfect adjustment" (77). But just as settlers disrupted the balance by

bringing in non-native species, Mathews suggests that "Christianity and mechanism" threw Osage religion into "wild confusion" (84). He links Osage religion and hunting when he writes that "The passing of a concept of God seems to be almost as poignant as the passing of a species" (84). The passing of tribal memory and of religion is only part of the Osage dilemma, however: "The old men lament the destruction of their social structure, but they are more concerned over the consequent end of the tribe as a unit, the sudden rupture of their record, and the loss of their individual immortality" (86). Eagle-That-Gets-What-He-Wants is concerned about what has been happening to the young people: "Soon they will be white men and women, he says,and they will not remember very long what the old people have said" (89). Meanwhile, as Mathews reminds his readers, the buffalo have "been displaced by the white-faced bulls" (75).

In the context of the disappearance of the bison and the starvation of the Osage in the 1880s, Mathews offers a vitriolic condemnation of the white hunters. "There had never been any reason for lack of food, except that the ubiquitous white man, in his inscrutable desire to proclaim his presence, slaughtered wild life." He then somewhat romantically contrasts the white hunter with the Native American: "Where the Indian passed in dignity, disturbing nothing and leaving Nature as he had found her; with nothing to record his passage, except a footprint or a broken twig, the white man plundered and wasted and shouted" (*Wah'Kon-Tah* 57). Mathews further decries white hunting practices and the slaughtering of wild life by attributing it to the white man's feelings of inferiority, which he tries to compensate for by shouting "his presence and his worth to the silent world that seemed to ignore him" (*Wah'Kon-Tah* 57). These passages suggest the ironic, given that in *Talking* Mathews depicts himself as an avid hunter and sportsman who does his own gun-shouting on the ridges.

Against a landscape without bison, the author devotes the autumn chapters of *Talking to the Moon* to describing his own hunting adventures. Although he does differentiate between hunting as necessity and hunting as sport, he himself clearly is not a subsistence hunter. In fact, he details for the readers his eating habits which show that although he does occasionally eat venison and bear, he has no true need for such hunted animals. He feeds himself "artificially," he says, "from cans brought from town and food from the ranch" (60). He offers his guests "limitless beef and beer and piles of spaghetti" (98). He also recounts the hunting he does that is specifically not for game. Wing-shooting, for example, is "particularly good sport" even though of the hunted doves he says that "we have never elevated them to the status of game" (152).

The reader can see that irony exists in the space between the narrator's enthusiasm for the hunt and Mathews's awareness of its tragic results. In an

early essay, "Admirable Outlaw," Mathews describes an outing during which the hunters' hounds finally run down and kill a coyote. He has this to say of the victim: "As he is the embodiment of cunning, fleetness and courage, one feels that such a death is a disgrace, and unfair to such high courage. One attempts to forget . . . that this little wolf's long quavering howl is the very voice of the night prairie" (264). In *Wah'Kon-Tah* Mathews expresses disgust with white men's hunting for sport. In the nineteenth century they "sneaked over the boundaries and slaughtered deer and turkey. . . . Later when the grazing leases were given to the cattlemen, there were no provisions protecting the game of the Reservation, and thousands of prairie chickens and quail were killed and shipped out to market. The cowboys and the hangers-on of the ranches killed deer and turkey simply for the sport of killing" (*Wah'Kon-Tah* 56-57).

Robert Warrior makes the point that the "terms self-determination and sovereignty connote in their most immediate sense much of the human arrogance that Mathews believed was the root of twentieth-century problems" (101). Yet for the narrator in *Talking to the Moon*, hunting for sport brings about that very sort of arrogance. Take for example Bill Whitman. After shooting quail, he declares that the hunt has made him "feel like a god—a pagan one of course. . . . I have a superior feeling" (182). Despite Mathews's misgivings about human arrogance, the book chronicles a man's passion for hunting, "for the sport of killing." This passion results in part from his Osage heritage, from need for action,from the Hunkah of his nature. This passion for the hunt repeatedly juxtaposed with an acute awareness of its adverse affects, however, also creates a dramatic irony. Despite Mathews's own complex feelings concerning hunting and the elimination of traditional game, the autobiographical character seems unaware of his complicity in the extinction of the animals he hunts.

Hunting from an automobile or from an airplane, the narrator argues, is good sport. After all, he calibrates the intensity of hunting as a sport according to clean killing and its danger to the hunter (184); therefore, he argues, shooting from an automobile is sport because the hunter risks a flat tire and having to travel back across the prairie on foot. At one time Mathews also thought shooting fox from an airplane to be sport (186). Such sport reminds one of descriptions of how railroad businessmen would advertise buffalo hunting from the train cars as enticement for prospective rail travellers.[23]

In the chapter "Deer-Breeding Moon" (October), sometimes called New-Horn Moon in response to the whitetail buck's having cleaned his antlers this time of year, the author reminds his readers that "Unfortunately the whitetail buck is gone from the blackjacks" (157). In the "True Hunting Moon" chapter, Mathews explains that bear hunting rivals quail hunting for

the honor of the "king of sports" (174, 182). The hunter finds bear hunting exhilarating because it "awakens every nerve to incautious action" and recalls the human's once having been "the delicate, thin-skinned hunted rather than the hunter" (168).

Despite this reference to primal man, to the hunter, the book's irony is pervasive; Mathews reminds the reader that there are no more bear. In the first winter chapter, "Baby-Bear Moon," the hunter laments the passing of the bear: "There are no baby bears born on the old reservation now. I imagine there are no wild bears being born in all the former domain of the Osage" (193). Where have all the young bear gone? one might ask. Mathews answers: "All three of us were in time to see the bear reach a tall Douglas fir just in front of the hounds, jump around to the opposite side, and climb to the top swiftly." As the hunters later skin this bear, Mathews wonders at the bear's "size and porky fatness" (166).

Mathews's hunting practices are further ironic in that they lack any spiritual element. Unlike the traditional Osage, this hunter fails to thank any spirit or animal itself for the game; he does not offer tobacco. Traditionally, the Osage observed "religious rites . . . throughout the [hunting] time." According to Osage tradition, "'Still hunting' was forbidden under penalty of a flogging, and if a man slipped away to hunt for himself, thereby scattering the herd and causing loss to the tribe, he was punished, sometimes even to death" (quoted in Marriott 48). Yet Mathews relates how he is often alone on the prairie hunting for bear, or deer, or coyotes.

Such hunting practices suggest the hunter's loss of any sense of spiritual connection with nature. For this hunter, non-human life is no longer sacred; contemporary man hunts not from necessity but for sport; hunting is an ornamentation. Mathews's hunting, allied with *playing* in that Latin motto over the fireplace, recalls one of the earliest in a series of misunderstandings between European settlers and the indigenous peoples. The European viewed hunting as a sport and so assumed the Indians were not industrious; after all, they spent their days merely hunting. The European settler did not understand that hunting was the Native American's work. In *Talking to the Moon* hunting is sport, and comparison with a passage from Gerald Vizenor suggests its irony: the "white man smacks his law and order on the land, possesses the earth until it can hardly breathe, and then goes hunting in the mountains while the tribes die in his institutions" (43).

Through his hunting, his disturbing the balance of nature on the ridges, his apparently ignoring the contemporary political concerns of the Osage, Mathews can be seen as playing an incredibly complex role as man and as narrator of this autobiographical account. On the one hand he both laments and prognosticates the passing of an age, the passing of Osage culture, a passing that parallels that of the bison, the bear, the whitetail deer. On the

other hand, the settler/narrator is, throughout, an active participant in bringing about the deaths of those bear and, indirectly, that culture. As a hunter he has killed off the bear in Osage lands. As settler and home-builder he has disturbed the balance with his composite roof, well, and hundred-dollar chickens. As farmer he has introduced conflict and necessitated the killing of coyotes, snakes, and skunks. As beef-eater and automobile driver he has actively participated in the very culture he critiques. In his opposition he has relied on the very actions he condemns and has become victim to the very attitudes and practices he exposes. As Osage autobiographer, on the other hand, Mathews offers a powerful critique of Euro-American civilization, provides a glimpse of Osage culture and history, and with great skill describes life on the ridges. By depicting himself ironically, depicting himself as one of the spoilers, he exposes the spoilage.

NOTES

[1]The stones Mathews brings with him from northern Africa suggest not only the irony of his building a cabin on the ridge but also, as A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff points out, that the stones themselves have outlasted the Roman empire, an empire which finally only temporarily subdued the people. In that fire was sacred to the Osage, Mathews's building a house around the fireplace combines Western and Osage cultures.

[2]O'Brien, Krupat, and Wong argue there exists a Native American precontact autobiography, or expression, of one's life, whereas Krupat and Bataille/Sands in their respective works suggest that American Indian autobiography is not a traditional form among Native peoples. The latter stress the bicultural nature of as-told-to autobiographies. More helpful in the context of Mathews—who for the most part subscribes to a Western form of autobiography—are thus Lejeune, Eakin, and Olney who theorize about self-authored, written life stories.

[3]One must ask whether it is fair to suggest that *Talking to the Moon*, this "spiritual autobiography of a special period in the history of the author's life" as Ruoff calls it (5), also be deemed protest literature, especially considering that the narrator himself insists he "could never be disturbed by the struggle of social groups in America who waved ideological banners" (15). Robert Warrior thinks so. In *Tribal Secrets* (1995) he maintains that Mathews resists "the forces of death around him. . . . His voice of protest is not one that makes loud demands," however. Rather, by his withdrawal, Mathews moves "toward the maturity of intellectual experience and action" (Warrior 104). Warrior finds *Talking to the Moon* a cryptic critique of Mathews' Euro-American contemporaries.

[4]Mathews writes that "With his Chesho thoughts, his ornamental expressions . . . he was colored by the processes of the earth in general and by his own struggle

in particular" (*Talking* 221).

[5]Guy Logsdon writes that according to Mathews the Osage's "religious concepts are intertwined with nature through three principles of life: 'self preservation, the necessity of reproduction, and a Force that inspires a bird to sing for the sheer joy of singing'" (74). Carol Hunter examines Mathews's interest in Osage history in "The Historical Context in John Joseph Mathews' *Sundown*."

[6]Concerning Mathews's commitment to creating an Osage museum, for example, see "Two WPA Projects" (117-21). Chapter titles that refer to Osage names for the months, recollection of Osage stories, and descriptions of the painting of portraits to be housed in the Osage museum all show the importance of Osage heritage to the book.

[7]Ruoff argues that "Mathews realized that exploring his own ethnicity in this autobiography would have resulted in severe criticism from the Osages and would have undercut his efforts on their behalf" (15).

[8]In 1808 the Osage were forced to cede almost all of present day Missouri and almost all lands north of the Arkansas River in present day Arkansas. Seventeen years later, in 1825, they were forced "To cede all remaining lands lying within the state of Missouri and Territory of Arkansas and all lands north of the Arkansas river in present day Kansas." In other words, the Osage were asked in these two treaties to cede about 100, 000, 000 (one hundred million) acres. (See Mathews, *The Osage* 518 *ff* and Wilson, *Underground* 8-9.) The Little Ones were thus left with a strip of land in present day Kansas fifty miles wide and about 250 miles long, from 25 miles west of the Kansas-Missouri border (neutral land) to the Mexican territory, land promised to them for as long as they chose to live on it.

[9]Mathews recalls this final move (in subtle protest) by narrating a story told by Eagle-Who-Gets-What-He-Wants. In this story the Osage chief's father relates what the head men of the Little Osage think: "they say that what Government said to us is not true. They say there that what Government said to us about having our own land if we left Kansas is not true. I heard them say there that white men are coming there too. They will come like flood water on river; they will run over everything" (*Talking* 92).

[10]As Mathews points out in *The Osages*, allotment was unique for the Osage in that they "would hold their land intact but not communally" (773). Even before allotment, the Osage had money to buy their reservation in Indian Territory from the Cherokee; and before oil they had money from cattle grazing.

[11]For an account of Mathews' involvement in the Osage Tribal Council from 1934-1942, see Wilson, "Osage Oxonian" (278-80).

[12]Even as late as 1936 Mathews could have read an article about the Osage as the richest Indians. According to one writer, in the popular *Literary Digest*, for example, the Osage were 1) getting ever richer, 2) grumbling anyway about not receiving their full share of the oil money because the oil companies were cheating them out of three percent, and 3) enjoying a "prosperity such as not even their white neighbors had heard of." They enjoyed the prosperity, the author claims, even though they did not really know how to appreciate such wealth—spending it, for

example, on lavish homes they would not live in ("Richest Indians" 14).

[13]Throughout the depression the federal government did make efforts to include Indian communities in New Deal work for the poor among the Osage. The Indian Emergency Conservation Work plan, for example, put many to work digging ditches and planting grass in an effort to curb soil erosion. As Oklahoma Indians, the Osage, however, were essentially left out of the major Indian policy making of the 1930s because of "the political connivance of Osage County's parasitic non-Indian association" (Wilson, *Underground* 167).

[14]The IRA, signed into law 18 June 1934, abandoned future allotment and allowed for the exchange of formerly allotted land. It also extended the trust period on restricted land. But as Kenneth Philp points out, Senator Elmer Thomas of Oklahoma had exempted the Oklahoma Indians "from six important sections of the IRA. . . . These sections had extended existing trust periods, limited the alienation of restricted land, authorized the establishment of new reservations, and provided for tribal incorporation" (176). During October 1934, John Collier and Senator Thomas toured Oklahoma, stopping in Pawhuska. Thomas had opposed Collier's attempts to get the Oklahoma tribes to accept and thus benefit from the Wheeler-Howard Act (forerunner of the IRA) (See Wright, *Underground* 360). Collier notes that it is "not the general run of white people in Oklahoma who are fighting the bill. It's the small clique of lawyers and guardians who have profited in the past from the Indians and who hate to be separated from a nice source of revenue" (quoted in Wright, *Underground* 162).

[15]In an interview with Guy Logsdon, Mathews offered another reason for his returning to live in Osage county. He recalls that on a hunting trip in North Africa he was reminded of his youth by a group of "wild" Kabyles who surrounded his camp "joy shooting." "So I got homesick, and I thought, what am I doing over here? Why don't I go back and take some interest in my people? Why not go back to the Osage? They've got a culture. So, I came back; then I started talking with the old men" (Logsdon 71).

[16]As Carolyn Merchant suggests in *The Death of Nature*, Native Americans often objected to Western attitudes toward digging the earth. Plowing the ground for Smohalla of the Columbia Basin, for example, was analogous to tearing a mother's breast with a knife. Digging for ores was digging under her skin for bones (28). Mining is thus a form of incestuous rape. Sam Gill problematizes what he calls the mythologizing of the Native American Mother Earth Goddess, created by non-Indian writers. Mathews nowhere suggests anything as radical as what Merchant argues, yet he does seem acutely aware of the problems associated with drilling.

[17]Wilson argues that Osage oil production freed Mathews from seeking "gainful employment" ("Osage Oxonian" 271).

[18]As Ruoff points out (8), this passage clearly echoes Thoreau's description of why he came to the woods, "to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach" (*Walden* 89).

[19]This scene also differs substantially from one much later in the book when Mathews again describes his troubles with the imported, H-D (hundred dollar)

chickens. In the "Baby-Bear Moon" chapter (December), he recounts another chicken tragedy. In this instance coyotes kill the chickens, and the narrator's response differs significantly. He deems the coyotes "sportive": "They found easy killing and had some sport. I couldn't credit them with vengeance, nor with murder, for that matter, since they hadn't killed members of their own tribe. Their emotions must have been intense and their excitement wild" (204). Mathews's relatively calm response to this particular attack on his prized chickens comes in the midst of accounts of his own sportive nature and the excitement he gets from hunting.

[20]One might argue that the enormity of the narrator's action is not his killing what he calls an "abnormal" skunk in a fit of rage; the enormity is in his "emptying the cylinder," in relishing in the "musk odor," in championing the human being in the struggle for survival, and in attempting to justify the action. The passage echoes Cortés' burning of the aviaries in Tenochtitlan—for no other reasons than revenge and intimidation. In "The Passing Wisdom of Birds" in *Crossing Open Ground*, Barry Lopez writes that "in a move calculated to humiliate and frighten the Mexican people, Cortés set fire to the aviaries" (196).

[21]In thinking of other possible responses to the blacksnake in the birdhouse, I am reminded of one of Mathews's literary descendants, the naturalist Edward Abbey, who in the "Serpents of Paradise" chapter of *Desert Solitaire* discovers a rattlesnake under his trailer one morning. Abbey's response is this: "—I'm a humanist; I'd rather kill a *man* than a snake" (17).

[22]There exists a vast literature on the history of American bison, its near extinction, and its relation to the Osage and other plains tribes. See, for example, Dary, Voget, Marriott, McHugh, Garretson, Leckie, and Burrill.

[23]See Dary, 85.

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Fishing at Sandy Point

Tiffany Midge

Beyond the private road branded *No Trespassing*,
stand trophies of rich men's wealth;
houses eyeing the occasional whale passing by,
the echo of just-gunshot seal,
and rows of crab pots, kelp beds, nets.

Across the Sound
Lummi Island floats in the distance
like a slumbering blue whale,
and from this vantage it appears a misplaced
replica of Paha Sapa's Bear Butte;
dark, meditative, vital.

It's Sunday afternoon and we've gone fishing.
Dan for Silver, and I for poems.
He casts his line, I cast mine.
Every few throws a bullhead snags the hook,
winged gills struggling like sea gremlins
desiring flight. *Wannabee salmon*, Dan says.

A mischievous seal pokes its head
out from the surf and yawns a belch
with our coveted salmon on its breath.
I think of Herschel at the Locks
and the blow-up doll intended to scare him.
He just kept right on eating though.
This one in the water is probably his cousin.

Dan pulls up kelp, ocean's endless tossed
salad, while I wander down the sand spit
to squat behind the pilings and crab pots.
More seals greet me;
one is headless and baiting flies,
the other is shark bitten, gouged out,
its skins and flippers sun petrified.

Further down the shore,
an ear of corn, remnant of clam bake—
a tampon applicator, remnant of moon,
broken husks of calcium,
crustacean pinchers, bull whips,
acres of seaweed, Nike sneaker,
smoothed stones, driftwood, shell keepsakes,
and even more if you care to look hard enough.

I am fishing for poems at Sandy Point,
and if Dan's luck holds we'll be reciting them
over barbecued fish and beer glasses of cheap wine.
If not, we'll be playing Nooksack Keno
and dining on pan-fried oysters and chilled shrimp
bought with an Indian discount—wink, wink.

The lure are buzz bombs and illegal hooks,
and the pole is strained against the Silver
caught on the end of Dan's line. I climb
over the barnacled wish rocks
to capture the prize with Kodak, while
envious chumps rain on the parade.
"His line'll prob'ly snap . . ." they smirk.
"It better not, that's my dinner!" I smirk back.

Moments later I'm towing
an 8-and-a-half pound Silver, long as my arm
over the rocks and into the trunk—
its sacrificial blood
trailing all the way, and I hear myself
say to the lesbian in the rubber suit,
"Use buzz bombs." As if I'm telling
her the choicest scheme
in catching a poem.

Tribute to Mary TallMountain

Jeane Breinig

In the Koyukon Athabascan language there is no word for goodbye. That's because in Athabascan thought everything is connected. From this perspective, it is easy to appreciate the indistinct line between the spiritual and physical dimensions of life. While the late Mary TallMountain has departed from our physical world, she has left behind a rich legacy of beautiful and insightful writings. Now that she is gone, it is fitting that we honor her life and her life's work, by reprinting one of her well-loved poems:

Sokoya, I said, looking through
the net of wrinkles into
wise black pools
of her eyes.

What do you say in Athabascan
when you leave each other?
What is the word
for goodbye?

A shade of feeling rippled
the wind-tanned skin.
Ah, nothing, she said,
watching the river flash.

She looked at me close.
We just say, *Tlaa*. That means,
See you.

We never leave each other.
When does your mouth
say goodbye to your heart?

She touched me light
as a bluebell.
You forget when you leave us;
you're so small then.
We don't use that word.

We always think you're coming back,
but if you don't,
we'll see you some place else.
You understand.
There is no word for goodbye.

Thank you Mary. *Tlaa*.

Reflections on Mary TallMountain's Life and Writing: Facing Mirrors

Gabrielle Welford

As Janet Malcolm says in "The Silent Woman-I," an essay about Sylvia Plath's biographies,

> Imaginative literature is produced under the pressure of an inner interrogation. . . . Poets and novelists and playwrights make themselves, against terrible resistance, give over what the rest of us keep safely locked within our hearts. (109)

The writer Mary TallMountain was unstinting in execution of this undertaking. Rather than keep them locked in her heart, she struggled as a writer to make public sense of all the conflicting threads of her life: in her case, Athabaskan, Russian, Irish-American, pagan, Catholic, agnostic, tribal, middle class Anglo, shamanic and priestly voices all clamoring to be heard and expressed. One cannot do justice to TallMountain's work without taking into account the conflicts and the resolution of these conflicts in the life that forms a context for it.

As a young child of six in 1924, Mary TallMountain was, without warning to her, adopted out to a middle class white family, away from her Athabaskan/Russian mother and the Yukon village of Nulato, Alaska. She was the first child to be adopted out of the village by decision of the Village Council. With her adoptive parents, she was forbidden to continue to speak Athabaskan. She never saw her mother again, though she continued to write letters until her mother's death of tuberculosis when TallMountain was eight. Both her mother and, later, her brother (at 17 years old) succumbed to the tuberculosis that was epidemic among Alaskan indigenous peoples.

The shock of displacement from one world into an utterly different and not always nurturing one was to lead TallMountain along a path that could

have killed her through alcoholism or suicide and the many physical illnesses that she attributed to the buried rage and grief she carried with her. But, ultimately, she succeeded in embracing her conflicted changeling voices into her self, her writing, and thence out again for the benefit of others who are alienated, convinced of their isolation, confused by a multitude of internal voices. She specifically desired to take the material of her life and make it available to people who might need it. She wrote in an internal conversation with the exiled child she called Lidwynne: "From us will come some wonderful things for people we might never know, but they'll hear us say something, and it might change life for them just a little bit, give them some new way to think. And that's because of you and me, and how we are. How we love each other and our folks and them, and that magic Spirit we can't see" ("Dialogue With Lidwynne" 9).

Mary TallMountain wrote poems that celebrate Athabascan culture, such as "Good Grease," "Gisakk Come, He Go," and "Soogha Dancing." She also wrote stories of the homeless and elderly poor in the Tenderloin of San Francisco, where she lived for so many years; Catholic hymns of praise together with poems of spirit animals like "The Last Wolf," "Raises His Subtle Song," and "A Quick Brush of Wings." Her yet to be published novel "Doyon" addresses the experience of a child uprooted from one culture into an alien one, forbidden to remember or be what she was. It is in the novel that many of the voices come together, but both the pain and the dignity of the dispossessed appear throughout her work.

Mary's poem "Schizophrenia" explores the experience of being torn between voices:

booming
foghorns
sad
behind my squandered heart
where has the sly moon hidden
trifling
with her lover stars
so I burrow deeper
into the gray
maudlin buzzing caverns
poems wander gossamer
through
shadows in my mind
out of the mazes
I wake at evening asking
why is morning so dim

dusk flows rich as canvas
painted in oil
by Rouault
staring
at a stranger's gun
and into eternity
while somewhere monks
chant
gregorian masses
knives flash
blood drips in dust
police sirens howl
and I hear the murmured
mantras
of life

(*Light* 42)

Those who have heard TallMountain read her work will realize with what slow deliberation she would have made the split between the two sides in the poem speak to each other. As she told the story in conversation, the poem represents her literal decision between life and death. On one side of the split, made visual in the poem, is the despair of waking "at evening asking / why is morning so dim," of one who stared "at the stranger's gun / and into eternity." On the other lies healing poetry and "the murmured / mantras / of life" which come through strongly in TallMountain's short stories, portraits like "Indin Bilijohn" that would otherwise be despairing. "From each level in this alien culture," she says, "I reaped something to put into my bag of laughs and tears" (*Continuum* last page). Mary TallMountain's experiences with the lost days of alcoholism and contemplated suicide vie in the poem with her strong hope and her spirituality, the healing from abandonment and rootlessness she found in her writing and worked to share with others.

In this day of economic nomadism (not with a tribe of family and friends, but alone—a dislocation so deep and abusive we have not begun to feel its consequences), TallMountain recovered for herself and continues to offer to others a way of existing. It is a way she remembered only through courageous acknowledgement and willingness to feel the pain of her childhood exile and the experience of her return to Nulato fifty years after she had been taken away. She did this with help and she passes the help on to others who need taking "into the arms of my tall Mountain" (*A Quick Brush of Wings* 26, "Your Dream" 16).

In the midst of our constantly changing, disrupted way of life, TallMountain's poem "There Is No Word For Goodbye" is one signpost. The

poet never stopped working to come to terms with, to make sense (if possible) of having left Nulato without saying goodbye, with finding herself a stranger in both the Athabaskan and the white world. [For the complete text of the poem, please see pages 59-60.] TallMountain, in a poem that commemorates a moving personal experience, at the same time offers an alternative way of understanding leave-taking, exile, abandonment. There are other ways of comprehending a network of ties that keeps on getting broken than the one which necessitates the finality of the word "goodbye."

When cultures are mixed together in one person, that person may experience the pain and difficulty of being a permanent outsider from any one culture, *but*, if s/he is committed to honesty, s/he can also know the added scope of a consciousness that leaps beyond individual cultures. There can be not only different cultures that give one point of view, but also an awareness that there are very different ways of looking at the world and that there is great worth in each. Mary TallMountain recognized the advantages and difficulties of several ways of living and allows each to speak to the others. For TallMountain and all whose backgrounds are an international jumble, a deep richness of source material is available. One can access vision that, though seated in the sometime pain of otherness, goes beyond differences to the essential dignity in a human being.

This ability to acknowledge all one's capabilities, all one's origins (including those of being homeless, desperate, despairing), and to give each one time on the network, is an unusual gift, one that Mary TallMountain makes the main ingredient of her art. She shows as much compassion, for instance, in her portrayal of her dying father (although he left the family and abandoned her to a painful adoption) in the story "Wild Birds" as she does in the poems to her mother and grandmother and her stories about homeless men in the Tenderloin (*A Quick Brush of Wings* 42).

Because of her own insistence on her role as a healing bridge between ways of life, as an explicator of the pain and vision of exile, it is important that Mary TallMountain not be read only as a Native American woman writer any more than she could be read only as a white writer because she was adopted and also educated by white step-parents. To read her as *only* anything obscures the importance of the other voices expressed so strongly in her writing and the desire she had to write for all dispossessed people, especially children. She was painfully aware of the way in which our society abandons and rejects children, giving them little place to be themselves. She spent her life dealing with the difficulties of having no place, except what she found in her own heart, that she could really call home. She gave the resulting voice to her writing. It would be a disservice to ignore that that was what she was doing.

Because Mary TallMountain did not exclude voices from her play of

life, she stood at a place where supposedly opposing world visions could meet. It has been difficult at times, as Paula Gunn Allen acknowledges in *The Sacred Hoop*, to place her. In *The Sacred Hoop,* Allen was concerned over what seemed to her TallMountain's choice of visionary Franciscan Catholicism over Native American spirituality. Later, in her Foreword to TallMountain's *The Light on the Tent Wall*, Allen realizes that TallMountain was fully capable of embracing both beliefs and making her home within the transformation: "In telling her life and the life of her faraway people, she tells all our stories; she tells our lives. And in so doing not only affirms life, but re-creates it" (2).

In her confluence of faith, she discussed a right way of going about all the simple everyday acts of living, whatever faith or no-faith one might happen to be in. For instance, in "Meditation for Wayfarers," written for a Catholic audience but existing also within a Native American spiritual context (and acknowledging that many Native Americans are also Catholics) she says:

> How can we followers, how can anyone, not be aware of things? I remember faintly some uneasiness in cherishing a gift, a book, a new dress. Was I become worldly? . . .
>
> But with slow enlightenment the old door so long locked swung open, and in the midst of our contemplation there appeared an earthly garden. It seems the Creator intended that we have a garden where we could enjoy "things," could bless them in giving them prayerfully to God, and could truly know they are also given to ourselves.
>
> . . . Gathering "things" up into prayer-fragments, salting them with words from Francis, we begin to see these together composing the song of a human and fragmented life (fragmented as are all our lives) a song that connects with the Creator of all "things." ("Meditation" 36)

The multiple heritage that is the ground for TallMountain's life appears interwoven, each part mirroring each as she integrates and folds the corners back into the middle.

To take another example of her commitment to incorporating difference, both the influence of the classical training TallMountain received from her adopted mother and her Irish-American father's love of music and words appear in her use of classical allusions and in her ear for dancing rhythms.

> Letters from the Desert
> to Sister at Ocean
> IV
> Your Dream
>
> Ourobouros

ah stealthy the
monstrous worm of the world
in your throat
ingurgitated into
an ellipse of serpenthood

dichotomy of entrapment
together / apart
you struggle ever more
savagely until
body bowed oblate
you stare O holy carp
shuddering into eyes of basilisk

O now if I could
I would carry you little sister
into the arms of my tall Mountain
until you wake (*A Quick Brush of Wings* 26)

The Latinate language, the classical metaphoric imagery of ourobouros, carp, and basilisk, and the notion of dichotomy all derive from the Old World. But coming from Mary's other voices, the Indian, the poor, the dispossessed, is the vision of the European Old World as nightmare against which "my tall Mountain" will do her best to guard.

It is easy to hear the dancing rhythms that abound in:

In the Night Also
An Octet
VIII
Ultimate

You who inhabit the solitudes,
who sing in the thrusting Yukon,
who stir the breast of the snowy owl
To think that you

who paint the veils of northern light
should linger here with me

You who brood in the tundra; bud
in the small wild rose; flame
in the midnight sun—

Drift my gossamer thistledown
home
on your endless river (*Continuum* n.p.)

Catholic religion and Athabaskan spirituality blend with the Irish dance of words. No corrals, but vast space of tundra seen through silk-thin petals of a wild rose. All the influences blend to show how supremely the resources

of a mongrel human being (as TallMountain would have laughingly described herself) can be used if that being refuses to bury them.

This is what Paula Gunn Allen was talking about when she named TallMountain a supreme survivor. Not only did she literally survive physical disasters such as alcoholism, cancer, and strokes, but she mustered the forces of all her forebears (both physical and spiritual) to laugh at all kinds of death, emotional and spiritual as well, and to balance rekindled on the edge of a tricksterish new world. Allen says in her Foreword to *The Light on the Tent Wall*:

> Coyote went out one day, and he encountered some trouble. He got himself in one of those situations, and he was killed. He fell down a cliff, and all that was left was his bones. But somebody came by, and he called to them. He talked them into giving him a bit of their fur, and trading their eyes for some flower petals. That was how he tricked them. Then he pulled himself together, the bones of his skeleton all came together and the bit of fur stretched out to become his coat. He put his eyes in and trotted off. He was always dying, Coyote. And always coming back to life.
>
> In her way TallMountain is Coyote, and like that quintessential old survivor, she knows if you're going to face death, and if you're going to engage the sacred, you'd better have your sense of humor intact. It had better be mature, well formed. She plays. (*Light* 2-3)

That "tall Mountain," the writer who fed life onto the page and reaped it back again into life, has used the gleaning to recreate life from many deaths, as Allen says. All the separate bits of her—the eyes, the fur, the bones—tricked their way through all the near deaths until the final one—spiritual, emotional, and bodily—that she encountered. And now, like Coyote, she lives on as a teacher—showing the advantages as well as the pain of having so much to draw on, doing much more than surviving in a world hostile to the mongrel, the dispossessed, the Other. She leads a dance of mischievous cohesion in a world where things are flying apart.

Counterpoint
For Reuel
1976

I shall float upon you
like the brown chameleon I am
sometimes blushing rose
with startlement at life
sometimes singing a tiny tune

only you can hear

as you play your magic horn
at night where people dance
always looking up

into your far green seaborne eyes
reminding you of small things
peace
silence
trees
no one else knows chameleons
and everyone will think
you had been under a tree
that day
as a brown
leaf
fell

(Bledsoe 54)

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The Politics of Point of View: Representing History in Mourning Dove's Cogewea *and D'Arcy McNickle's* The Surrounded

Robert Holton

> Thus the primitive and the modern are ever at variance; neither comprehending or understanding the other. The Stemteemä knew many interesting tales of the past; legends finer than the myths of the Old World; but few of them known to the reading public and none of them understood. (*Cogewea* 40)

> Five tepees had been set up in the low ground by the creek, where they were hidden from the big house. After nightfall the flames would light up the black encircling pines and the reflection would fall upon the windows of the house and cast a soft glow in Max's bedroom. There would be voices rising up to him, too. He would lie in bed, swearing at the noise and wondering what it signified, whether the voices were sad or happy. (*The Surrounded* 60)

I

The problem of point of view in narrative is crucial not only in discussions of fiction but also in historiography, a field in which point of view is situated not solely as a formal problem or an exigetical tool but can be understood (to borrow Pierre Bourdieu's terms) as the stakes of a multi-cultural struggle to impose the legitimate definition of temporal reality. In this essay I consider such a struggle in relation to the representations of history in two novels which explore the interstices between marginalized Native cultures and the dominant white culture: Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* (1927) and D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936). Both of these novels feature main characters of mixed ancestry, and in their attempts to

establish themselves in the social world we see a tension that is at once a struggle between individuals and a conflict between the cultural narratives which frame their respective senses of history. The lack of common understanding that is elucidated in these novels can be seen to have affected their reception as well: the same cultural force field that divides communities in the two narratives divided the novels, at their time of publication and for decades after, from their potential audiences as well.

The founding statement of modern historiography remains von Ranke's injunction that the historian's job is "only to show what actually happened" (57). Von Ranke's confidence suggests a thinker whose cultural framework is secure, whose assumption of the felicity of narrative representation is undisturbed, and whose point of view is not in doubt. Events make sense and that sense can be communicated univocally and transparently in narrative. More recently, a very different attitude to history and narrative has emerged. While narrative can provide a sense of order to events, it is a sense underwritten by cultural presuppositions that often remain tacit and largely unchallenged. A "true historical sense," Foucault argues, "confirms our existence among countless lost events, without a landmark or a point of reference" (155). Historical narrative is a means of witholding selected events from the temporal abyss Foucault speaks of, and the necessary landmarks or points of reference thus established both constitute and are constituted by the cultural point of view structuring the narrative. The coherence of historical narrative depends to a great extent on the coherence of the cultural community whose point of view gives the narrative its orientation.

In *The Idea of History*, R. G. Collingwood comments that historical representation is constrained not only by the availability of information but also by the historian's frame of reference. When the historian finds events unintelligible, non-narratable, "he has discovered a limitation of his own mind; he has discovered that there are certain ways in which he is not or no longer, or not yet, able to think" (218). There are places, then, that a given narrative imagination cannot go. The problem of what is thinkable can be approached in many ways, one of which is determined by community affiliation, and the boundary delimiting narratable space coincides with the line marking off the cultural other, a line that is at once epistemological and political. What makes possible the translation from the events themselves to the narrative representation of those events, argues Hayden White, is "a notion of a social center by which to locate [events] with respect to one another and to charge them with ethical and moral significance" (11). The question of community, of social center, is crucial here to the orientation of point of view in terms of that sense of community known as common sense. And as Louis O. Mink has argued, common sense "has presuppositions

which derive not from universal human experience but from a shared conceptual framework, which determines what shall count as experience for its communicants" (182). The interpretive limits of this *sensus communis* occur at the point where cultural difference renders the significance of events opaque, incoherent, and resistant to narrative encoding or else necessitates a violent distortion of events in order to make them accord with an ulterior narrative logic, a different common sense. The representations of Native peoples in North American historiography—inadequate at best, racist at worst—have, until very recently, provided an unfortunate but clear example of this process. From the position of those within the dominant community, however, this has not traditionally been experienced as a problem: domination of the narratives of other communities has, in fact, consciously or not, been an integral part of a more general political domination, which has involved the disabling of resistance by a variety of means from the cultural to the military. The problem, in White's terms, is not simply "whose story is the best or truest but who has the power to make his story stick" (167).[1]

Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* (1927), one of the first novels published by an American Native woman,[2] calls attention to this imbalance in discursive authority through its juxtaposition of Native and *shoyahpee* (white) narrative. Three principal characters take part in the struggle to define the meaning of the past. Cogewea's grandmother (*Stemteemä*) is the repository of traditional narrative and embodies resistance to the dominant white culture represented by Densmore, a villain of melodramatic proportions. Cogewea herself is caught in between: of mixed ancestry, she has been raised with Native traditions and has attended white schools as well. Her ability to resist the dominant interpretations of history is, however, clearly demonstrated in her outraged response to the western novel she is reading, *The Brand*, which (like most traditional westerns) offers a white perspective on Native experience. "The story," she observes, while "interesting to the whites, was worm-wood to her" (91). Moreover, in this response she shows herself to be acutely aware of the power of historiographical representation in the struggle for cultural survival:

> Cogewea reflected bitterly how her race had had the worst of every deal since the landing of the lordly European on their shores; how they had suffered as much from the pen as from the bayonet . . . [since] the annals had always been chronicled by their most deadly foes and partisan writers. (92)

Nevertheless, she is attracted to the sophisticated easterner Densmore as he tries to seduce her, and during their 'courtship' she argues points of history and interpretation with him, the argument at one point focussing on that quintessential and foundational American historical event, the landing

of the *Mayflower*: "The coming of the Mayflower," declares Densmore, repeating a historical catechism taught to generations of Americans, "was as a spiritual light bursting on a darkened New World" (132). Densmore speaks confidently, assuming the point of view of universal truth here, assuming the Euro-American colonial narrative to be identical to a divinely-ordained narrative of Human History. Yet the meaning of an event, as this novel is at pains to demonstrate, is not wholly determined by the event itself, but is secured by the larger narrative framework that situates it. And Cogewea responds that "Viewed in its proper light the coming of the Mayflower . . . to my people . . . taint[ed] with death the source of our very existence" (133). This phrasing conflates, however, two very different claims: "Viewed in its proper light" suggests an absolute historical standpoint, a correct version of the story, yet that is qualified by the subsequent "to my people" which specifies a particular perspective or point of view. And Densmore, unaware that his own perspective is similarly culture-specific, later replies, "You are surveying the situation through colored lenses" (145). For Densmore, the transparency of his own cultural lenses cannot be doubted.

Ultimately the novel does not attempt to establish an absolute or universal standpoint from which to survey the whole past. The point is more to insist on the articulation of the relationships of specific communities to given sets of events—in this case the European settlement of the Americas—and to demonstrate the role of social and political power in shaping what is accepted as the truth of history. Of course, the fact that Densmore, the defender of the dominant American myth, is as evil a man as one could encounter anywhere in literature, is hardly coincidental. Ironically, it is the man who actually believes his culture's account of events to be objectively true who is revealed as the dishonest and violent criminal, while the woman who acknowledges the cultural encoding of historical narrative speaks with authority in the novel. And his treachery in dealing with Cogewea suggests a much wider pattern of treachery disguised as destiny in the relations of the broader communities these characters represent.

These versions of events represent what Lyotard calls a differend, and the different phrase universes or language groups each inhabits are later emphasized as Cogewea is called on to translate for Densmore from the Salish the histories told by her grandmother. The fact that translation is necessary for comprehension suggests the cultural abyss between them, and this is, in very literal terms, the aspect of novelistic discourse which Bakhtin characterizes as pushing "to the limit the mutual nonunderstanding represented by people *who speak in different languages*" (356, italics in original). The promised meeting between the two is pointedly deferred for several chapters, a deferral suggesting the tension, the polarization—an

almost anti-magnetic repulsion—that defines their relationship. The older woman begins her story with a traditional introduction but adds a more sombre historiographic note as well, stressing the cultural gap between audiences. "The story I am telling you is true" she states. "It was given me by my father."

> He told me the tales that were sacred to his tribe. . . . Treasured by my forefathers, I value them. I know that they would want them kept only to their people if they were here. But they are gone and for me the sunset of the last evening is approaching and I must not carry with me this history. (122)[3]

The stories she tells through Cogewea's translation, stories originally intended for a Native audience only, are tales of cultural genocide incompatible with the historical mythology of emancipation and light that has underwritten so many of the standard American accounts of the frontier. Having seen her culture's past eroded by white colonial power, she lacks a future now as well and looks forward to her own death, where she will be free of the "smooth tongue[s] and books" of the invaders who have betrayed her people by means both of physical and representational violence (123). Cogewea responds strongly to these stories; Densmore, predictably, not at all. As they leave the older woman's lodge, he calls her story ("those supposed facts as narrated by your grandmother") into question by noting points at which it differed from "recognized history" (129).

It is indicative of a central aspect of the relationship between dominated and dominant that while Cogewea understands the mainstream American version she rejects—as her response to *The Brand* has shown—Densmore has no understanding of the Native version that he rejects. "It is all 'bilk' to me," he exclaims dismissively (131). It remains simply incomprehensible to him throughout—a point of view without authority and thus a non-narratable set of events. This is precisely the kind of circumstance referred to by Collingwood in his delineation of the limits of historical narrative, and here the cultural limits of the thinkable as a kind of epistemological frontier, like the American frontier itself, are pushed back in the interests of colonial expansion rather than any higher purpose. Densmore's only serious attempts to find out about Native culture and history are part of his villainous scheme to get Cogewea to marry him in a traditional Native ceremony so that the union will not be legally binding and he can more easily betray her. "I will be Indian," he declares with an evil intent transparent to everyone but Cogewea herself. "Tell me more about your tribal customs. That marriage ceremony—" (162).[4] "I believe you mean well," says Cogewea, "and a few whites do try to uplift my race . . . but they do not understand . . . never will it seems" (144). "[T]he real situation," she remarks elsewhere, is that "the

whites can not authentically chronicle our habits and customs" (94). The irony here is, of course, that Densmore does not mean well at all; rather he stands as an extreme example of the fact that interest can have a profound effect on historiographic interpretation.

The lengthy debate about history occupies the central sections of the novel, but no resolution to the problem is offered. Its artificially happy ending allows Cogewea finally to escape from Densmore and his evil plot and to find her true place among her own community, but the narratives of Native and European North Americans remain as discordant as ever. For Densmore, representative of a malign white culture, Native history and Native reality remain non-narratable and no middle ground seems possible on which a narrative could be constructed that might accommodate or reconcile these apparently incommensurable points of view. For Cogewea, on the other hand, the choice between narratives—and between cultures—is simply an either/or, and finally no choice at all since no place for her or her point of view exists outside the community of Native people and "half-breeds" she has been raised in.

And, in light of the very poor reception of the novel, no middle ground of readers existed who might understand Mourning Dove's assertion of Native history, which for many years remained essentially as non-narratable a space for white audiences as Cogewea's point of view was for Densmore. It took eleven years to find a publisher for *Cogewea*, and then it was published with the costs borne by the author and McWhorter. Even so the book did not come out until McWhorter threatened legal action,[6] and, once out, it fell rapidly into obscurity, remaining out of print for decades until changed attitudes amongst white and Native readers rendered it readable—narratable—at last.

III

While *Cogewea*'s failure to attract a readership could, perhaps, be attributed to its lack of literary sophistication, one could point to many commercially successful works of questionable literary merit. One could also cite the example of another novel, D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*, a novel written from a similar perspective whose literary sophistication is unquestionable yet which, like *Cogewea*, fell into almost immediate obscurity and remained virtually unread and out of print for decades. Once again, a sense of cultural division is apparent from the opening paragraphs of *The Surrounded* as Archilde arrives home to visit his Native mother who lives in her more traditional dwelling and his white father who lives in his ranch house nearby. As in *Cogewea*, where the Stemteemä avoids the ranch house in favor of her tepee, these adjacent but separate habitations suggest the adjacent but separate cultural-historiographical worlds in which they

belong. "When you come home to your Indian mother" remarks Archilde, "you had to remember that it was a different world" (3).

While in *Cogewea*, Densmore's inability to venture into Native narrative space is attributed at least in part to a combination of ignorance and an evil desire to take advantage of the Native people, in *The Surrounded* this gap is more complexly rendered. Archilde's father, Max Leon, has his weaknesses, but he is not really evil or predatory. Nor is the local white historical authority, Father Grepilloux, villainous. There is simply an epistemological gulf that separates the Native historical vision of Modeste and Catharine (who remember the coming of the whites) and of Max and Father Grepilloux (a kindly, if patronizing and partriarchal, priest) who see the white perspective only. The problem lies more in the institutions within which these men are situated and beyond which—as Collingwood points out is often the case —they are unable to think. The church (and its residential schools), for instance, regardless of its intentions, does not appear as a force for good but as part of the erosion of a healthy Native tradition, and Catharine's gradual abandonment of Catholicism in favor of reclaiming her Native traditions is significant. Indeed, like the Stemteemä of Cogewea, Catharine eventually refuses to speak English (162), again a sign of a lack of cross-cultural understanding. White civil society is ultimately represented, however, not solely by the church, but in the person of Sheriff Dave Quigley as well, relentlessly efficient lawman and Indian hunter. With these two forces the novel offers its own version of what Gramsci calls hegemony: that variable combination of coercion and consent that guarantees the stability of a social order.

These two positions, Native and white, contrasted from the start, are only further polarized during the course of the novel. And, like Cogewea, Archilde must choose which version of the historical narrative he will identify with—no middle ground is available. Both Archilde's mother and the priest provide lengthy narratives of the early days of white settlement in the area, and both agree on some details of the events, but the larger narrative structures framing the events differ greatly. One is, like Densmore's, a narrative of an expanding civilization, the bringer of light and true faith; the other a narrative of social tragedy: "First the great numbers and the power, then the falling away, the battles and starvation in the snow, the new hopes and the slow facing of disappointment, and then no hope at all, just this living in the past" (74). As Louis O. Mink has argued, "The same event, under the same description or different descriptions, may belong to different stories, and its particular significance will vary with its place in these different—often very different—narratives" (198). To be consigned by the dominant culture to this non-narratable space has important ramifications: since the dominant culture almost monopolizes the power to bestow or

withold legitimacy, the narratives of the dominated groups may remain virtually unrecognized outside that community itself. Given the agonistic nature of this type of contest of narratives and the hegemonic power of the dominant group, Pierre Bourdieu speaks of the "'aphasia' of those who are denied access to the instruments of the struggle for the definition of reality" (170). "[O]ur voices have become weak," says Modeste, guardian of Native tradition, "when we speak in the old ways we are not heard" (73). And in his room nearby, just within earshot, Max (the white rancher) complains about these voices he can hear but not understand. "Why was it," he wonders, "that after forty years he did not know these people and was not trusted by them? . . . . What were they saying? Why didn't they talk to him?" (74-75). Even though he has learned to speak their language—Salish—the narratives they tell elude him, and remain incomprehensible to him. Without any shared understanding of the cultural framework which places their words in historical context, he cannot understand at any deeper level.

Just as the historical narratives of the dominated group do not penetrate the dominant culture, the rituals also tend to lose their meaning when they confront cultural barriers and ethnic hostility. Both novels contain accounts of ritual dances held on the occasion of the Fourth of July celebrations—and the importance of this image in Native fiction is evident in its recurrence.[7] The irony of such celebrations is pointed out in both: they do not take place in honor of the historical anniversary of the American Declaration of Independence, but are traditional Native midsummer dances which now, like a palimpsest, are carried out beneath the surface of the American holiday festival (205). "These ceremonies, [once] held sacred," writes Mourning Dove, "are now, shame to say, commercialized and performed for a pittance contributed by white spectators who regard all in the light of frivolity" (59-60). Similarly, McNickle depicts the degraded nature of the situation: "The idea was of a spectacle, a kind of low-class circus where people came to buy peanuts and look at the freaks" (216). McNickle goes into much more detail, however, stressing the pathos of the situation, particularly of a dance which celebrates the past glory of the Salish culture amidst the roulette wheels, pop and ice cream stands, firecrackers and circus music. "Let it be as it was in old times," is the refrain which ironically punctuates the dance. But for Archilde, "[i]t was a sad spectacle to watch. It was like looking on while crude jokes were played on an old grandmother, who was too blind to see that the chair had been pulled away just before she went to sit down" (217). When Archilde is, at one point, drawn in to the spirit of the dance, his ability to identify with its celebration of the "majesty" and unconquerable spirit of his Salish culture only lasts a very brief period before it is shattered by the scornful jokes of the white audience and by the presence of Dave Quigley, the white sheriff who is pitted against him throughout the novel.

The historical traditions of his culture lose their affective power in the framework of a dominant white culture whose responses, all too often, are to ignore, to ridicule, and to repress by force if necessary all cultural manifestations of legitimate Native perspectives.

Like the Stemteemä in *Cogewea*, Modeste, along with Archilde's mother, nevertheless sustains counter-narratives which resist the hegemonic pressure of the dominant interpretations presented by the priests and enforced ultimately by the police. The continued existence of this point of view in spite of all efforts to eradicate it is crucial: the dominant social group may have the power to impose its offical narratives on the groups it dominates, may refuse to recognize the narrative authority of the dominated, may even be unable to imagine the possibility of a point of view at odds with its own, yet that marginalized narrative may well continue to survive, even to thrive–albeit in ways unsanctioned by and even unknown to the dominant group. This struggle is not, however, carried on from positions of equal discursive strength, and, as White points out, "One alternative to collective unity is forced on us by a combination of master narratives and instruments of control backed by weapons"—precisely the combination Mourning Dove and McNickle document. In the end, Archilde is led away in handcuffs, an evident and inevitable consequence of his refusal to accommodate himself to the master narratives.

IV

These novels and their publication histories attest to what anthropologist Johannes Fabian has termed "a kind of political physics":

> it is impossible for two bodies to occupy the same space at the same time. When in the course of colonial expansion a Western body politic came to occupy, literally, the space of an autochthonous body, several alternatives were conceived to deal with that violation of the rule. The simplest one . . . was of course to move or remove the other body . . . [but] often the preferred strategy has been simply to manipulate the other variable—Time. (30)

Time is the essence of narrative, and an analogous difficulty may arise when, as is the case in these novels, more than one narrative purports to represent a single time. If those narratives represent conflicting versions of the past from the point of view of communities with opposed interests and visions, then the conflict of narratives becomes part of a more general social struggle to impose the framework within which the experience of past, present, and future take on significance. Thus the perspectives of colonized groups, whose experience appears incommensurable with the narratives of progress that have defined much traditional American historiography, were simply

omitted from that history. Continuing to share geographical space (when they were not simply got rid of by one means or another), they were assigned to a temporality at once separate and, from the dominant perspective, non-narratable. The hope expressed by Mourning Dove that her "novels would help Indians and Americans to understand one another" (Bernardin 490) remained sadly unfulfilled.

Cogewea expresses a guarded version of this optimism late in the novel as she reflects back on the experience of being betrayed by Densmore. "The curse of the Shoyahpee [whites] seems to go with every thing that he touches. We despised *breeds* are in a zone of our own and when we break from the corral erected about us, we meet up with trouble" (283). This corral is bordered by a fence put in place by whites to establish a cultural limit around the Natives and "breeds," and to touch the fence is to court danger. Cogewea's hope is, not that the fence be torn down, but that it be taken over by Natives themselves: "I only wish that the fence could not be scaled by the soulless creatures who have ever preyed upon us" she concludes (283). Thus the fence, whose existence seems an inevitability at this point, would be appropriated by those whom it surrounds as a means of protecting the Native community rather than enclosing it for the benefit of whites pursuing their self-interest.

A few years later, McNickle seemed less hopeful that the sense of being surrounded could have any positive side. As Archilde and Elise head for the mountains in search of freedom, taking with them two boys who have been condemned to return to the white school where they have been abused, Archilde has no sense that they can either escape from what Cogewea calls the corral or be protected by it. The guards who patrol the enclosure—teachers, priests and police—are firmly in place. As fall approaches,

> The priest and school were being left behind, but they had no feeling of security . . . . They had lived in a world of their own making—only they were foolish enough to count on it enduring. Just one glance at Father Jerome's stern eyes had taught them again how much greater—how everlasting—was the world of priests and schools, the world which engulfed them. . . . Everything was hopeless. It made no difference whether they stayed at home or went to the mountains. When they were wanted, by police or agent of the devil, they would be sent for. (286)

The problems faced by the dominated group in asserting a narrative point of view at odds with the legitimized dominant one are enormous, yet these narratives may persist—albeit in ways transformed by the experience of military and cultural imperialism. The narrative aphasia of those whose cultural authority has been delegitimated by the official culture,yet who keep

their counter-narrative alive, is not total, as is evidenced by the continued existence of novels such as these. And common sense, the sense of community and its borders, is not static, but changes with historical events themselves. Indeed, as Karl Kroeber points out, "Around the middle of this century, a resurgence began first in Native populations then in pride, self-awareness, and assertion of red cultures. . . . This resurgence has been steadily accelerating, and it seems inevitable that American Indians will play an increasingly important role in this country's life during the twenty-first century" (2-3). Even more curious and also significant perhaps is the rise Kroeber discusses in the number of Americans claiming Native ancestry, and thus a share in Native identity, community, and history (1-2). Today, a number of important Native writers who are quite emphatic about asserting a Native point of view are taken seriously by the publishing industry and by the general reading public. Unfortunately the novels of Mourning Dove and D'Arcy McNickle appeared a little too soon to enjoy the attention this resurgence has subsequently brought about, but they are important, even essential, documents of the struggle to keep the Native historical point of view alive during a difficult period of North American history.

NOTES

[1]It is not possible here to cover the fascinating debate concerning the question of historiographical representation, although the journal *History and Theory* is an excellent source. See also my *Jarring Witnesses: Modern Fiction and the Representation of History*.

[2]S. Alice Callahan's *Wynema* (1891) is now thought to be the earliest. See A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff's discussion of Callahan and her work. There has, as well, been much discussion of the role of Lucullus Virgil McWhorter in the writing of *Cogewea*. A recent and thorough treament of this is Susan K. Bernardin's "Mixed Messages: Authority and Authorship in Morning Dove's *Cogewea, The Half-Blood: A Depiction of the Great Montana Cattle Range*."

[3]See Lyotard's discussion in *The Differend* of this kind of formulaic introduction to cultural narratives among the Cashinahua, the authority it generates and the sense of cultural continuity and community belonging it inculcates.

[4]Mourning Dove's reference to this type of betrayal can be traced back, perhaps, to her own grandmother's betrayal under precisely these circumstances. See Alanna Kathleen Brown's "Mourning Dove's Voice in *Cogewea*."

[5]To become the object of historical study and narrative, writes W. B. Gallie, events must be recognized "by members of some human group to belong to its past, and to be intelligible and worth understanding from the point of view of its present interests" (52).

[6]Alanna Kathleen Brown discusses the novel's publication difficulties in "Mourning Dove's Voice in *Cogewea*."

[7]In Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* such a degraded ceremony, and its redefinition and reclamation by Betonie, is central to the novel.

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FORUM

From the Editors

The editors of *SAIL* sadly note the passing of Rodney Simard, former editor of our journal. In his years as editor, Rodney worked diligently and enthusiastically to promote Native literatures and to bring scholars and writers from diverse backgrounds and ideologies into a productive discussion of our common ground, until ill health made it necessary for him to step down and, subsequently, retire from California State University, San Bernardino. His ready smile and wry wit will be sorely missed. Good thoughts.

Calls for Submissions

AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURES AND CULTURES, PCA/ALA, ORLANDO, FLORIDA, 8-11 APRIL 1998

We invite submissions from individuals or organized panels (3 or 4 persons) focusing on any issue relating to American Indian / First Nation / Indigenous peoples' lives and literatures. We especially invite the participation of Native scholars and writers.

For individual submissions: 200-250 word abstract; complete address, including phone, and e-mail/fax if available; 30-word summary of paper; brief biographical statement.

For panel submissions: Brief description of panel's focus; 200-250 word abstract of each panelist's paper; complete addresses of all panelists, including phone, and e-mail/fax, if available; 30-word summaries of all papers; brief biographical statements for all panelists.

Deadline for all abstracts: **15 September 1997**. Send all submissions to:

Elizabeth Hoffman Nelson
Area Chair - American Indian Literatures and Cultures
American Culture Association
English Department - SUNY Fredonia
Fredonia NY 14063
(716) 792-9405
NELSON@CS.FREDONIA.EDU

SOUTH CENTRAL MLA CONFERENCE, NEW ORLEANS, 12-14 NOVEMBER 1998

Teaching Multi-Ethnic Literatures in American Literature Classes: Choices, strategies, experiences, problems, possibilities. How do you "survey" American literature multi-ethnically? What works? How do various ethnic literatures work off each other? And what do your students think?

Abstracts (paper or electronic) by **31 October 1997** to:

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REVIEWS

Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact. *Vine Deloria, Jr. New York: Scribner, 1995. $19.95 cloth, ISBN 0-684-80700-9. 286 pages.*

Vine Deloria, Jr. is a professor of history, law, religious studies, and political science at the University of Colorado in Boulder and has published in the study of Native America for twenty-five years. His most recent text, *Red Earth, White Lies*, is the first in a series that he will offer on "three terribly complex areas" (35) in American Indian life—science, religion, and politics. In this first volume, Deloria "deal[s] with some of the problems created for American Indians by science" in the "number of amazing inconsistencies in the manner in which science describes the world we live in and the role it has chosen for American Indians to play . . ." (35). In subsequent volumes, Deloria proposes to examine religion and the federal relationship, respectively (36).

In *Red Earth, White Lies*, Deloria posits that "corrective measures must be taken to eliminate scientific misconceptions about Indians, their culture, and their past" and that "there needs to be a way that Indian traditions can contribute to the understanding of scientific beliefs at enough specific points so that the Indian traditions will be taken seriously as valid bodies of knowledge" (60). He argues this through an analysis of the (mis)interpretations of the role of the Indian in theories of evolution, the Bering Strait, and big-game hunting, with special attention to the role of radiocarbon dating in establishing historical periods and validating said theories. Deloria's conclusions that science has grossly misconstrued the history of the world

and of humans, that it has proven itself to be inconsistent and erroneous in its claims about dates and events, that the scientist is no better than the competitiveness and peer pressure that his/her profession demands, and that Indian traditions have legitimate and alternative knowledge about the world have proven to be controversial and have been received both enthusiastically and suspiciously for their method and assertions. In respect of Deloria's scholarship and in an effort to understand the questions that *Red Earth, White Lies* raises, I will pose four questions about Deloria's methodology and conclusions.

Question #1: Deloria makes a compelling and important call for the reconsideration of scientific theories and their authority in understanding the origins of the world and the place of American Indians therein. He asserts that science has misinterpreted and mythologized the role and traditions of Indian peoples and argues that there is a need for Indian traditions to be respected and included within scientific studies of the world's origins and records. There is a definitive lack of theories and methodologies that allow for this kind of approach or that respect Indian histories enough to care about considering them. For Deloria, being informed is not enough; the scientists must now incorporate Indian traditions into their theories, fundamentally changing their conclusions. The question for Deloria's audience is how to go about this kind of project–especially if you are non-Indian and unfamiliar with how to interpret Indian traditions–without falling into the kinds of intellectual colonialisms so often characteristic of these kinds of writing practices.

Question #2: Theories of physical evolution have argued for incrementally progressive, incalculable, and unseen changes in the development of living beings, and social evolution has furthered racist ideas about the role and position of indigenous peoples in that "progress." But today, there is ample scholarship that argues for a different kind of physical evolution that is dramatically abrupt and unpredictable as well as scholarship that has challenged the racisms of social evolution and other scientific theories and practices.[1] Deloria's review of evolution seems too cursory, creating hegemony among scientists, theories, and their reception and consequently underestimating the differences and contentions among evolutionary scientists and within evolutionary theories and their reception. In other words, aren't the facts about evolution in greater debate than Deloria accounts for and aren't these contentions important to understanding the role of Indian traditions in science?[2]

Question #3: Deloria refutes scientific claims of a Bering Strait land bridge in order to refute claims that Indian peoples have no real rights to U.S. lands because they were merely earlier immigrants than Europeans: "By making us immigrants to North American they are able to deny the fact that

we were the full, complete, and total owners of this continent" (84). He is careful to show up the inconsistencies and errors in land bridge theories, specifically working through the impossibility of such a journey, and the need for alternative scientific theories of occupancy (81-107). My question is about how Indian traditions of migration might be accounted for in such histories. For instance, the Lenape have an elaborate and complex oral tradition called the Wallum Olum or Red Record which tells about a long migration from the "north" into their traditional lands in the northeast U.S. (similar to other Indian traditions of long journeys before settlement in ancestral lands in the U.S.)[3] Is there a way that traditional Indian migration stories and contemporary sovereignty land claims can be shown to be compatible as histories of residency and rights to lands within the U.S.?

Question #4: I have a great respect for Deloria's scholarship for its invaluable contributions to American Indian studies. This text read differently for me than his others. It seemed to me that his argument was too polemical. For instance, he writes:

> Academics, and they include everyone we think of as scientists except people who work in commercial labs, are incredibly timid people. Many of them are intent primarily on maintaining their status within their university and profession and consequently they resemble nothing so much as cocker spaniels who are eager to please their masters, the masters in this case being the vaguely defined academic profession. . . . Scientists and scholars are notoriously obedient to the consensus opinions of their profession, which usually means they pay homage to the opinions of scholars and scientists who occupy the prestige chairs at Ivy League and large research universities or even dead personalities of the past. (42-43)

Deloria makes like generalizations throughout the book about who scientists are and their loyalties to one another, their profession, and their theories. Again, it seems that Deloria's approach insists on a hegemony within science when there is contention and disagreement. My question is whether the approach is too polemical, and if so, will it be too easily dismissed for generalizing complex relationships between science and Indian traditions and the role of Indian traditions in science?

With those questions asked, let me conclude by restating that I think Deloria's *Red Earth, White Lies* is important precisely because "there needs to be a way that Indian traditions can contribute to the understanding of scientific beliefs." I think his call for the reconsideration of scientific claims such as those found in theories of evolution, the Bering Strait, and big-game hunting, and practices such as radiocarbon dating, is compelling and important and needs to happen. It's work that matters because of the way

these specific sciences have been used to position Indian peoples in histories that undermine and dismiss their knowledge. For all of us working under the assumption that indigenous histories and traditions are significant and meaningful to science, religion, and politics, Deloria's text will no doubt be a valuable resource as will his forthcoming volumes.

NOTES

[1]See, for example, Robert E. Bieder's *Science Encounters the Indian, 1820-1880: The Early Years of American Ethnology* (Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1986) and Sandra Harding's edition of *The Racial Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1993).

[2]I also wonder about indigenous people's work within the disciplines of physical science. How does it invite or oppose scientific theories and practices concerning how the world came to be?

[3]See for instance *The Red Record: The Wallum Olum, the Oldest North American History*, translated and annotated by David McCutchen (Avery Publishing Group, 1993).

Joanne Marie Barker

The Legacy of D'Arcy McNickle: Writer, Historian, Activist. *Ed. John Lloyd Purdy. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1996. $29.95 cloth, ISBN 0-8061-2806-2. 264 pages.*

The Legacy of D'Arcy McNickle, the first book-length collection of essays on McNickle, comes as a timely and important contribution to scholarship on McNickle, who is only now receiving the critical attention he deserves. In his introductory essay, John Purdy recognizes McNickle's enormous contribution to Native American history and literature and the glaring need for such a study as this:

> [McNickle] is a prominent figure in twentieth-century Native American history who never achieved mainstream prominence. The general public, and even scholars, know little

> about him. His name is rarely mentioned in history books, although he had a hand in shaping policies and programs that dramatically affected contemporary Native American life and the ways historians address Native American history. In addition, his own writings not only reflect that history but also the issues, and the perceptions of issues, that became crucial to indigenous North American peoples. An exceptionally talented fiction writer, his innovations in that genre are now central to contemporary Native American written literatures. In short, his life and works are immensely interesting and worthy of careful study for they are clearly relevant to understanding interactions among all Americans, past, present, and future. (x)

In Purdy's collection readers will find a variety of new interpretations and approaches to McNickle's work, especially the three novels, *The Surrounded* (1936), *Runner in the Sun* (1954), and *Wind from an Enemy Sky* (1978).

Although McNickle was best known for these three works of fiction, Dorothy R. Parker's essay, "D'Arcy McNickle: An Annotated Bibliography of His Published Articles and Book Reviews in a Biographical Context," recognizes the importance of his other writings and how they "provide a more immediate and intimate insight into the development of his thinking" (3). Parker's study gives a comprehensive overview of his entire body of written work, which is extensive and surprising in its variety: besides numerous academic publications, McNickle consistently showed his dedication to giving general audiences, uninformed about Native American culture, a distinctive Native American perspective by publishing essays on American Indian history in such arenas as the National Geographic Society and *Encyclopedia Britannica* as well as a "light piece" for *The American Way*, the in-flight magazine for American Airlines. During his career at the BIA under John Collier, McNickle did a significant amount of writing that not only shows his sympathy for Collier's reform-minded agenda but also illustrates the degree of influence McNickle had on Indian policy during the Collier years and beyond. As with his fiction, a central focus of McNickle's nonfiction is aimed at promoting "tribal survival and increased tribal self-determination" (11). Parker shows that, throughout his career, McNickle wrote numerous articles, book reviews, and other writings that were aimed at criticizing the government's inept and harmful treatment of Native Americans as well as promoting leadership and self-sufficiency among tribal members in order to stress "tribal peoples' adaptability and continuity" (24).

The second chapter, devoted to studies of *The Surrounded*, includes five essays that mark significant progress in scholarship on McNickle's first

novel. Much of the earlier criticism of *The Surrounded* and *Wind from an Enemy Sky* deals with the problematic endings of those two novels; these recent essays are no exception, with Robert Evans, in "Lost in Translation: McNickle's Tragic Speaking," brilliantly emphasizing the impossibility of an alienated figure like Archilde Leon, protagonist of *The Surrounded*, living in harmony with both the dominant culture and his native Salish people. Evans focuses on the multiple losses that result from translation, both linguistic and cultural. The primacy of English, as a language Archilde speaks and the very medium through which McNickle writes, causes an impossible gap preventing reconciliation for Archilde: "In *The Surrounded* . . . the mixed blood Archilde enacts the 'errancy of language' within himself; the destructive effects of white power stand revealed in both speech and its complement, silence. Both expose Archilde to his crossed identity and further his destruction. . . . For McNickle there is no language that can defend the Native speaker against the master language" (89). Evans's essay is a powerful refutation of previous studies that try to read something positive into the novel.

In contrast, three other essays on *The Surrounded*, Phillip E. Doss's "Elements of Traditional Oral Narrative in *The Surrounded*," William Brown's "*The Surrounded*: Listening Between the Lines of Inherited Stories," and Robert F. Gish's "Irony of Consent: Hunting and Heroism in D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*," focus on the tribal perspectives of the work, which can often be subtle but powerful. Doss reiterates "McNickle's intent . . . to show that it is the adaptability of Native American traditions in the face of physical, cultural, and intellectual opposition that has prevented those traditions from being completely supplanted by Western European social organizations" (53). He argues convincingly that this adaptability enables McNickle to construct the novel as an "act of remembering," parallel to oral traditions (60). William Brown's essay, which includes a line-by-line comparison of the story of "Coyote and Flint" as it appears in *The Surrounded* and McNickle's source for the story, Helen Sanders's *Trails Through Western Woods*, emphasizes orality in the novel and the way in which McNickle "has tried to approximate actual storytelling experiences more closely" (75) in that text. Brown's finding suggests that *The Surrounded* is a powerfully dialogic text combining oral tradition with the Western literary form, telling "part of the story of distinctive Native voices emerging from this earth to meet the novel" (84). Gish also focuses on non-Western elements of the novel, arguing that if it is read as a Western novel, it is "simple" and "formulaic" (103). By recognizing the complexities of the elaborate metaphors associated with the hunt, the novel becomes much less simplistic and far more ironic.

Birgit Hans's "Rethinking History: A Context for *The Surrounded*" provides some valuable historical background for better understanding why McNickle chose to make the novel conclude on such a seemingly dark note. In her essay, Hans compares *The Surrounded* to the earlier unpublished manuscript, "The Hungry Generations," which ends with Archilde taking over his father's ranch, living happily ever after. The problem with the happy ending, argues Hans, is that such a fate vindicates popular trends favoring assimilation and integration of Native Americans into white culture at the expense of anything else. Hans notes that McNickle was heavily influenced by assimilationist ideas early in life, but as he grew as a writer he slowly moved away from such thinking and,as a result, revised "The Hungry Generations" into the more problematic and complex novel that became *The Surrounded*.

This collection also includes three new articles on McNickle's second and most widely neglected novel about Indian life in pre-contact America, *Runner in the Sun: A Story of Indian Maize*. Dorothy Parker's "D'Arcy McNickle's *Runner in the Sun*: Content and Context," provides in-depth background for the work, showing how "McNickle incorporated various motifs from Native American mythologies to locate Salt [the novel's protagonist] in the Anasazi world, in a time and place that might be recognizable to his . . . readers" (119). Parker illustrates the degree of influence Joseph Campbell's work on the "mythic hero," *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, had on *Runner in the Sun*, using "thematic materials from the Native American mythology he knew so well, and then adapted the story to Campbell's interpretation of the universal hero myth" (119). Lori Burlingame, in "Cultural Survival in *Runner in the Sun*," notes that McNickle wrote the novel in an effort to offset some of the effects of the "termination era" by debunking the myth that "American" history "began with Columbus's 'discovery'" (136). Along the same lines, she also illustrates how McNickle tears down romantic and stereotyped notions of Native Americans by "striv[ing] to recreate a realistic or true-to-life depiction of Indian life in the precontact era" (137) and showing the "necessity of change and adaptation in Native American cultures" (151). In another article that deals with McNickle's agenda of illustrating Native American life in a real-life, dynamic manner, Jay Hansford C. Vest, in "A Legend of Culture: D'Arcy McNickle's *Runner in the Sun*," argues that McNickle addresses the "civilized / savage" stereotype in that novel. Part of Vest's argument comes from his assertion that McNickle juxtaposes "traditional Native legends" against "the implicit Western stereotypes of American Indian cultures" in order to exploit the "Native American intellectual tradition of Trickster-Transformation characteristic to Native oral

narratives" (157). These three studies suggest that *Runner in the Sun* should be recognized on the same par with McNickle's other two novels, rather than being downplayed as an adolescent novel, which is part of the reason for its lack of critical recognition.

The final chapter of the collection offers three approaches to *Wind from an Enemy Sky*, McNickle's final and posthumous novel. In "Wards of the Government: Federal Indian Policy in 'How Anger Died,'" Birgit Hans offers another study of a manuscript version that preceded the published novel, discussing how McNickle's interest and involvement in federal Indian policy influenced his fiction. Hans argues that the manuscript version, "How Anger Died," which ends happily with Adam Pell successfully returning the sacred Feather Boy bundle to the fictional Little Elk people, is McNickle's exploration of the consequences of "the government program to 'civilize the Indians'" (173). Her paper focuses on the general intolerance on behalf of the government toward Native culture that McNickle perceived as he was writing the manuscript, which is symbolized by the removal of Feather Boy, who provided the Little Elk people with their traditional religion and agricultural methods.

James Ruppert's "Two Humanities: Mediational Discourse in *Wind from an Enemy Sky*," a condensed version of a chapter from his book *Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction*, provides a convincing explanation for the puzzling conclusion of the novel. Using reader-response theories of interpretation, Ruppert shows how McNickle was attempting to show an Indian perspective through a medium intelligible to white readers not familiar with Native cultures by foregrounding well-intended white characters whose efforts ultimately caused great harm. He writes, "the sense of the inadequacy of the non-Native understanding of Indian thought (best exemplified by Pell) keeps the implied non-Native reader from rushing into a specific solution. Implied non-Native readers are led to see that the 'real targets' [of Indian anger like that expressed by Bull at the close of the novel] are those like themselves who come with solutions to Indian problems" (193). By focusing on the lack of understanding of the Little Elks found in characters like Adam Pell and Toby Rafferty,the reform-minded agent, Ruppert argues that McNickle is simply showing his non-Native readers the potential results of cultural misunderstanding in order to espouse in his readers a sense of "cultural conversation" (200) instead of cultural imperialism. The final essay in the collection, Alanna Kathleen Brown's "'What Did You See? What Did You Learn? What Will You Remember?': *Wind from an Enemy Sky*," also emphasizes McNickle's agenda in teaching white readers. In this case, Brown focuses on the character of Henry Jim, the first prominent member of the Little Elk tribe to

accept the white way of life, but who is fully reconciled with the rest of the tribe shortly before his death. "Henry Jim's story, combined with Antoine's, shows readers that the whites' promise of a better life for Native Americans was a lie. Instead, those who believed themselves to be culturally superior are exposed as arrogant, abusive of power, and self-knowingly manipulative" (215). Like Ruppert, Brown's article offers a hopeful reading of the novel's conclusion, giving special attention to positive elements that occur in the novel, such as Henry Jim's reconciliation, Antoine's role as a young leader, and the success of others such as Henry Two Bits, who wants to take up farming so his sons will come back to the tribe.

This collection, with its consistently powerful readings of McNickle's work, is a strong sign that McNickle—one of the most influential Native American writers—is finally getting the high critical stature he deserves.

Andrew McClure

The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives. *Ed. T. Lindsay Baker and Julie P. Baker. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1996. $24.95 paper, ISBN 0-8061-2859-3. 544 pages.*

"I am what we colored people call a 'native.' That means that I didn't come into the Indian country from somewhere in the Old South after the War like so many Negroes did, but I was born here in the old Creek nation, and my master was a Creek Indian. That was eighty-three years ago, so I am told." Thus begins the narrative of Mary Grayson, a resident of Tulsa, Oklahoma and eighty-three years old at the time of her interview in the summer of 1937. This is just one of one hundred and thirty Oklahoma freedmen's narratives gathered from African Americans who had been born into slavery. These people shared the stories of their lives with field workers from the Oklahoma Writers Project over a three-year period in the mid-1930s.

Twenty-eight of the 130 informants were in servitude as slaves of members of the Creek, Cherokee, Chickasaw, or Choctaw nations who had taken from the Euro-Americans the practice of black slavery. When

expelled from their Southeastern homelands, they took with them their slaves to Indian Territory. These insightful, detailed, inside views of slavery among the American Indians provide a look into a time many people simply ignore or are not aware of. The remaining 102 narratives come from people who were held in bondage in other states, moving with their masters to Oklahoma soon after the opening of the territory to settlement by non-Indians. Although American Indians had a reputation for showing more humanity to their slaves than whites, these narratives give a broad range of relations between all groups.

Haunting, oftentimes poetic accounts ("Next thing we knowed they was Confederate soldiers riding by pretty nearly every day in big droves") of memories during rumors of the Civil War, through the actual fighting, and the freeing of the slaves afterwards, give readers a chilling account of a time when any man with enough money and who so desired, was able to actually own the lives of others. Common threads of hurt, dedication to masters (probably spurred by the interviewers who were white), and a belief in the power of strong prayers weave together these narratives.

Accounts of the Pin Indians (the Cherokee secret society that opposed Cherokee ownership of slaves as well as other elements of Euro-American society) show that not all American Indians were in favor of slavery. The factional discord caused by some Indians backing the South, and still others the North during the Civil War, makes for a very interesting aspect of the narratives. After the Confederate surrender at Appomattox in 1865, American Indians were forced to negotiate new treaties with the U.S. government, which insisted that they make their slaves full legal members of the tribes. Four of the five so-called "Civilized Tribes" complied; the Chickasaws refused to accept their former slaves as tribal members.

Highly emotional reading, *The WPA Oklahoma Slave Narratives* takes the reader into a time that exists only in memory. Educational yet disturbing, this collection is recommended for anyone who desires to know more about the truth surrounding slavery than traditional history books have presented over the years.

MariJo Moore

Completing the Circle. ***Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve. Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 1995. $20 cloth, ISBN 0-8032-4226-3. xvi + 119 pages.***

When she was a child, Virginia Driving Hawk's family left their home on the Rosebud Indian Reservation for a summer vacation in the Black Hills. At one point they stopped for gas and she ran behind the station, where she encountered three privy doors: MEN, WOMEN, INDIANS. Back on the road, she told her parents about her discovery, commenting: "Isn't it nice that there was a special place for Indians?" Years later, having learned more about the racial bigotry that permeates American society, Sneve learned that she had to create her own "'special places' because no one else would provide them" for her (95). This personal account of her family history is one of those special places.

Completing the Circle is Sneve's affectionate chronicle of her family, focusing especially on her paternal grandmother and a maternal great-grandmother, along with other female and male relatives who nurtured her. The title refers to the recent Dakota/Lakota tradition of quilting; Sneve suggests the star quilt as a metaphor for the way an individual life develops as an expanding circle, pieced together by family relationships and storytelling. This book was conceived at a family Christmas gathering in 1988, where Sneve and several female relatives decided to create a "picture book" of heirloom photos, and Sneve volunteered to compile a brief family history to accompany the album. What followed in her attempt to flesh out family records and stories involved several years of research, collecting historical data from published sources as well as unpublished manuscripts, archival materials, and interviews with relatives. Sneve has attempted to synthesize this information in her narrative, with mixed results; in the course of her research, she encountered significant gaps in information about Dakota/Lakota women, and she admits that "this great lack of knowledge made me feel incomplete" (xii).

The book is organized in five chapters: two centered on her grandmother and great-grandmother, two chronicling family history on the Santee

and Rosebud reservations, and a concluding chapter detailing Sneve's own childhood recollections. The first two chapters offer a meandering patchwork of memoir, storytelling, ethnography, and history; each begins by describing the centrality of a maternal ancestor and her use of story as an educational tool, then moves to a broader discussion collecting various insights from Sneve's historical research. The remaining chapters are structured in a more straightforward chronological fashion, weaving together the several branches of the family until Sneve herself appears on the scene. The main flaw in this book is the organization of the text, which maintains a readable voice but never establishes a unifying narrative purpose beyond Sneve's desire to document her family's history. And although she clearly wants to challenge the Eurocentric interpretations of gender relations commonly advanced by both patriarchal scholars and their feminist critics, Sneve does not adequately problematize the Western categories of marriage and kinship, racial and religious identity, and historiography that she relies on throughout her narrative.

The primary value of this book lies in passages offering an intimate portrait of reservation life during the first half of the twentieth century, including interesting references to the important Episcopal women's collective Winyan Omniciye, employment opportunities provided by the Indian WPA, and a Depression-era dance band (led by Sneve's Episcopal priest father) called "Chief Crazy Horse and the Syncopators." In her depiction of Dakota/Lakota churches, Sneve interprets religious adaptation by emphasizing functional continuity despite changes in form, while also pointing out the unpredictable persistence of some traditional Dakota/ Lakota forms within these Christian communities. I was particularly struck by how many times (at least seven, by my count) Sneve recounts important family and community events that happened at Christmas, with no apparent mention of Easter or other religious or national holidays, a narrative pattern that may very well reflect a distinctively Dakota/Lakota theological interpretation of Christian history.

James Treat

Bone Game. ***Louis Owens. American Indian Literature and Critical Studies Series 10. Norman: U of Oklahoma P, 1994. $19.95 cloth, ISBN 0-8061-2664-7. 243 pages.***

Tricksters in Native American thought often include the gambler and skinwalker. Traditionally, the character of the gambler appears in order to test a person, who must play and win a life and death game so that the individual (specifically) and the tribe (generally) will survive. And, according to anthropologist Larry Sunderland (*500 Nations*), a Navajo skinwalker ostensibly inserts a bone into a victim's body without breaking the skin. This action often results in mental and/or physical injury, illness, and death. The bone can only be removed ceremonially by a singer (hataali); both the gambler and skinwalker are shapeshifters. During the Morning Star Ceremony, which is demonstrated in *Bone Game* and was ended by Metalsharo (Pawnee) in 1813, a maiden's body would be painted 1/2 black and 1/2 white, staked to the ground, and shot full of arrows in a Dionysian ceremony. Owens delicately intertwines these three ceremonies and figures in a story filled with action, mystery, and surprises.

Similar to the traditional gambler, who collects scalps and hands of victims, *Bone Game* opens with the students and faculty at the University of Califorina at Santa Cruz (where Owens taught Native American literatures) in a frenzy because the head and hands of students have started to wash up on a nearby shoreline. The plot is further complicated because the protagonist, who suffers from "ghost sickness" (96), must stop his slow alcohol-induced suicide before he can face his destiny and stop the murders. This protagonist in *Bone Game*, Dr. Cole McCurtain (Choctaw/Irish, middle-aged, survivor's guilt, divorced), is the unwilling and unknowing hero who must confront the gambler/trickster/skinwalker. Although Cole seems aware of the magnitude of what he must do, his traditional family rushes to assist him because, as the medicine man Luther states, "This story's so big Cole only sees a little bit of it" (79).

Gerald Vizenor, the academic trickster, states that "that game, the four ages of man [and woman], continues to be played with evil gamblers in the

cities" (*Interior Landscapes* 180), and similarly, throughout his text, Owens implies that this mortal game is still being played.

In *Bone Game* the trickster/gambler/skinwalker is both literal and mythical in this text where Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee/Irish) has the past and present, dreams and waking, real and surreal, and natural and supernatural exist simultaneously. Owens's text is easily accessible to both Indian and non-Indian alike, and he effectively grabs his readers and shakes them into a realization (shared by Mikhail Bakhtin) that myths and everyday reality exist simultaneously—maybe we had better start listening.

Julie LaMay Abner

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Andrew McClure is currently completing his dissertation on Native American literature at the University of New Mexico. He has previously published articles on Gerald Vizenor and James Welch, and he has an article forthcoming with *MELUS* on Sarah Winnemucca Hopkins's autobiography, *Life among the Piutes*.

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