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# Refiguring Indian Blood through Poetry, Photography, and Performance Art

ELIZABETH ARCHULETA

One of the most provocative issues facing American Indians today concerns the competing definitions of Indian identity.<sup>1</sup> Significant questions asked about identity include, Are there characteristics associated with Indianness? Does Indian identity originate from genetics or from cultural affiliation? Finally, Is Indian identity static, or can it change? American Indians and non-Indians have defined Indian identity through law, biology, and culture. All three overlap in specific ways, but more significantly, all have ties to outdated blood quantum standards associated with nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century theories of race. While the dominant culture has largely discredited and discontinued the use of the “one-drop rule” historically used to determine a legally codified African American identity, Indians and non-Indians alike continue to foreground blood as the standard for determining American Indian identity.

Blood quantum standards divide and alienate American Indian communities and perpetuate a colonial discourse that promotes internalized self-hatred, alienation, and fractionation. This internalized oppression appears in the work of mixed-blood authors Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna/Sioux/Lebanese) and Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d’Alene). At the same time, other full- and mixed-blood poets and artists such as Elizabeth Woody (Warm Springs/Wasco/Yakama/Pit River/Navajo), Teresa Iyall-Santos (Coeur d’Alene/Yakama), James Luna (Luiseño/Dieguëño), Marie Annharte Baker (Anishinabe/Irish), and Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie (Seminole/Muskogee/Diné) create oppositional models of representation that challenge

current paradigms of Indian identity and, at the same time, challenge Indigenous audiences to create alternative understandings of what it means to be Indian. They use their poetry and photography, as well as their own bodies, to create images that either refigure the binary of blood and identity that adds up to “Indian” or reinforce the strength of multifarious Indian identities that cannot be measured by blood.

In Paula Gunn Allen’s poem “Dear World,” a mixed-blood identity causes internalized oppression and racial self-loathing that manifests itself through an illness that is figured in physical, mental, and spiritual terms. Allen’s poem illustrates how blood quantum standards tend to promote internalized self-hatred, forcing the mixed-blood person to blame herself or himself, rather than the vagaries of history and prevalence of non-Indian violence against Indians, for the effects of internalized racism. In the poem, a daughter talks to her mother, who has lupus, about what the mother feels is a connection between her mixed-blood status and her illness. The mother describes lupus as “a disease / of self-attack,” similar to “a mugger” who breaks into “your home,” and when the police arrive, she tells her daughter, “they beat up on you / instead of on your attackers” (56). In medical terms, lupus is a chronic autoimmune disease in which the immune system attacks normal tissue. In other words, one’s own immune system fights itself, literally setting one’s own body on fire by creating inflammation as a protective process designed to eliminate a foreign body and protect itself. The daughter recognizes the logic in her mother’s analogy. She tells her mother,

that makes sense.  
It’s in the blood,  
in the dynamic.

The daughter realizes,

A halfbreed woman  
can hardly do anything else  
but attack herself,  
her blood attacks itself. (56)

She believes, “There are historical reasons for this [the blood attacking itself]” (56). While the daughter positions her mother’s illness in a historical context, she also implies that her mother has learned to hate herself, which explains why she “can hardly do anything else but attack herself.”

The history of white–Indian relations is written in the blood of the mother’s body, exhibiting itself as physical illness and dysfunction. The narrator unites illness and history through blood whose “Indian” side inevitably attacks a foreign intruder, meaning the white, Euramerican blood contained in her mother’s body, a foreign blood that has colonized and assumed power over the “Indian country” that is her mother’s body. The dominant culture’s construction of and American Indians’ tendency to adopt “authentic” Indian identity based on blood quantum standards leave the mother unable to “make peace / being Indian and white” (56). Her racially mixed body no longer signifies clearly within either system of identification, which leaves a question about how her being is constituted. Conflicting definitions of self render her invisible, because, she says, her blood’s varied strains “cancel each other out. / Leaving no one in the place” (56). No one accepts her as white or as Indian, leaving her to feel that she is “attacked by everyone,” and thus, her body becomes “conquered, occupied, destroyed / by her own blood’s diverse strains” (56). The rhetoric the mother uses to describe her illness grounds it in historical violence and social injustice against American Indians; yet, she still blames herself for circumstances beyond her control.

The poem’s framing of blood quantum also focuses on metaphors of invasion and attack. Using the language of war and colonization provides the daughter with a model for helping her understand the devastation her mother has experienced as a mixed-blood woman. Her mother’s body cannot make peace with itself, a statement reflecting Indigenous peoples’ ongoing struggles with the United States. At the same time, her use of war metaphors also serves a political function. To say that her mother’s body is conquered, occupied, and destroyed implies that enemies with battle plans and strategies for victory must exist, which begs the question, Who is the enemy and what

are their plans? In the United States' attempt to rid itself of Indians, Washington bureaucrats devised and legally codified blood quantum standards as a psychological strategy for relocating inside Indian bodies the legal, physical, and politics wars between Indians and the federal government. Allen's narrator has no answers for resolving the problem of blood quantum. She merely shrugs her shoulders and says,

Well, world. What's to be done?  
 We just wait and see  
 what will happen next. (56)

By framing blood quantum through dialogue, analogical matrices, and metaphors, Allen's poem demonstrates an alternative to the already recognized and studied cultural frameworks for interpreting and understanding mixed-race identities among American Indians.

Like Allen's narrator, the narrator in Sherman Alexie's "<sup>13</sup>/<sub>16</sub>" imagines mixed-blood identity in tragic terms with a bit of trickster humor. However, rather than imagine mixed-blood identity as an etiology for illness, Alexie's poem examines the potential negative consequences of blood quantum standards. He envisions a fractionated identity as a condition that can result in self-inflicted violence. The poem's narrator writes,

I cut myself into sixteen equal pieces  
 keep thirteen and feed the other three  
 to the dogs. (16)

Alexie creates a comic image, pointing to the absurd way blood quantum forces us to view people as fractions some of which can be tossed out or fed to the dogs. With a fractionated identity, the narrator cannot envision himself as whole and complete. He keeps a part of himself and allows the dogs to consume those that are presumably scraps, bits and pieces perceived as expendable.

Rather than imagine a mixed-blood identity through metaphors of war and foreign invasion as in Allen's poem, Alexie's narrator creates scenes of alienation and division. He explores the division of

identity literally through mathematics as he explains how his body became fractionated. He says,

It is done by blood, reservation mathematics, fractions:

father (full-blood) + mother ( $\frac{5}{8}$ ) = son ( $\frac{13}{16}$ ).

It is done by enrollment number, last name first, first name last:

Spokane Tribal Enrollment Number 1569; Victor, Chief.

It is done by identification card, photograph, lamination: IF

FOUND, PLEASE RETURN TO SPOKANE TRIBE OF

INDIANS,

WELLPINIT, WA. (16)

When blood, an enrollment number, and an identification card become *the* major signifiers of Indian identity, the person behind these signifiers becomes displaced, lost among a host of meaningless numbers and cards meant to validate his Indian identity. The human that gets lost behind the fractions and mathematical calculations of reservation math verified on identity cards pleads to be returned to his community if found.

Alexie critiques reservation math as a method for determining identity because it results in an equation that, literally, does not add up correctly.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, the narrator implies that relying on abstract numbers to determine identity requires rethinking if we are to find a correct answer to the perceived problem of mixed-blood identities. The narrator ends by reminding us, “We are what we take” (17), meaning, we have the power to choose or to reject fractionated selves and identities handed down to us through reservation math with equations that always add up to wrong answers. Alexie’s poem suggests that blood-quantum identities almost always create a partial rather than a whole person with some parts perceived as holding less value than other parts.

While many would not typically consider Alexie a mixed-blood Indian, no one has yet considered the alternative definition of mixed-blood status that Alexie makes obvious in his poem. “Mixed-blood” is typically understood to mean a mixture of Indian and some other racial group. Yet, we should not consider Alexie, Woody,

Iyall-Santos, and Tsinhnahjinnie as full-blood despite the absence of non-Indian blood in their background. Woody and Tsinhnahjinnie recognize their mixed Indian blood heritage and the similar restrictions or limitations it places on them in that their mixed-blood status determines what positions they can occupy or responsibilities they can assume within each community to which they belong. Such a definition of mixed-blood status challenges the traditional way of defining the term. Likewise, much of the newer scholarship on blood quantum asks us to challenge current methods for defining Indian identity.

American Indian artists are using art and language as a form of activism to critique dominant discourses that dictate blood quantum as a presumed truth or reality of Indian identity and to suggest other possibilities for creating and thinking about what constitutes identity beyond blood measurement and admixtures.<sup>3</sup> Eva Marie Garroutte concludes her book *Real Indians: Identity and the Survival of Native America* by leading us back to our own cultures, which she claims contain resources for creating or recovering more meaningful definitions of identity. Adopting a phrase from one of her research participants, Mashpee cultural firekeeper Ramona P., Garroutte reminds us that all tribal nations have what Ramona P. refers to as “Original Instructions,” or directions that concern relationships with humans and non-humans (115). Asking us to return to proper relations because it is tantamount to Indigenous identity construction, Garroutte concurs with Vine Deloria Jr., who says, “The task of tribal religion [. . .] is to determine the proper relationship that the people of the tribe must have with other living things and to develop the self-discipline within the tribal community so that man [*sic*] acts harmoniously with other creatures” (88). Woody, Iyall-Santos, Baker, Luna, and Tsinhnahjinnie turn to art as a form of cultural intervention and a tool to survey proper relations, employing language, image, and body as object and subject of inquiry to explore identity issues. Their art intervenes into dominant representations of “Indianness” in ways that destabilize the fictions constructed in a colonial paradigm that posits “blood-as-truth” about Indian identity.

Elizabeth Woody’s poem, “Translation of Blood Quantum,” re-

calls her own community's Original Instructions as a way to recover a traditional definition of identity that re-examines and re-interprets numbers.<sup>4</sup> She discredits the fiction of reservation math Alexie critiques and provides a new way of thinking about numbers or identifiers attached to Indian identity that unite rather than divide. The narrator begins her math in much the same way as Alexie, listing the fractions that make up who she is: " $\frac{31}{32}$  Warm Springs—Wasco—Yakama—Pit River—Navajo /  $\frac{1}{32}$  Other Tribal Roll number 1553." These fractions add up to a correct answer; thus, she is rewarded with an "other" identifying number, a tribal roll number. According to Joanne Barker, "making indigenous people 'governable' by roll or certificate or blood allows the United States to reinvent its power to govern indigenous people as citizens 'of a particular kind'—as those who can be enrolled, recognized, qualified, and eliminated" (32). With her tribal roll number, Woody's community and the federal government recognize her as having enough "Indian blood" to "authenticate" what she is—an Indian—allowing her to claim one or two parts of her mixed-blood identity.

Nonetheless, Woody reconfigures the equation that makes her a "particular kind of citizen" that the United States accepts and recognizes, thereby rejecting the implication that outsiders have the authority to enroll, recognize, qualify, or even eliminate her, effectively canceling out her identity through blood in much the same way that the identity of the mother in Allen's poem feels nullified. Woody accepts a number, but she chooses the denominator, the fraction's bottom number, which indicates into how many parts the whole is divided. She refuses the division of self that goes along with a fractionated or mixed-blood identity embodied in the numerator, the fraction's top number. Equally, she rejects the meaning of a fraction that divides her into pieces, leaving her identity fragmented. Instead, she recreates reservation math and comes up with a new way to read numerical identifiers, boldly claiming that she is "THIRTY-SECOND PARTS OF A HUMAN BEING," not a measurement or fraction of blood.

Woody's essay "Voice of the Land: Giving the Good Word" alludes to Indigenous peoples' historical and ongoing intermingling and intermarrying that existed before colonization. From this history, she gath-

ers together the fragments of her mixed-blood identity—Warm Springs, Wasco, Yakama, Pit River, and Navajo—and adds more detail than her poem provides. She states, “I am a descendant of the Wishram, Wasco, Watlala (usually known as Cascade), and Pit River tribes on my maternal grandfather’s side. On my maternal grandmother’s side, I am Tygh and Wyampum. From my father, I am Diné and born for the Tódích’ii’nii” (152). To these she adds the possibility of English, Hawaiian, and Spanish ancestry. Blood quantum identity ignores this history of interrelations, oftentimes forcing one to choose a single identity and history rather than claim multiple ancestries and histories. Although blood quantum standards make Woody eligible to claim membership and enroll in the Navajo Nation, she chooses to align herself with the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, because her maternal ancestry has resided in Oregon for five generations. Moreover, Woody confesses that she “cannot claim a voice within [her multiple] ethnic literatures, communities, and cultures,” because, “like most U.S. citizens, [she has] a tenuous connection to several perspectives and land bases” (152). She recognizes her proper relations as having been established in a particular geographical location, and since a tribe’s worldview and language derives from the land, her family’s historical residence in Oregon makes that landscape home for her. Therefore, land and community, not blood, form the primary basis of her identity.

To establish how her worldview and identity have grown out of the landscape and history of Oregon, Woody again re-configures the fractionated part of her identity to include much more than that which runs through her veins. Her identity also encompasses a geographic space that contains clouds, rainbows, language, animals, stories, philosophies, religion, song, and more. Additionally, this space includes “*The People*,” a unified rather than a fractionated or divided “We,” who, she says,

are watched over  
by the mountains, not Man, not Monarchy,  
or any other manifestations

of intimidation by misguided delusions of supremacy  
over the Land or beings animate or inanimate. (152)

The totality of that which her homeland encompasses informs her identity, not fractions of blood that should, according to the proponents of blood quantum, add up to a certain number in order for her to claim a relationship with the landscape on which she resides. Identifying herself as a member of the Nusoox community rather than a divided and isolated individual, Woody claims,

We kept peace. Preserved and existed through our *Songs*,  
*Dances*, *Longhouses*, and the noninterruption of giving Thanks  
and observances of the Natural laws of Creating by the Land  
itself. (152)

Her use of “we” and “our” establishes her place within this history. Through natural law the land created her and her people; they were not created by strategies of blood quantum devised by bureaucrats to undo the Nusoox and separate them from the land and each other.

Like Ramona P., Woody also uses the term “Original Instruction,” or “Voice of the Land” (153) to describe proper relations the Creator established for her people. For her, blood quantum standards are corrupting Indigenous peoples’ identity and their proper relationships with each other. She reminds Columbia River Plateau societies about the future and potential threat that imperils tribal nations that rely on blood quantum by asking, “If descendants are ineligible for enrollment because of the fragmentation of blood quantum, who will receive the reserved rights of our sovereign status?” (153–54). She charges Warm Springs people to return to their Original Instructions characterized in the saying “Tee-cha-meengsh-mee sin-wit ad-wa-ta-man-wit,” which she translates, “At the time of Creation, the Creator placed us on this land and gave us the voice of this land, and that is our law” (166). Woody alleges that deferring to blood quantum standards defers to another law—western law—devised by a non-tribal government to rob Indigenous peoples of their lands and identities. Woody’s poem and essay critique the over-determined operation of blood in forming

identity, which she corrects by reconfiguring her identity to include Nusoox Original Instructions and law.

Like Woody, Teresa Iyall-Santos rejects an Indian identity defined through United States law, biology, or western numerical standards. Instead, she turns to Salish material culture, a piece of clothing, and an alternative mathematical understanding as a way to formulate an Indigenous sense of self. As a result she too refigures Alexie's brand of reservation math and U.S. or scientific charts that trace Indian ancestry. Rather, she traces her identity through a dress her mathematician grandmother made for her. Her poem "Grandmother, Salish Mathematician" positions her grandmother working with numbers to effectively replace the "scientists," bureaucrats, and tribes who use western mathematical models to devise blood quantum charts. The dress her grandmother creates helps Iyall-Santos understand who she is through Salish material culture. The math her grandmother traces in the dress's pattern aims for balance and wholeness rather than fractions. She writes,

Grandmother, my *Yay-Yay*  
made this dress with purpose:  
for protection, for legacies,  
for balance in our worlds. (136)

Her grandmother designed the dress to protect her granddaughter. She also designed it for Iyall-Santos to pass down to her own daughter, not only to protect and balance but to use as a tool for teaching those legacies of balance and protection. Iyall-Santos's dress taught her how to use numbers in a way that maintains balance as opposed to numbers that unbalance mixed-blood identities and create one side of a fraction that always weighs more heavily than the other, thereby disturbing her equilibrium and balance in the world.

Rather than trace her ancestry through abstract and meaningless numbers on charts, Iyall-Santos garners from the dress several ways to determine identity. One method she uses comes from the geometric patterns laid out in beads her grandmother has stitched on to the dress. Iyall-Santos recognizes numbers' significance but suggests that when used in certain ways, such as measuring blood quantum, they

become meaningless. However, the beads on her dress form geometric equations, which she describes as immense:

Measured dimensions hanging abstract,  
cut-glass beads strung through thread  
creating a matrix of geometry  
symmetrical beyond belief,  
its value absolute. (136)

She transforms the beaded pattern into a form that expresses a quality separate from the dress. At the same time, the beads appear to represent parts of her heritage held together by a fragile thread, which will shift and move with the dancer's motion, communicating the pattern's meaning. Geometry's calculations metaphorically describe an identity that is symmetrical and balanced. When worn by Iyall-Santos, the dress identifies who she is in her grandmother's mathematical calculations created in beaded patterns formulated through song. The dress's symmetry comes from her grandmother, the dress, beads, songs, and patterns, all of which form what Iyall-Santos refers to as

Equations of perfect balance,  
repetitions of patterns complex.  
*Yay-Yay* + Spirit = Balance  
balance infinite  
in cyclical time. (136)

She has devised an entirely new equation unlike Alexie's equation, which strictly relies on his parents' blood quantum at the expense of tribal culture as a way to establish a connection or relationship to his parents and his community.

At the same time, Iyall-Santos's equation is also reminiscent of other equations Alexie formulates elsewhere. In *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *Old Shirts and New Skins*, Alexie links survival and poetry with anger and imagination through the following problems: "Survival = Anger x Imagination" (150) and "Poetry = Anger x Imagination" (15), respectively. While these add up to more life-affirming and healing equations than math that divides an indi-

vidual into pieces, anger, like fractions, can still unbalance a person. For that reason, Iyall-Santos excludes annoyance or rage from her mathematical equation. Instead, she finds balance by bringing together her grandmother and the spirit that the dress embodies. The dress, with its beaded patterns that emerge from a creative spirit gifted to her grandmother, which, in turn, extends to her, connects both of them to each other and to the creative force. By creating and sharing an element of Salish material culture, the grandmother offers her granddaughter a particular way of seeing or ordering her world and her identity within that world. When Iyall-Santos dances in the dress, she re-establishes a relationship with her grandmother and with the patterns of their heritage woven on to the dress in beads. The dress as metaphor for Salish cultural and familial relations offers a new way to conceive of identity and relations beyond blood, reminding the wearer of the balance, reciprocity, rhythm, and repetition that result from maintaining proper relations.

Unlike most of the writers examined so far, Marie Annharte Baker uses humor in her poetry to explore issues of mixed-blood identity. Unlike Allen's and Alexie's narrators, Baker's narrator in the poem "Cheeky Moon" refuses to become complicit in a system that seemingly asks her to acknowledge her mixed-blood status as inferior to full-blood status.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the title itself indicates that cheekiness characterizes her insolent, bold, or self-assured attitude. The narrator exhibits no symptoms of internalized self-hatred nor does she engage in self-inflicted violence, cutting herself into pieces. Rather than avert her gaze from accusatory stares or judgmental looks, she stares back at individuals who disapprove of mixed-blood children and the women who bear them:

Those eyes show total disgust  
 at mothers who got sweet talked.  
 I am the direct result  
 —fruit of the union—  
 the big cheek breed  
 who bucks tradition  
 becomes a typical troublemaker. (38)

Refusing to apologize for her existence or to remain silent about the histories, social relations, and conditions that created others like her, the narrator, still playing with the word “cheeky,” proudly proclaims herself to be a “big cheek breed / who bucks tradition” (38) and upsets the dominant group’s battle plans for destroying Indians through statistical extermination.<sup>6</sup> Ready to engage in battle, this narrator also uses war metaphors, claiming that she is “left to defend / one lonely drop of blood,” because, as she explains, “I might terminate / if I get nosebleed” (38). Here, she complicates the traditional meaning of “termination,” examining its impact on relations. Since the federal government targeted tribes and not individuals for termination, the narrator expands the meaning attached to “termination” to include individuals.

Although termination severed relations between tribes and the government, the narrator suggests that the loss of her Indian blood would result in a similar action, severing her relations within her tribal community and her identity as an Indian. The possibility of losing her Indian status provides her with the motivation to defend “one lonely drop of blood” that if lost would, according to her, leave her without an identity she embraces and without a community, because she bases her identity on being an Indian, not an isolated individual or generic Canadian. While her ancestry is not based on one drop, she points to the absurdity of measuring one’s identity through blood.

“Cheeky Moon” ends with the narrator comparing the adherence to blood quantum standards with crabs’ perceived instinct for “holding each other back.” Baker writes,

I need the law of the land  
to respect my blood.  
Between you and me  
it’s the bucket of crabs  
pulling us down together. (38)

Her knowledge of crabs’ behavior makes this an apt analogy. While it is difficult to contain one crab in a shallow bucket, the addition of a second crab means that they no longer need to be watched. One crab

could easily regain its freedom and climb out of its container, but the second crab will pull the first one back before it can escape. At the same time, the crabs do not assist each other in an attempt to escape their impending doom. Clearly, the narrator translates blood quantum as a legal and extra-legal device meant to entrap Indians and pull us down together. It does so by becoming that bucket of crabs that encourages us to prevent each other from finding freedom from what is a restrictive means for defining people. The crab analogy also comments on the relationship that blood quantum creates; it is one that leads to continued devastation. Comparing her position to being alone in a bucket, the narrator does not find herself isolated and alienated. Instead, she exclaims,

I count myself lucky  
to salvage my ancestry  
in this particular drop  
at my time. (38)

In essence, she is just one drop in a bucket among many buckets that contain individuals in similar circumstances. Luckily, she escapes from the mentality that “the bucket of crabs” creates by taking pride in rather than apologizing for the “one lonely drop” of blood that leads others to regard the narrator and her mother with disdain.

Baker also uses the sub-genre of slam poetry to engage in further political commentary on blood quantum. In “Raced Out to Write This Up,” she creates a poem that is meant to be read or performed in front of a live audience, in effect, establishing and affirming new and old relations among friends and strangers. While traditional poetry tends to isolate both poet and reader, spoken word poetry has the opposite tendency. Spoken word poetry brings people together when the poet releases words from a page that, when read alone, silence the poet’s voice or deny the poet’s active presence. Slam poets work within the oral rather than written tradition and so fuse poetry and performance art. Internationally recognized slam poet Oni the Haitian Sensation (Ingrid Joseph) describes slam poetry as “metaphorically lift[ing] the poem off the page and bring[ing] the words to life.”<sup>7</sup> Slam poetry contains thought-provoking content, and Baker makes

her audience aware of her poem's controversial subject matter in the first stanza. She announces,

I often race to write    I write about race    why do I write  
 about race    I must erase all trace of my race    I am an  
 eraser abrasive bracing myself embracing.

Baker writes about race yet yearns to eradicate race as a marker of her identity even though the racialized discourse of Indianness and blood quantum have already marked and marginalized her. While Baker identifies as Anishinabe and her physical features mark her as Indian, her blood quantum poems render the “white” part of her identity ambiguous for readers unaware of her Irish background.

Despite the perceived ambiguity of Baker's identity, she writes about race and mixed-blood status in a way that captures the anger of those whom blood has marginalized. Poetry as performance-driven art contains this kind of personal perspective in order to “encompass the experiences, the struggles and joys of the people in the community; by utilizing poetry as a medium for constructive dialogue, the poet can rhyme about current affairs that are affecting the community” (Joseph 18). Baker becomes the deWant or “cheeky” voice that relates the struggles and joys of a mixed-blood community when she proclaims,

so few of me yet I still write not for the white audience but  
 the color of their response to my underclass class    the  
 flash of their fit to kill me why race away to the finish  
 when I cross the finish line will it be white    will I be red  
 from running    hot and cold touch me not less I am to be  
 divided against my self who is both red and white but not a  
 shade of pink maybe a beige pink blushed flushed off  
 white right I color my winning everytime    I am still in the  
 red not the black    blackened red    reddened black.

Baker admits she is not an academic poet but a poet of another class, a class for whom she writes and a class for whom the dominant group draws a finish line that presumably denotes success if crossed. For Baker, this brand of success means assimilation at the sacrifice of

one's own background and worldview. She intimates that denial of self is what the dominant group encourages underclass and raced bodies to achieve in order to be successful. Baker colors or "races" the finish line white, creating a white barrier she feels she is supposed to cross in order to ensure that her writing "will [. . .] be red" (read). To cross this line puts her in a race against herself, a self that is both red and white, since she equates the kind of winning identified in her poem as white. Refusing to claim whiteness, she avers, "I am still in the / red," which presumably leaves her in a precarious status as a poet whose words do not typically reach large audiences compared to canonized poets or poets who write about less controversial subjects.

Despite the suggestion that her poetry has not met with the success of more mainstream poets, Baker's "Raced Out to Write This Up" epitomizes the philosophy of slam poetry. Its performative aspect democratizes poetry by granting equal access to those traditionally denied recognition by academic writing programs, publishing houses, and audiences. More significantly, the genre recognizes that an author's social or cultural condition can and should be the subject of poetry. Nuyorican Poets Café co-founder Miguel Algarín suggests that slam poetry's "aim is to dissolve the social, cultural, and political boundaries that generalize human experience and make it meaningless" (9). Baker's poem is comedic, sarcastic, and harshly critical, but her inclusion of race, class, inequality, and whiteness speak to another experience, an experience meaningful in various ways to those whose differences place them at the margins of society. "Otherized" experiences, however, are the subjects that garner attention with slam audiences. So while some might not read her work, deeming her subject matter "unpoetic," slam poetry commands a listening audience, meaning she will be heard and listened to.

Dominant discourses about Indian pedigree and authenticity clearly have influenced literature; they have also played a role in the production and marketing of "authentic" Indian art under the auspices of the 1990 Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA).<sup>8</sup> Although Congress created this act to protect "government-certified" Indian artisans, it is important to remember that they also wrote it with commerce

and consumers in mind. Capitalism also contributes to reservation math and creates signifiers of Indian identity that empower colonial discourse as a form of knowledge and facilitate the dominant culture's ongoing surveillance and control of American Indian populations—in this case, the control of American Indian artists. Luna and Tsinhnahjinnie use their art to challenge blood quantum and its implications for the IACA. Because performance art and photography are more visual and conceptual than writing, these mediums allow both artists to engage directly in a critical commentary on identity construction.

In much of James Luna's work, his body becomes a palimpsest on which he inscribes dominant ideologies of race largely based on visual cues that signify Indian identity to others. Like Alexie and Woody, Luna incorporates the language of a fractionated identity into his photographic triptych entitled *Half Indian/Half Mexican*.<sup>9</sup> Luna's triptych integrates visual stereotypes that refract back to his audience their own projections, perceptions, and assumptions about Indians and Mexicans, which are largely based on physical appearance. In the left- and right-hand panels Luna presents images of himself in profile, with the left panel containing his Indian half and the right panel his Mexican half. As one might suspect, in the Indian image he has long hair, no beard, and wears an earring; on the Mexican side he has short hair and a moustache. In the center panel, Luna faces the camera. This frame splits or divides the identities on either side. At the same time, the center image unites both identities. In the center panel, the visualized racial cues contained in the two profile shots come together. In this image we see a photograph of a man who is literally and visually half Indian and half Mexican. Presenting notions of blood quantum visually, Luna allows us to see the comic and ironic elements inherent in blood quantum standards and the stereotypes these standards maintain.

The narrative that accompanies Luna's exhibit also disturbs the dominant culture's objectification and stereotyping of the racialized body through its discussion of blood quantum. A dialogue accompanying the display states,

I'm half Indian and half Mexican.  
 I'm half many things.  
 I'm half compassionate/I'm half unfeeling.  
 I'm half happy/I'm half angry.<sup>10</sup>

By juxtaposing seemingly disparate signifiers, Luna creates a linguistic strategy that reveals and exposes other signifiers that one could attach to identity yet remain outside the language of blood discourse. His identity includes humanizing characteristics such as emotions and feelings. Moreover, Luna claims that he is

A self made up of many things,  
 I do not have to be anything for anybody but myself.  
 I have survived long enough to find this out.  
 I'm forty-one years old and am happy with  
 my whole—self  
 Don't let your children wait as long . . .

Like Woody, Luna claims an identity made up of “many things,” including a life experience that creates a complete and contented person, not a divided, alienated, and fractionated self. Often, outsiders expect raced individuals to “perform” race, and for Indians, this usually includes the expectation that one must “look Indian,” a prospect that Luna critiques due to its damaging effects on children.

Since federal blood quantum standards uniformly accept the rule of hyper-descent, the practice of determining a child's lineage through the race of the more socially dominant parent, in effect, they locate “what counts as Indian” in the blood. Additionally, because blood quantum standards rely on hyper-descent, the suggestion is that Indianness is color and that color does matter. When deciding who “counts as Indian,” color is privileged, and individuals like joannemariebarker, Louis Owens, and Thomas King feel the repercussions of hyper-descent when they are told that they do not “look Indian.” Like Luna, joannemariebarker considers “what counts as Indian” when people respond to and challenge her identity based on her physical features:

You're really Indian? What's it like to be Indian? How much Indian are you anyway? A half? A quarter? What? You know, you don't look anything like an Indian. What kind of fellowship did you say you were on? I don't mean to be rude, but you really don't look anything like an Indian.

Joannemariebarker's case demonstrates how blood quantum standards are designed to accomplish what simple observation cannot: Indians who do not look "Indian" are excluded, rejected, and looked upon with suspicion. Owens's writing reflects similar feelings of rejection and exclusion. After looking at family photos and admitting that he does not see any visible markers of Indianness among his mixed-blood relatives, he confesses that he must "narratively construct him out of his missing presence" (103). To this Owens adds a reminder to anyone questioning his authenticity that "few looking at [these] photos of mixedbloods would be likely to say, 'But they don't look like Irishmen'" (103). Having been mistaken for Mexican or white while in college, King admits to growing long hair, wearing a fringed leather pouch, and sporting a bone choker around his neck (45–46). Bearing these markers of Indianness, King was accepted as Indian; it is not until he decides to forgo wearing these items that other Indians question his "authenticity," calling him an apple or Uncle Tomahawk (67–68). The experiences of all three prove the government no longer has to police the borders of Indian identity, keeping interlopers and wannabes out; Indians and non-Indians have taken over the responsibility of reducing Indian numbers by challenging those who do not "look Indian." Therefore, what it means to "be Indian" often differs from what "counts as Indian" for the federal government and even for many Indians themselves, and what typically counts is blood and color. Yet, tribal communities offer Indians who do not look the part inclusion and acceptance if they have a tribal enrollment and CDIB (Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood) card. There is not always a correlation between blood quantum and how a person looks, yet many American Indians are quick to challenge others' heritage based on physical appearance.

By creating and holding federally recognized tribes to blood

quantum standards, the federal government has affirmed their right to define who is Indian by eliminating traditionally flexible features that have created and validated Indian identity in the past. Federal acknowledgement based on blood quantum standards also deprives tribes the right of self-identification by giving the government control over meaning. Realizing blood quantum's damaging effects on children, Luna asks parents and adults to affirm children's identity so that they become whole, healthy individuals before it is too late. Luna admits that it took forty-two years for him to fashion a whole and self-determined identity without apology, so he returns to his audience the divided brown bodies in the triptych, images that the dominant culture has appropriated and reinscribed through blood quantum standards. Combining narrative with image, Luna recognizes the potential of performance as a political tool for critiquing dominant paradigms of American Indian identity and articulating an oppositional viewpoint. Therefore, his art functions as a lens through which he brings into focus the struggles and conflicts waged around identity issues.<sup>11</sup>

Like Luna, Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie also creates photographic images that explore the regulation of Indian identity, but her images allude to potentially more sinister aspects of identity monitoring. Whereas Luna's exhibit visually represents the cultural codes that society has inscribed onto Indian and Mexican bodies, Tsinhnahjinnie's photographic series entitled *Creative Native* literally superimposes these codes onto an Indian body—her own—visibly marking and authenticating her Indianness for those with a vested interest. By visibly marking her identity as Indian, Tsinhnahjinnie imbues with new meaning Beth Brant's words from *A Gathering of Spirit*: "Who we are is written on our bodies, our hearts, our souls. This is what it means to be Native in the dawn of the twenty-first century" (74). As a Native artist, who Tsinhnahjinnie is in the twenty-first century includes her tribal roll number, which she stamps on her forehead, marking, identifying, and marketing herself to Indian art consumers as a "real," government-approved Indian who can sell her art under the rules of the IACA.

In addition to her roll number, Tsinhnahjinnie imprints on her

face another cultural code that has become so familiar to consumers that it is now barely discernible in the marketplace. She tattoos onto her face Universal Product Codes, better known as bar codes. The superimposed bar codes on her face resemble war paint, possibly leading viewers to ask, “Why bar codes?” Businesses use bar codes to save time and money, and retailers use them along with their accompanying numbers to collect information on customers and their buying habits. The ubiquitous bar code also leads to more efficient production and inventory control by attaching identifying labels to products that allow them to be tracked and monitored. Understanding the social and political implications of barcodes—their use in tracking and monitoring customers’ buying habits—problematizes Tsinhnahjinnie’s use of them, because they become another tracking device that she makes visible. Her facial bar codes point to the personal data or information about her that they contain. Clearly, she perceives the IACA trademark that the government awards to “real” Indian artists as akin to the bar codes she stamps on her face, which transform her from a human into a product with already collected and verified information from the government about her identity for those who would sell or display her art in their establishments. By imprinting bar codes on her face, she also suggests that the IACA has commodified both Indian art and artists, transforming her into an item sold along with the art she created. Many collectors of Indian art “buy” artists along with their art, collecting whatever their favorite artist creates. Tsinhnahjinnie’s critical use of bar codes condemns the IACA’s power to collect data that establishes, controls, and markets Indians and their identity for non-Indians interested in purchasing “Indian art” and artists.

By enforcing blood quantum standards, many American Indians have adopted the government’s role of policing Indians through acts that typically take place in public forums intended to identify ethnic frauds to a larger population or to scold others who are “not Indian enough,” usually mixed-blood or urban Indians. In an *Indian Country Today* column, Suzan Shown Harjo (Cheyenne/Hodulgee Muscogee) identifies Ward Churchill as a fraud who is unable to prove any Indian heritage: “While some people in Colorado believe one or an-

other of his stories, no Native nation and no Indian community of interest accepts him as one of their own. Native artists never knew nor embraced him, either as an artist or as a Native person.” Elizabeth Cook-Lynn critiques several well-known mixed-blood writers who are popular with publishing houses and non-Indian audiences, including Gerald Vizenor, Louis Owens, Wendy Rose, Betty Bell, Thomas King, and Paula Gunn Allen. Her charge against these authors? Due to their mixed-blood status, their writing is not Indian enough, because she considers “mixed-blood literature [as] characterized by excesses of individualism” (69). Cook-Lynn believes American Indian authors have a responsibility to promote nation building and sovereignty, not agonize over identity issues. Harjo and Cook-Lynn caution their readers that ethnic frauds and mixed-blood concerns present the potential to mislead and confuse non-Indians about what is important in our communities. While I am not challenging the well-intentioned motives of Harjo or Cook-Lynn, I am left wondering about the many individuals who were stolen from their parents at birth and adopted out or the individuals who have no say in who their parents will be or where they live. Colonization has changed our lives and challenges us to rethink the way we identify ourselves, and like Garrouette and the authors and artists featured in this article suggest, we need to find another way to talk about Indian identity other than blood quantum, which represents the internalized colonization of Indigenous peoples.

Theresa Harlan describes Tsinhnahjinnie’s Creative Native series as works of art “representing the national debate over institutionalized Native identity by critiquing the reliance of Natives on the federal government for their identity and pointing to the internalized colonization of Native people” (118). In the image *Census Makes a Native Artist*, Tsinhnahjinnie points to her head, signaling her Indigenous audience to think more deeply about numbers, cards, and documents meant to track and inventory American Indians.<sup>12</sup> Census numbers do not make Tsinhnahjinnie an artist; her sense of proper relations defines her as an Indian artist, with her priorities being the survival and dignified representation of Native peoples. In *Census Makes a Native Artist*, she points to her head as if asking her-

self, “Why should I have to authenticate myself to anyone but my own community?” Tsinhnahjinnie creates a series of self-portraits designed to represent debates about Indian identity, but she also levels her critique at Indigenous peoples’ lack of self-criticism regarding the IACA.<sup>13</sup>

At the same time that many Indigenous artists and writers are engaging in the process of decolonization, there exists the dilemma of the Indian artists whose views on blood quantum become a source of creative inspiration but who at the same time realize that blood quantum remains a means for the government to control their identity under the guise of protecting the production and marketing of Indian art for non-Indian consumers. This article provides no answers but, like Woody, points to the risks we face when we allow western systems of signification to replace our own community frameworks for constructing identity. Instead of turning to more meaningful signifiers such as those listed by Woody or Iyall-Santos, many American Indians have allowed blood quantum to become a totalizing system used to define Indigenous peoples and reassign us to narratives that trap us into assigned roles—full-blood, mixed-blood, part-Indian, real, authentic, traditional, urban, and so on. Luna masquerades as half Indian and parodies stereotypes attached to race that we accept when we identify ourselves as “half,” “mixed,” or “part” anything. What remains significant about Luna’s image is that it represents American Indians’ adoption of a western-formulated system designed to discipline and hierarchize our own people based on blood, taking over the United States’ role in doing this. Luna, Woody, Tsinhnahjinnie, and numerous other American Indian writers and artists create works that remind us to fashion identities that are made up of *our* values, histories, and experiences, all of which exceed the representational frame of blood quantum standards.

#### NOTES

1. Scholarship examining Indian identity includes Kimberly TallBear, “DNA, Blood, and Racializing the Tribe,” *Wicazo Sa Review* 18.1 (2003): 81–107; Steve Russell, “Apples Are the Color of Blood,” *Critical Sociology* 28.1–2

(2002): 65–76; Pauline Turner Strong and Barrik Van Winkle, “‘Indian Blood’: Reflections on the Reckoning and Refiguring of Native North American Identity,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11.4 (1996): 547–76; Hilary N. Weaver, “Indigenous Identity: What Is It, and Who Really Has It?” *American Indian Quarterly* 25.2 (2001): 240–55; Eva Marie Garroutte, “The Racial Formation of American Indians: Negotiating Legitimate Identities within Tribal and Federal Law,” *American Indian Quarterly* 25.2 (2001): 224–39; Bonita Lawrence, *Real? Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood* (Lincoln: U of Nebraska P, 2004).

2. In fractions with common denominators, the two top numbers are added together and the bottom number remains the same. Thus,  $\frac{8}{8} + \frac{5}{8} = \frac{13}{8}$ , not  $\frac{13}{16}$ . It is unclear if Alexie intended the incorrect sum or not.

3. According to Guillermo Gómez-Pena, “the work of the artist is to force open the matrix of reality to introduce unsuspected possibilities” (6), and many American Indians artists are doing just this.

4. Woody’s poem, found in *Luminaries of the Humble* (U of Arizona P, 1994), is also online at *Storytellers: Native American Authors Online* (<http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers>). References to the poem come from the Web site.

5. For the sake of efficiency, I refer to the narrator as female.

6. The term “statistical extermination” is taken from Jaimes-Guerrero (423).

7. Oni is the festival director of the Canadian Spoken Word Olympics.

8. For more information on the IACA, see the Indian Arts and Crafts Board’s Web site (<http://www.doi.gov/iacb/act.html>). Also see Barker; Sheffield.

9. For images of James Luna discussed in this section, go to his official Web site (<http://www.jamesluna.com/jamesluna1.html>) and click on “Images.”

10. Subsequent references to Luna’s narrative come from this text.

11. Similar to Luna and joannemariebarker, Joane Cardinal-Schubert, Ward Churchill, and Jimmie Durham parody the language of blood quantum and consider “how much Indian” constitutes an Indian identity. Cardinal-Schubert critiques the phrase “part Indian,” because it fragments. Likewise, Churchill and Durham critique the nonrepresentational reality inherent in the phrase “part Indian.” Churchill uses weight to identify that part of his identity that is Indian; he labels 52.5 pounds of his body mass as Indian. Durham turns to his parents. He acknowledges that, although half of his blood comes from his mother and the other half from his father, he iden-

tifies as male. Even though time and use have naturalized the language of blood quantum, these examples demonstrate how easily other systems of classification might have become the standard for determining and regulating Indian identity (Strong and Van Winkle 547, 551).

12. For an image of Tsinhnahjinnie's photo, see the Women Artists of the American West Web site (<http://www.cl.purdue.edu/WAAW/Corinne/Tsinhnahjinnie2.html>).

13. For another reading of Tsinhnahjinnie's photographs, see Barker 43–45.

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# Widening the Circle

Collaborative Reading with Louis Owens's *Wolfsong*

BLAKE HAUSMAN AND JOHN PURDY

The scholastic emphasis on cultural pluralism in recent decades has coincided with a technological revolution, and the quincennial discovery of Columbus by American Indians has coincided with the evolution of the Internet. The Internet has served to close the distance between people, ironically by widening the circle. It is a forum that enables those with Internet access to engage ideas, symbols, and unique voices from around the world. Cyberspace is simultaneously everywhere and nowhere, reducing communication barriers created by distances in space. This phenomenon is eminently important to teachers, especially teachers of literature. In an era when scholars are searching for better ways to understand authors from diverse backgrounds, the Internet creates the capacity for people in a classroom to interface, sometimes directly, with the writers they study.

For writers and readers of American Indian literatures, the digital revolution has often been engaged as a means of storing information. Native language revitalization programs across the continent are using computers in classrooms, and some tribes even provide Internet surfers with the ability to download phrases and fonts from Indigenous languages. Many literary and scholarly journals publish original works on their Web sites, often with links to tribal resources or authors' Web pages. The Internet Public Library offers an excellent catalog of information on hundreds of Indigenous writers. And despite the accurate accusation that the Internet exploits credit consumerism, Sherman Alexie fans who did not get to see *The Business of*

*Fancydancing* in theaters will surely take solace in the fact that the DVD can be purchased online.

But what new role can the cyberworld play in the classroom? By using our project as a sort of model, teachers can engage the Internet as a means of reducing the discursive distance between themselves, students, and the writers studied during class. If a classroom has a computer with Internet access as well as an audio/video projector, the entire class can visit authors' Web sites, which often have links to recent interviews. Some interviews in audio format are accessible through IPL, NPR, PBS, the BBC, and other resources, enabling teachers to project an interview with an author during class time.<sup>1</sup> The dynamic of teachers and students both listening while the author discusses his or her work can dramatically reduce the distance between writers and readers through a humanizing process. The authors become speakers in a larger dialogue, dynamic participants in an old conversation who bounce ideas off those they speak to, participants in a live discussion rather than static (or stoic) imaginings bound to exteriorly imposed definitions.

Our project, based on experiences in a classroom at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington, revolves around an email conversation between our students and Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish writer Louis Owens. The class was a sophomore-level Introduction to American Indian Literatures class. We were team teaching the course. The texts assigned included an anthology, several films, and one novel—Owens's 1991 *Wolfsong*.<sup>2</sup>

We chose *Wolfsong* for several reasons. Perhaps most importantly, the novel is set in the nearby North Cascades, about fifty miles from the Western Washington University campus. We anticipated that its geographical significance would attract the students and inspire our initial discussions of the book. Owens graciously agreed to answer questions generated by our students in response to the novel, questions transmitted from Washington to California and back via email. Toward the end of the course, students composed three- to five-page critical essays based on *Wolfsong*, engaging many issues that the author addressed directly, resulting in a unique crossroads of inquiry.

Our project involved many stages. First, both instructors met sev-

eral times prior to the beginning of the course.<sup>3</sup> We discussed the debates over the need for cultural sensitivity when teaching texts by Native writers (Dorris, Silko, Hobson). We also addressed the issue of “re-colonizing” the texts; some critics argue that readers and educators should avoid imposing their own cultural orientation upon the work of Native authors. We agreed that it was necessary to invite students into an engaging, “real-time” discourse, and we saw our dialogue with Owens as a means of achieving this goal by widening the circle of participants beyond the “traditional” classroom and into the lived experience of the author and those about whom she or he writes.

The following sections reflect the structure of the project:  
 Reflective Introductions—initial reflections on the class and goals;  
 Personal Essays on *Wolfsong*—initial personal responses;  
 Preparations—ideas from our initial responses to the novel and a list of texts that we assigned prior to the novel;  
 The Students’ Questions, the Author’s Answers—the crux of our project, and a unique email dialogue;  
 Student Essays—excerpts from several student papers illustrating how different students responded to their dialogue with the author when composing original essays;  
 The Teachers’ Debriefing—short essays by each instructor that share our own reactions to the project and the process;  
 Conclusions—last thoughts and a list of relevant texts for further inquiry.

These sections progress chronologically, from our initial planning to our concluding reflections, but our readers are encouraged to read the article in whatever manner that they find most suitable.

Some readers may initially think that this article is somewhat disjointed, lacking a cohesive central narrative. Indeed, it is, but doesn’t. It is a gathering of voices from many different places—geographically, culturally, personally—that are trying to understand what is happening in the areas around the North Cascades, the space within which we and our students try to coexist. All readers come from diVerent, rather dissimilar, backgrounds, and we bring divergent experiences to the classroom dialogue. Anyone who has tried to teach a complex work of literature can surely empathize with the struggle to

construct coherent interpretations of complex texts through class discussion. In this way, our project is an accurate representation of the real-time dynamics of a discourse about American Indian literatures—different people, distanced from each other, searching for a way to communicate on the same ground.

Bringing the author's voice directly into the conversation can create common ground. It not only encourages students to invest more personally in the discussion, knowing that their questions serve more than simply to meet requirements and receive a grade. More importantly, this method deflects attention away from the teacher as the source of "definitive" or "authentic" ideas about the text and encourages students to consider issues raised in the reading of course texts as a lived reality, both virtual and vital.

#### REFLECTIVE INTRODUCTIONS

##### *Hausman's Introduction*

I anticipate this collaborative project with equal amounts of enthusiasm and fear. This is an extraordinary opportunity for me, as a graduate student in English at Western Washington University, both to gain experience teaching Native American literatures and to explore the effect of bringing an author directly into the classroom discussion. John and I will devote our energies to a project that is rather unique. (If I were an undergraduate, my ears would surely perk up if the instructors in a literature class told me that a novelist was going to answer questions of my own design.) However, if the uniqueness of this experiment may encourage others to think that I approach it without feelings of insecurity, I would like to dispel any such ideas right now.

Yes, I'm afraid. I'm afraid of how the students will react to me as a teacher in this context. I'm afraid of their criticism, though it is probably not as harsh as my own self-criticism. My mother is Cherokee. So am I, though my father is Jewish. I am acutely aware of the long history of part-Cherokee people, or part-Indian people in general,

who have abused their status as “Indigenous” as a means of personal gain. The long history of people with Indian ancestry acting as spokespersons for all American Indians, often in universities, and blatantly misrepresenting the people whom they intend to “help,” looms ominously. I’m afraid to say anything too decisive about *Wolfsong* to the students—afraid I’ll say too much, afraid that my words will all be misinterpreted, afraid that I’ll be the one blatantly misrepresenting “my people”—because of fears that I have developed by attempting to make sense of my own place on this continent. Basically, I do not want to “re-colonize” the texts in our classroom, but it seems impossible to avoid.

Any teacher in the humanities can probably relate to this fear of “re-colonizing.” If you are a Euramerican teacher, how do you present Alice Walker to your students? If you are African American, how do you present Amy Tan? If you are non-Indian, how do you present texts by Indigenous poets and storytellers? If you are mixed-blood Indian, how do you know that your perspective, your methods, and your reasons for teaching the work of Indigenous writers are accurate and responsible? For my purposes here, if you are of Cherokee descent, how do you present works by writers who are also of Cherokee descent?

As we prepare to team teach this Introduction to Native American Literatures course, I have high hopes for our *Wolfsong* project. Ideally, the dynamics of actually bringing Louis Owens’s ideas into the classroom, having the author himself respond to students’ questions, will redirect many of the factors that create my fears and help transform them into something useful and relevant for the students. Hopefully, this project will cause the students to perceive Louis as a real person, as a flesh and blood storyteller who actually does exist. Perhaps this project will enable John and me to act less as administrators of the novel and more as facilitators, attempting to thwart misrepresentation by keeping the meaning open and the writer alive, and by having varying—perhaps even conflicting—readings of the novel.

This project may enable me to discuss *Wolfsong* as someone trying to read it critically and make some sense of it (as our students will be

attempting to do with their essays) rather than as someone who closes the novel's meaning by speaking too authoritatively about it as a "displaced Cherokee" novel. In class, I want to focus on what's happening in the novel itself, to read the characters as unique people in their own right, rather than try to fix the text's meaning through my own perspective of southeastern Indian removals and how the novel seems to echo those removals. More on this later, because I think it will inevitably come out during class discussion.

### *Purdy's Introduction*

My consideration of our students echoes Blake's, with a slight variation. Our engagement with Owens's novel brings home, once again, the problematical qualities of introductory courses such as this. First, they are usually "general education" courses that factor as requirements in various ways at institutions of higher education. In other words, students take them for very different, sometimes conflicting reasons: some because they are Native, some because they have to, some out of curiosity, and others out of an empathy—however they may define or experience it—for Native Americans. Each motive carries its own set of attitudes and problems that require attention. Nonetheless, this is where "diversity issues" (a phrase often employed by administrators to group together, simplify, and thus contain sometimes disparate and always complex realities) are made central to the curriculum, and thus the tension, controversy, and contention generated around who should teach them and how—around pedagogy.

Second, introductory courses have an inherent tendency, given the class makeup and location of the classes in curricula, to reduce texts to political statements or a list of overarching cross-cultural issues, as presentations of the historical "plight" of oppressed peoples. In part, this is reinforced by the fact that these required courses are termed "ethnic" or "minority" and so on and thus are *perceived* to be created for political expediency, so students expect them to be driven by a sentimental survey of events locked in an inviolable past. While I would argue that these courses are absolutely necessary, I would

also argue that their curricular positioning can set up students to respond to our course texts in prescribed ways, as political tracts only and not as dynamic works of art first and foremost.

Obviously, the socioeconomic, cultural, and historical issues many texts in an introductory Indian literatures course raise are crucial for students to engage and understand. However, ironically, the centrality of issues carries with it a concomitant danger of dismissal through overgeneralization; the logic is easy and comfortable and all too common: “Ethnic literatures are protest driven, so reading one text is like reading them all.” All students need do in response, then, is simply parrot concern about marginalized and exploited peoples and the “good” grade and credit are forthcoming.

This tendency must be resisted at all turns. It can be accomplished at one level by information: the historical and social contexts out of which the issues derive. These facts can bring home the reality of oppression and survivance (as Gerald Vizenor terms the survival of Indigenous peoples despite horrific events) in compelling ways, although this alone is not enough. Vizenor’s work—particularly his trickster discourse, such as the wonderful movie *Harold of Orange*—and the work of authors like him can also assist us in this educational process. When students laugh, they approach the issues with barriers and boundaries diffused, if not deconstructed.

A related, and I believe crucial, approach is to call attention, continually and with close readings, to the diversity of artistic visions and lived experience the texts tell. This underscores the wonderful complexity of the literary production of Indian writers. As with any canon, the personal and myriad ways of telling a story contribute to the evolution of literature in general but also to society and its concepts of aesthetics. This moves texts from margin to center in subtle yet important ways.

Also, but not finally, another option derives from this experiment: to involve the students personally, and this may be accomplished by a careful selection of one or more texts with which they may identify either through the characters or through the setting, as with our selection of *Wolfsong*. There are myriad possibilities here, as well. Bildungsromans abound, as do stories of young people in love, and for

those students whose concepts of vampires need fine tuning, there is Aaron Carr's *Eye Killers*. The possibilities are numerous, various, inviting. To reinforce and extend this, the technological possibilities are also growing at an unprecedented rate; today, unlike the not-so-distant past, one may consider engaging the author in direct discourse. This personalizes the texts in some compelling ways, as anyone who has taken students to readings may attest, and with so many authors pushing the conventions of the past, there is a heightened need and convenient means (the Internet) for them to share their evolving sense of the canon and its future.

#### PERSONAL ESSAYS ON *WOLFSONG*

##### *Hausman's Essay*

*Wolfsong's* construct develops from tricky tribal dynamics and contradictions. Louis Owens identifies himself as a Choctaw-Cherokee-Irish person. His tribal genes traveled westward by force and choice until he was born in Lompoc, California. *Wolfsong* is set in Washington's North Cascades, a place where Cherokees and Choctaws are not indigenous any more than Norwegians, and a place where Owens's own work experience informs his literary descriptions of the physical environment. These details in and of themselves are not contradictions—Owens, like many mixed-blood Indigenous Americans, has tribal roots in the East and personal experience living and working in the West. However, a plethora of contradictions comes with the consciousness that Owens employs to tell Tom Joseph's story in *Wolfsong*.

Owens characterizes Tom Joseph as a full-blood Stehemish Indian, a member of a tribe whose numbers are small and appear to be shrinking. Thus, Owens takes a risk that opens several avenues for critique. First, why must the tribe be shrinking? Secondly, why does a mixed-blood Choctaw-Cherokee guy need to employ the consciousness of a full-blood Indigenous northwestern protagonist to tell this story? These questions become even trickier with the fact that there is no Stehemish tribe. The word "Stehemish" is a composite of Indig-

enous northwest names like Stehekin, Snohomish, and Swinomish. The traditional Stehemish cosmology is likewise a composite of traditional and modern lives of Indigenous northwesterners. By constructing a fictional tribe, Owens avoids criticism that would surely follow if he created Tom's character as a full-blood person living on one of the state's many reservations, and he avoids placing himself in a position to misrepresent a real tribe that is not his own.

Mixed-blood Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan does something similar in her 1998 novel *Power*—she tells the story of a full-blood narrator (Omishito) from a fictional tribe in southern Florida (“Taiga,” likely a composite of Seminole, Chickasaw, and Taino). *Power's* drama parallels the sickness and shrinking population of the Florida panther, and destruction of Indigenous culture is consciously fused with destruction of the “natural” environment and panther habitat. The environmentalist dilemma is personified in the choices faced by the young protagonist of the fictional tribe.

Like Owens's, Colorado-born Hogan's Indigenous ancestors were subject to the brutal Indian removals from the East in the early to mid-nineteenth century. Unlike Owens, Hogan sets her book in the Southeast. I believe that Hogan projects her own tribal consciousness of the southeastern Indian removals onto a young full-blood person whose fictional ancestors stayed and managed to survive the genocide, a young person whose knowledge of the past informs her choices at a present coming-of-age crossroads. I believe that *Wolfsong* is performing a similar projection of tribal and personal consciousness, but the direction is inverted—Owens takes his own consciousness of the simultaneous genocide, removal, and industrial development (such as mining) that occurred in the Southeast and projects it onto the consciousness of Tom Joseph and the personal crossroads he faces in the present-day Pacific Northwest.

I relate to Tom Joseph in that I reside in the Northwest. My own Indigenous ancestors were from the Southeast, however, and I do not pretend that my own “mixed” identity grants me an intuitive understanding of an Indigenous northwestern consciousness. But then again, Tom Joseph's consciousness is consciously fictional, so I sup-

pose that Owens invites me into Tom's composite fictional mind because of this contradiction.

Like Tom, I have an uncle who has worked hard to resist the construction of mining operations on lands where treaties still maintain tribal rights to water and hunting. My uncle is a lawyer on the Colville Reservation, and he has struggled against several resource-extraction corporations such as the Houston-based Battle Mountain Gold Company, who have spent considerable effort to construct an open-pit leech mine in north-central Washington. The issues are real, and they are heated, and there are no monolithic positions held by all members of any particular group involved.

The road between my home in Bellingham and my uncle's home in Okanogan County is State Route 20, the North Cascades Highway, one of the most beautiful roads in North America. Of course, the road wasn't initially built to make car travelers ogle at the area's majestic beauty—it was built to facilitate mining through the region during the twentieth century. Today, there is no Indian country in these mountains. The Upper Skagit Reservation sits in the western foothills near Baker Lake, and the larger Colville Reservation is across the pass on the eastern side, but the industry in what is now the North Cascades National Park paralleled the eradication of an visible Indigenous presence in that region of the state.

This parallel of colonization, resource extraction, and Indian removal exists in both the North Cascades and the deep Southeast, a parallel which Owens synthesizes into the consciousness of his protagonist. Just as the 1828 "discovery" of gold in northern Georgia predicated the Indian Removal Act, and just as the white settlers who rushed to the Old Cherokee Nation dug for gold that would keep their "ownership" economy going, the looming construction of *Wolfsong's* fictive Honeycutt Copper mine seems poised to involve the elimination of an Indigenous cultural presence in the area around the town of Forks (which is actually Darrington) and the mountain Dakobed (Glacier Peak) in order to boost the depressed local economy.<sup>4</sup> Tom Joseph's story begins with the death of his uncle, who had stayed to try and stop the mine. Now, Tom must choose between two paths that seem mutually exclusive—complet-

ing a college degree with the promise of future leverage or continuing his uncle's resistance to this particular mine. Staying at college means removing himself from the land, thereby causing Tom's fate to be similar to generations of Indians before him. Thus, Tom Joseph's personal crossroads is inseparable from choices about environmental politics and his own sense of self, purpose, and place. His crossroads is both very real and entirely fictional.

"The crossroads" itself is, of course, an archetype in American folk consciousness. Everyone is at least somewhat familiar with the story of Robert Johnson's "deal with the devil" and the lyrics of Johnson's tune "Crossroads," which describe the speaker's attempt to "catch a ride." Our first glimpse of Tom Joseph as he rides a Greyhound up the West Coast with his clothes in Bob McBride's guitar case reverberates through the entire novel. Tom is clearly searching for something, and the novel constantly plays on how far Tom is willing to go to fulfill this search. The importance of "song" and "singers" in this story should not be overlooked—perhaps *Wolfsong's* environmental dilemma can be just as easily explained by analyzing the Robert Johnson story as by reflecting on the author's own identity and consciousness. Of course, stories say that Johnson's fabled deal with the devil occurred in Mississippi, the traditional tromping grounds of Owens's Choctaw ancestors, before he "caught his ride" out.

The Robert Johnson story contains three main characters—Johnson, the devil, and the guitar.<sup>5</sup> *Wolfsong's* cast is much larger, and it includes several non-human elements as well. As a result, everything moves in interesting ways. In order to activate all of the elements that converge at Tom Joseph's crossroads, Owens animates the physical environment. For example, active verbs portray inanimate objects as the origin point of movements. Consider these phrases from the first paragraph of chapter 2:

- the tires threw rain off the asphalt
- tall black firs stabbed a layer of cloud
- the rain slanted in the wind
- wind cut the tops off waves and wove whitecaps around the broken stone (13)

Owens animates the physical environment to the point that it becomes an active element, a character in the story. Tension between the “mechanical” and the “natural” components of the environment engulfing Forks serves as a central locus for both Owens’s sleek style and the issues that complicate Tom’s choices. Tom’s vision of suffocating emptiness, though we don’t read about it until a little farther into the novel, precipitates his return to Forks. The land is singing, but it has been changed by machinery.

Owens builds tension by not only amplifying the fear and violence bred by deeply entrenched racism but more importantly by weaving these tensions directly into a fabric where politics and economics are intimately linked to identities and environments. *Wolfsong* presents a chaotic collision of worlds, each with an active synthetic consciousness, and the lines that distinguish people amplify rather than clarify the chaos. This grinding tension emanates throughout the novel, eating at the people closest to Tom Joseph.

The novel opens with an ending, as Tom’s Uncle Jim dies in the first chapter. Before his death, readers witness his attempts to sabotage the construction of the road to the future Honeycutt Copper mine with guerrilla rifle attacks on construction machinery. Jim does not open fire on the workers, just the machinery. Consider these passages from the book’s opening chapter:

“What the hell you doing?” a high squeaky voice shrilled from behind the other tractor. A black baseball cap rose over the cat’s track and the voice squeaked, “ ‘A ’ere Krag put a hole in you big enough to drive this fuckin cat through.”

The big man sighed and squinted at the trees above him. “Hell, Jim Joseph ain’t going to shoot nobody—he wanted to shoot somebody you and me’d been shit out of luck a long time ago.” (3)

Dinker looked at the timbered slope. “Maybe he’s jest waiting to blast us new assholes,” he said.

“Naw. He never takes more’n a couple shots.” Leroy rubbed the reddish gray stubble on his chin with the back of his hand and let out a long breath. “Serves us right for working our asses

off out here while everybody else is in town. Fuck the overtime.”

“You’re crazy trying to talk to that old man.” Dinker squinted through the rain from under the brim of his cap. “Maybe he’s still setting up there. Nobody knows what crazy people do, specially crazy injuns.” (7)

The workers’ dialogue conveys the depth of Jim’s detachment from the mainstream Forks community, a sentiment furthered by many dialogues throughout the novel. Jim dies in isolation, and this isolation serves as the beginning to Tom Joseph’s story.

Tom’s dislocation is furthered by his studies at UC–Santa Barbara. It will be interesting to see how our students, who may sign up for the course because they want to “learn more” about Indians, respond to Tom’s memories of Santa Barbara. Something I find intriguing is that Tom only perceives the university through memory—as far as the act of narration or reading is concerned, the university is always in the past, and it sifts further and further away from Tom’s immediate experience as the novel progresses. In a way, Tom invents the university as much as it invents him.

The town of Forks has a strange connection to the California university, and its inhabitants are dubious of things Californian. Many townspeople resent Tom for his studies, such as local lumber patriarch J. D. Hill’s son, Buddy, who taunts Tom for going “all the way to Califuckinformia to learn to be an Indian” (130). The town’s collective xenophobia is projected on Tom for studying in California, furthering the ironic notion that Tom does not belong in his hometown, that he is even more of a “foreigner” now than before.

However, many people in Tom’s hometown encourage him to leave town. The pro-industry Forks residents, which include nearly everyone in town, fear that Tom will assume his uncle’s role as the man who resists the mine’s construction. As such, they want him out. They want him to return to California. Some mine-motivated locals even seem concerned with the “plight” of Tom’s tribe, encouraging him to return to college because doing so could result in more power and leverage in the future, a sentiment exemplified by these lines

from J. D. Hill: "You're not only the first boy from Forks to get a scholarship to a university, you're an Indian. . . . You can go back to school, and you can do a lot more to help your people than you can without an education" (66). While Tom could perhaps "do a lot more" in the future, the fact remains if he leaves town to return to Santa Barbara, he will be "removing" himself from the ancestral lands. In this case, academia is removal. The historical fact is, of course, that "American education" has long been a means of removing young Indian people from their families and ancestral lands, a fact echoed by Tom's dream of severed tongues. The American educational system has historically removed Indian students in order to include them into a "new" collective. The school is a place for "reconstruction," for creating pan-tribal alliances and identities as a result of dislocation from the "original" lands. The American school is contradictory nexus for Native diaspora, and *Wolfsong* plays with this contradictory role that universities are now playing in the "revitalization" of Indigenous cultures. The university is simultaneously a traditional colonial apparatus and a contemporary source of political power to resist colonialism. To further the contradiction, Owens himself is a professor, a job that would seem to repulse his protagonist.

Tom's predicament has his family worried, but they are realists. His mother and brother tell him to leave, to finish school, to avoid becoming like his uncle. Everyone who seems to like Tom wants him to leave, trying to convince him to go back to school, to become an Indian lawyer, someone with a commanding degree. Tom's old girlfriend, Karen, a green-eyed Cherokee with Bear visions, is engaged to Buddy Hill (the patriarch's son) and pregnant with Buddy's child. Karen repeatedly tells Tom that he should not have come back, that he could not expect things to stay the same, that he should leave soon before it gets worse. But despite all these urgent warnings to leave Forks and return to UCSB, Tom does not leave. He chooses to stay at home after his uncle's funeral.

Tom does not want to return to the university, to Southern California, to mixed-bloods from the Native American Students Association telling him how to be Indian. Bob McBride, Tom's roommate and friend at college, provides Owens with ample space to probe the

construction of Native American identity. McBride, Tom tells us early on, joins everything. President of the Native American Student Association and enrollee of the Confederate Salish-Kutenai tribe, McBride's character manifests an Indian identity through connections to and affiliations with organizations or ceremonies recognized by the dominant culture as "Native American," regardless of how homogenizing these things may be. I find it interesting that, like UCSB itself, our only images of McBride in the first half of the novel come through Tom's memories. Not surprisingly, Tom remembers McBride's most ironic quotes, such as references to universities as the "Native-American-economic-opportunity-big-time"(27). McBride's physical absence allows Owens to play with Tom's perception of these seemingly overeager affiliations. Once readers finally do meet McBride, contradictions of tribal identity abound. Consider the ironies at play in chapter 22, when McBride rolls into town and invites Tom to "pierce and protest":

[Tom] thought about the fact that McBride had been through a lot of ceremonies that he knew nothing about and how funny that was. He was the fullblood, but McBride, who's grown up on the old Flathead reservation, seemed more Indian in some ways with his seven-eighths white ancestry. (183)

Tom isn't drawn to join organizations that confirm his "Indianness." The affirmation of his Indigenous identity, to paraphrase a recurrent theme from Owens's *Other Destinies*, develops out of a connection to the land itself.

So Tom stays at "home," thus finding himself in a predicament also noted in *Other Destinies*—he is forced to choose between the white path and the Indian path. In some ways, this causes *Wolfsong* to fall clearly in line with many of the Native novels written after D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded*, revisiting the McNickle binary.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, the symbolic "white road" is manifest in the literal road under construction, which will eventually lead to the site of the copper mine. And for Tom, there seems to be no "Indian road" available, short of assuming the role of armed guerrilla left vacant after his uncle's death.

By the novel's end, Tom fully assumes his uncle's persona, but he is chased out of town as he does so. Unlike his uncle, Tom does kill a person in his actions to protect the environment, again problematizing Tom's identity in relation to his actions.<sup>7</sup> The story concludes as Tom blows up a water tower built by the mining company. As such, he's the hero: His Indian identity is affirmed; he sends a powerful blow to the mining company; and his uncle's spirit seems to have settled in him as he climbs north to hide from pursuers. He liberates the water, the source of life, from its imperial metal containers. However, I'm not entirely sure if Tom has (in the eyes of "the machine," anyway) done much other than simply delay the process. Thus, though *Wolfsong* ends on a note that seems revolutionary, it invites both hope and skepticism through the contradictions and ambiguity of its final images.

Tom is not a typical "hero" in the romantic western movie sense: He does not "get the girl" because he cannot be with his old girlfriend, Karen, as her dysfunctional relationship with Tom's nemesis, Buddy Hill, continues at the novel's conclusion. Karen's character is compelling and complex. I think Karen's relationships with Tom and Buddy will be easily accessible elements of the story that will quickly engage our students' attention and empathy. We should consider how the readings we assign prior to *Wolfsong* may prepare students to critique these dysfunctional dynamics.

It is hard to avoid imagining the events that occur after the novel ends. I'm prone to think that Tom is heading up to British Columbia, to Aaron Medicine's place. Tom's first experience in British Columbia seems to have opened his eyes to a "Pan-Indian" or "Native American" experience that is more tangible and meaningful than his memories of UC–Santa Barbara. Indeed, Aaron Medicine's character is archetypal—a Lakota Sun Dancer with a sweatlodge in his backyard, where all sorts of people, Indian and non-Indian, come to pray and cleanse themselves. *Wolfsong* invites me to remember that despite the merchandising and advertised accessibility of a Plains-ish spirituality, something very real and very sacred does connect *all people*. Does it come from the land? Or rather, how does it come from

the land in *Wolfsong*? Regardless of how and where it comes from, the big question for our purposes here as instructors is how our students will respond. Consider potential student reactions to this line, which Aaron Medicine speaks to Tom: “We don’t mean that an Indian can’t watch the Super Bowl or use a microwave oven if he feels like it, we just want people to find out who they are” (193). While this line masquerades as a clear statement, it is filled with several layers of contradictions, and the texts we assign prior to *Wolfsong* need to expose some complexities and contradictions of human and tribal identity in order to prepare students for this novel.

Purists would likely have a tough time with *Wolfsong*. The book is not “traditional” in a reclusive or commodified sense because the story’s “origins” are vague. *Where* does the story itself really come from? Is it a Salish story? A Choctaw-Cherokee story? A “Native American” story? Simply a good story? While *Wolfsong* may indeed be all of these things, our students will bring their own assumptions about economics, identity, and tradition to the mix, and the outcomes of this experiment will no doubt speak to the diversity of our students’ perspectives.

I must confess, however, that I am concerned about being too directive with my reading of the novel. I don’t really want to bombard my students with my own interpretation of how Owens’s personal and tribal histories converge within the protagonist’s fictional composite consciousness. Doing so would make me feel like too much of an anthropologist, employing what may seem like static, museum-esque terminology to explicate the story. Moreover, I would probably resent such apparent reduction if a critic wrote something similar about my own fiction, suggesting that understanding my metaphors involved little more than applying my own Jewish-Cherokee tribal consciousnesses to explicate fictional symbols. I am too self-critical to speak authoritatively about my initial analysis of *Wolfsong*. However, I am hopeful that we can encourage our students to generate questions for Louis Owens that speak to such issues.

Having said all of this, I must now confront my own hypocrisy. Here I am writing about how land ethics and industrial economics

relate to identity and place, yet I have only lived in Washington State for a few years. My cultural orientation to the novel is much different than it is for John Purdy, who was born and raised in the foothills of the Oregon Cascades. Perhaps I want to perceive the North Cascades, in real life and in Owens's novel, as a projection of the southern Appalachians. Perhaps I want to see a southeast Indian story transplanted onto the Northwest landscape, because that's how I perceive my own identity in relation to this "American" place, because doing so enables me to make more sense of my identity in *this* northwestern place in particular. I probably need to deconstruct my own cultural orientation, despite my assumptions that Owens is playing with something similar.

### *Purdy's Essay*

Since the subjectivity of the reading and interpretive process has been the focus of so much debate in literary studies in contemporary times, it seems wholly appropriate to initiate a discussion of Owens's novel by sharing our personal reactions to it. By doing so, I hope to provide some points of entry into its concerns and to explore some of the ways Owens's vision intersects those of other contemporary American writers. To facilitate this initial phase of what promises to evolve into an extensive discourse, I would like to focus on two obvious fundamentals of the novel—place and people—for the novel adequately demonstrates Owens's talent for capturing the essence of both through finely tuned descriptive details, details that carry with them profound implications, at least for this reader.

I will out myself; I am a fourth-generation northwesterner, and Owens's details of place speak intimately to me. I too have hiked, fished, and hunted these mountains. However, Owens's tale also foregrounds the migratory patterns that speak to colonialism here and its various manifestations. At its heart, there is the colonial bottom line: extractive benefits for the colonizer. The colonial urge to occupy and possess exists today as well, and it has been subsumed into contemporary life in ways that students without the discursive prompting of Owens and other writers may never recognize.

Owens spent several years in close interaction with the place and the people he characterizes in his novel. Working for the National Forest Service out of its regional office in Darrington, Washington, he built and maintained trails through the Mt. Baker/Snoqualmie National Forest and Glacier Peak Wilderness, fought forest fires, and even served as an enforcement officer at one point. Despite the shifting of the fictive locale to the town of Forks (also in Washington and very much like the town of Darrington), the setting mapped out in the novel is in the upper basins of the Skagit and Sauk rivers, and it is one with which he became very intimate. As Owens notes, this is also where (and when) he began writing the novel.<sup>8</sup>

To say that Owens conveys a realistic sense of the Sauk and Skagit river valleys is too obvious. Their steep terrain, glacier-covered peaks, expansive rain forests, and indigenous fauna are all convincingly and beautifully portrayed. The significance of this observation for literary studies, at least for this reader, though, lies in the way that this realistic depiction evolves, merging with political, economic, and psychological implications far beyond this one geo-specific locale. In other words, in his exploration of the ways that people have interacted with this place over a long period of time, Owens evokes some intriguing historical facts that account for current issues: the degradation of the environment, the threat of loss for Indigenous cultures, the future of a country comprising diverse cultures.

This novel speaks very personally to me. I grew up in a small town very similar to the Forks of the novel. This fact shapes my reading of it; I know these people and, like Tom Joseph, went to school with the descendants of “settlers.” I know the “lingo,” the lexicon Owens deploys to give the material life of loggers: crummy, caulked boots, choker setter, widow makers. Like Forks, my hometown is situated in the foothills of the Cascade Mountains, and it shares a similar character because of its history. Primarily a farming and logging community, it was founded earlier than Forks/Darrington, since it was a terminus of the Oregon Trail and thus became a point of debarkation for those who moved northward to the land of the novel. In other words, Owens’s story operates in a recent colonial dynamic: the lived reality for numerous western, culturally and ethnically charged com-

munities that emerged from the urge of Manifest Destiny and now must live with the effects of that history.

Furthermore, in Owens's peopling of the valley, he teases us with the suggestive nature of these mixed migration patterns that came to shape the character of this place and the contemporary reality of the people in it who descend from its original inhabitants. The most recent immigrants to the forestlands come from urban areas in search of a "wilderness" experience (and perhaps suggest the stories of Jack Kerouac's and Gary Snyder's trips to this same area of the state to serve in a remote lookout to commune with nature). Before this recent migration, however, an earlier generation came from northern Europe—from Sweden, Norway, and Finland—and found work in the logging camps of the Northwest, founded by the "Americans" who preceded them. These initial immigrants from other pioneer locations in the West, but also from the East, had a very different history from those who came later, as reflected in the dialect they speak in the novel. These townsfolk came from the South, through the Midwest (where quite often families lived for a time before moving to the far West), and then often over the Oregon Trail or, later, on the "immigrant trains" that provided a quicker and simpler mode of transportation into the promised land. These early American "settlers" comprised a significant portion of the expanding population, and with them came the socio-political and economic orientation of their ancestors. These are the attitudes and motivations Owens unpacks in the novel.

In fact, the institution of slavery, as it evolved in the South, can be found in the novel's interrogation of racism based upon a utilitarian urge; just as plantation owners exploited their environment and fellow humans for profit and power, the founders of Forks carved out their own empire by erasing Native peoples and subjugating Indigenous lands, and their ideological descendants face the repercussions. These are what William Stafford—once Oregon's poet laureate—termed "the flute end of consequences."

The novel reflects the colonial history of these immigrants' interactions with the Stehemish, whose long tenure in this valley evolved a

culture and land-use philosophy strikingly different from the one imported with the new arrivals. Unlike other locations where reservations were formed, the Upper Skagit area is dotted with “trust lands,” small plots of forestlands or homes held in trust by the federal government for Native Americans. Often, these plots are not contiguous with the reservation and thus where housing and such are located, and sometimes they are separated by miles. This patchwork landscape is the home of the Josephs and the old burial plot of their kin.

Owens portrays the results of a philosophy of extractive exploitation and the linked policy of appropriating lands through “private ownership,” which precipitates the fragmentation of place through the imposition of arbitrary (and unnatural) boundaries such as the acre, the deed, the property line, the reservation boundary, and the forest “unit” or “sale.” He chronicles the results in *Wolfsong*, from the loss of ancient forests and viable ecosystem to equally fragmented communities—old and new—that depended upon them.

This is the social milieu of “Forks.” The word itself is simple, in stream terminology: two ways diverging, or converging, depending upon the direction you are traveling. Owens’s complicating of the word, however, is one intriguing aspect of the novel. While some writers may dwell upon easy social binaries, the game of “cowboys and Indians” Owens evokes at times in the novel, he chooses to blur the lines with characters who more accurately depict the multiple directions of the acculturation and cultural exchange that have taken place since first contact. Significantly, these characters, and the choices they make, also carry a subtext about the long-term effects of place upon people. Later, in this process of discovery with our students, I would hope we discuss Vern Reese, Sam Garvey, Ab Masingle, and Ranger Grider in some detail. For the moment, though, I’d first like to consider the most eccentric character in the book and use that discussion to provide some groundwork for the others.

Consider John Hanson, “Crazy John,” a character personally attractive to me for several reasons besides the obvious: his name. Small towns are notorious for such characters, those on the edge of the social order although never completely excluded from the civic

body. (In my hometown, there were two, and Owens told me that the character was based on a person in the Darrington area.) We meet him first as Tom Joseph rides the last few miles home in a logging truck driven by a fellow townsman, Amel. This is a scene familiar to those who have read several contemporary Native novels, for it reflects what Bill Bevis once termed “homing-in.”<sup>9</sup> Like Archilde, the protagonist of D’Arcy McNickle’s 1936 novel *The Surrounded*, and his literary descendents such as Abel in N. Scott Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn*, Tom Joseph is coming home from a life in the world far beyond this one small community. On the way, he and Amel see Crazy John, as always in his front yard carrying out a relentless war against the encroachment of the blackberry vines. I believe Owens is working on several levels with this scene, and I would like to unwrap a few.

First, there is the allusion, the resonance mentioned above; Owens is a literary critic and teacher of Native fiction as well as a novelist.<sup>10</sup> However, in Crazy John’s war against “the wilderness” as it tries to reestablish its natural order upon the industrialized worldscape brought with the European immigrants, we also find the often promoted idea of society’s fear of the “wilds.” This has often been a subject of discussion, one piece of the critical discourse, that surrounded the early attempts to differentiate between Indigenous and immigrant cosmologies. As the idea went, the Puritans feared the apparent disorder, the lack of God’s order, in the “wilderness” of this continent and therefore considered the lands beyond human “settlement” (a term suggestive in and of itself) the domain of the devil and thus due for God’s colonial influence. To what degree this is an accurate simplification of that social orientation is still the subject of debate; nonetheless, the idea has certainly worked its way into the literature of this continent, from Henry David Thoreau and, more specifically for many of the characterizations in the novel, James Fennimore Cooper to Gary Snyder and, more importantly for Owens, John Steinbeck, the idea of humankind at war with the wilderness, the natural world, is pervasive. Owens’s deployment of this concept, though, melds the literary tradition beautifully with the social. The ecological message touches all of us through the pragmatic, utilitarian need to use the

“resources” one finds for one’s own gain. That is the story of the West.

But to this story Owens adds two related, interesting qualities by re-envisioning the somewhat stock character of Crazy John, the war veteran turned gospel preacher.<sup>11</sup> The first quality rests in Crazy John’s ability to “see” the spirits of the place, whom townsfolk seem to think he equates with demons (and which he seems to confuse with Indians at times), and the other is his apparent ability to prophesy. The former is presented in our first encounter with him, only a few pages after we are introduced to the spirits of the land that dance as Tom’s uncle, Jim Joseph, dies. The latter capability comes late in the novel, when John conveys the foreshadowing of the novel’s conclusion, telling Tom that the “demons” are calling for him, just as they had for his uncle. The ironic reversal, though, hinges upon the orientation of the reader, which must acknowledge the convention of demonizing the “wilderness” and shift to valorizing it: One must grant the place its own and the possibility that it exists not as a commodity for use but with a presence that it would be best not to ignore. Crazy John exemplifies the ways that one’s own character may evolve dramatically—for good or ill—through a close association with place, in this case a place with a long-standing relationship with Tom’s people.

The story speaks to me in this way. It is not the only thing it says, nor does its voice speak in a monotone. My hearing rises and falls, hesitates and moves on, rethinking what Owens has said. Our students will speak it their way, and there’s the hub.

#### REPARATIONS

As we conceptualized how to schedule the readings and assignments in this particular English 235 course (Introduction to Native American Literatures), we knew that our email dialogue with Louis Owens would be the centerpiece of the course. The trick was how to prepare the students to ask Owens some good questions.

There were seats for seventy-five students in the class, and we required the students to purchase two books for the course—an anthology of texts by and about Native writers and Owens’s novel *Wolf-*

*song*. We expected mostly white students, given the demographic realities of our Northwest campus, and indeed that's what we got. A minority of the students consisted of Asian American, African American, and Native American people. A few of the students were mixed-blood people with Native ancestry whose tribal roots became evident as they chose to share their family stories. While we don't believe that these facts should directly affect the process of choosing which texts to assign in such courses, we were aware all along that the majority of our students, like the fictional students that Owens characterizes through Tom Joseph's memories of UCSB, would be white people in search of more knowledge about Indians.

Western Washington University, like all the public colleges in our state, runs on the ten-week quarter system. The survey nature of the course mandates a midterm and final exam. Students also composed multiple essays for the class—four one-page essays in response to films that students viewed outside of class and one three- to five-page essay in response to *Wolfsong*.

We decided early on to provide a vague essay prompt for the *Wolfsong* assignment. The essay assignment, which the students were informed of in the syllabus, was this: "a three- to five-page critical analysis of a significant element of *Wolfsong*." The most concrete part of the *Wolfsong* assignment was the collaborative process itself. From the beginning of the class, students knew the author was going to participate. We hoped that students would use this opportunity to generate their own essay ideas through the process of asking the author some more particular questions regarding issues of their own immediate interests, but we also knew that our schedule of readings prior to *Wolfsong* would shape the students' questions by giving them a context to ground their inquiries. We assigned *Wolfsong* after the midterm but before the final. The email exchange with Owens took place around week seven, and the students' papers were due at the end of week nine.

The texts we choose from the anthology were texts that both addressed issues raised in our own initial responses to the novel (part 2 of this project) and exposed several often contradictory angles on

these issues. Our initial reactions to *Wolfsong* both discussed place, and this is often an initial point of entry for students as they read Native novels. In this instance, Owens calls attention to the land and the impending ecological threat, so we paired the novel with the movie *Clear Cut*. Although set in Canada (fortuitously the place to which *Wolfsong*'s protagonist escapes), it raises similar issues of ecological and cultural loss tied directly to the history of colonialism. Second, questions of identity are highlighted throughout the novel, as they are in poems and short stories we assigned in advance. Third, an underlying inquiry into the ways culture is shaped by environment seems central to the characters' stories in the novel, including the non-Native characters. These three strands, we hoped, would provide the structure for our first day's discussion, moving from students' recognition of the landscape to ecological issues concurrent with our reading to characterization to history and so on.

On the very first day of class, we established an emphasis on "storytelling," on narrative. We accomplished this by telling our own stories of how we came to be teaching a class such as this and why we thought it necessary to do so. In other words, from the very beginning there was a blurring of the binary between "fiction" and lived experience, as well as a blurring of the college class and the world surrounding our classroom. This personal introduction was followed by readings from our anthology that included N. Scott Momaday's "Man Made of Words," Greg Sarris's "The Woman Who Loved a Snake," Kim Blaeser's "The Possibilities of a Native Poetics," Leslie Silko's "Yellow Woman," and several stories and poems by Louise Erdrich. The centrality of narrative to culture was thus highlighted, and issues of identity emerged as well.

We also read Thomas King's short story "Borders," taking the concept of identity into the political realm. Issues of representation were raised, particularly after the class viewed Victor Masayesva's wonderful movie *Imagining Indians*. Imagined ideas about western landscapes are also exposed in D'Arcy McNickle's short story "The Hawk Is Hungry," and given McNickle's influence on contemporary writers like Owens, we read the story early in the term. Thus, as the first

weeks progressed, the students were presented with several perspectives of the history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, capped wonderfully with Carter Revard's witty story "Report to the Nation: Repossessing Europe."

There are a few other pieces that helped frame the discussion: Silko's "Tony's Story" and Simon Ortiz's "The Killing of a State Cop," both of which fictionalize an historical event. We also read Susan Castillo's "Postmodernism, Native American Literature, and the Real: The Silko-Erdrich Controversy," which examines the contexts for Silko's scathing review of Erdrich's *The Beet Queen*. This was followed by the first midterm, essay exam. Over one-third of the class wrote about issues of representation, an understandable direction of inquiry, given the questions raised by these pieces.

This introduction thus provided the scope necessary to move into the novel. By the time students read *Wolfson*, they had engaged the history and the issues it evokes. Interestingly, on the first day of discussion there was little focus on the land; it was the shared "given" for the students, so an analysis of its depiction was deferred, coming later in explorations of economic, ecological, and political issues. However, this is not to suggest that the locale did not speak personally to the students as they reexamined their own landscape in the context of the narrative. Suffice it to say here that the students immediately moved into character analyses (and thus identity considerations), looking primarily at the book's protagonist, Tom Joseph, and his brother, Jimmy, but also Tom's former partner, Karen. In brief, they focused immediately on the characters with whom they most closely aligned by age or perhaps by personal experience or by similarity of situation: Tom Joseph leaves his home town behind to seek a university education, only to return to a home very much changed to "find himself."

On the second day of discussion, we formed small groups to draft the questions students would pose to Owens. It was a lively discussion, after the first moments of hesitation, and as we moved about among the groups, it became obvious that the groups moved quite rapidly from the usual, superficial questions one hears so often during the question-and-answer sessions after readings to ones of substance that

were directly related to elements specific to the novel as well as our own personal reactions to it. In brief, then, it seems that they clearly saw this as an opportunity to gain information and insight that would be of immediate benefit (i.e., be useful in a graded exercise) but also that the focus of the papers as they were conceiving them had become almost personal. Interestingly, the student questions for Owens addressed the relationship between culture and place.

#### THE STUDENTS' QUESTIONS, THE AUTHOR'S ANSWERS

These questions were first generated by students in small groups. The questions appear in the arbitrary order in which they materialized on the blackboard as we refined them.

Q: Would you explain some of the history behind the ethnographic details of the book, such as the inclusion of the wolf, the water imagery, and so on?

A: I don't really believe in giving ethnographic information for anything I've written; that feels too much like playing anthropologist and explaining the book. I can say, however, that I drew very heavily upon Salish stories for *Wolfsong*, especially Upper Skagit stories. The details regarding spirit helpers are as faithful to Upper Skagit belief as I could make them; the wolf, for example, is the most powerful animal helper a hunter can have. The vision quest experiences in the novel are accurate for Suiattle and Upper Skagit people, or at least that's what I was told and read.

I based much upon conversations and also upon several sources, including a strange collection of Suiattle stories and biographies compiled by an old Ranger in the Darrington Ranger District many years ago. A friend of mine was a mule packer whose father had worked for the forest service along the Suiattle near the turn of the century. His wife was Indian. I camped many times with them and heard many stories from them.

The story of trickster causing a great destructive flood is important in the novel, as of course is the seal from the opening passage and the presence of Raven.

I realize this may not be very informative, but it's an area I am very

careful with, especially because in this novel I was writing about a culture that was not my own. I had to touch very lightly upon some subjects and not at all upon others.

About the wolf: When I was on trail crew and then working as a ranger in the Glacier Peak Wilderness, from 1969 to 1976, I would hear again and again stories about people who saw or heard wolves in the Cascades. I, one winter, and others had heard wolves howl. But wolves were supposed to be extinct. I spent week upon week out in the mountains alone, backpacking off trail. I always felt I should have found signs of wolves if they were there, but I didn't, though I did come upon a grizzly once when there weren't supposed to be any in that area. I thought of the wolf in the novel as a kind of metaphor for the resilience of the natural world and of Native people. The question that haunts the novel is: have the wolves come back, or did they never leave?

Ironically, biologists now say there are not only wolves denning in the North Cascades but also a resident grizzly population.

Q: Is Tom Joseph modeled after someone you know/knew? To what degree are the characters autobiographical?

A: Tom Joseph was modeled very loosely upon a fellow I worked with. His family were Suiattle and lived near the ranger station in Darrington. I placed Tom Joseph's house where his family's house was. However, Tom Joseph is an entirely fictional character, with more of me in him than anyone else. I suppose one could say that I split my own character into Tom and the wilderness ranger who tries to help him. I was the wilderness ranger there, yet I think Tom's character is probably much closer to my own. I know all that country well, hiked all those trails, climbed Glacier Peak by the route Tom takes, by myself once and with friends once. And finally, I was very disturbed to discover a copper company's plans to put an open pit mine at Image Lake, near the sacred peak of Dakobed. A lot of my anger about that went into the novel.

Many characters in the novel are based on people I knew when I worked up there, some based quite closely on those people. Darrington was a fascinating town, and someone there actually did try to make his own helicopter. It crashed and broke his legs. Sam Gravey

was a real character in the town who really did—according to local stories—drive down the one street of town in a car with a fiddler and a whore. He supposedly did claim his life’s dream was to go to bed with a beautiful woman while a fiddler played “Turkey in the Straw.” You see, you cannot make up things that fine. I gathered many such stories from logger friends in the town, really wonderful people with huge hearts and a love for the place. Of course, I could only use a minute fraction of such stories in the novel.

Q: The Josephs are an interesting family. Are they meant to reflect a stereotypical Native American family in the Northwest, or are they—individually and collectively—meant to reflect specific issues of identity?

A: The Joseph family are meant to reflect realities particular to that particular valley. What must it be like to be living where your ancestors had always lived but be dispossessed of your home? The Native parts of my own family were displaced long ago from Mississippi and North Carolina, and then again after that, but the family I based the Josephs upon still lived where their ancestors always had, but they were marginalized, poor on the edge of a white community with strong racist views. The camas prairie that had been invaluable to their ancestors was covered with loggers’ homes. Of course, they also embody issues that I think are common to Native people all over the U.S. and Canada, such as identity, acculturation, loss of voice, loss of religion, loss of culture, loss upon loss. And how do you make your life coherent and positive in the face of generations of loss? How do you imagine who you are if you don’t know the stories? How do you make new versions of the old stories that apply to this life and this world?

Q: If you were to write a sequel, where/who would Tom be today?

A: I’ve been urged a number of times to write a sequel, and I’ve considered it. I see the novel as an incomplete circle. Tom has left home and gone south to Santa Barbara, moving south and west. He’s now left home again, this time moving north and east. When the circle is completed, he should be back in his home valley. A sequel would have to take place in Forks, in that valley. However, the sequel

I've imagined features Tom as an extremely old man, in the last months of his life, maybe eighty or older. He has never married. Jimmy has died long before, and the family ends with Tom. (This is not a Vanishing American Indian story.) I imagine Tom as someone who has made peace with his anger and with the world, who has come back because he could not live apart from those rivers and those mountains where the stories of his people live. I think he must be wise but of what sort would that wisdom be? What has he learned? That is what the book must be about. I've had so many things I've wanted and needed to write about that I've never undertaken that sequel. It might still happen.

Q: Did the ending of the story change as the novel evolved, or was it always planned out? (There is no clear closure, and the ambiguity is obviously purposeful.)

A: I knew from the first word of the novel that it would end at the summit of Glacier Peak, but I didn't know what was going to happen there. Glacier, Dakobed, is the birth place for Tom's ancestors, so to end the novel there is to end with a beginning. Therefore, there could be no closure. I knew the major conflict would center around the mine, and I knew the kinds of personal conflicts that would define Tom's character. That's about all I knew in the beginning. The way I've written every novel is to begin and then see what happens and who steps into the plot. I never know who the characters will be beyond the protagonist, or protagonists, and I never know what they will say or do until they speak and act. For example, I did not know that Jake would do what he did or that death would result from the water tank explosion until it all happened. That's for me what makes writing a novel such a pleasure, the constant surprises.

BONUS QUESTION: Given the things that have been written about the novel, what do you feel has not been addressed/engaged to your satisfaction?

A: The aspect of my fiction that I think probably hasn't been addressed much, if at all, is the intertwining of Native and European myth. Critics usually approach a novel with an agenda, and if the novel or the novelist is somehow identified as Native American, then the agenda is to find as much that's "authentically Indian" about it as

possible. The Christ figure in *Wolfsong* is an example of intermixing, and *The Sharpest Sight* is replete with fused mythologies. As a writer from a very mixed background, class as well as ethnicity and cultures, I've tried in my fiction to write a world that I want to live in, and that means no binaries. I wrote *The Sharpest Sight*, for example, deliberately so that no one could disentangle Choctaw and Indo-European mythologies. Cole and Attis live in both realities simultaneously. It's true again for *Bone Game*. It's not as true for a novel like *Nightland*, where I carefully stayed with Cherokee myth and story because I wrote it specifically for my aunt, who was Cherokee (and Irish).

Every writer must feel his brilliant, subtle, complex work is misunderstood. It comes with the territory. So it's a bit absurd to say such things. But still, if there is one other area I'd like people to notice, critically, it's the humor. Following *Wolfsong* I've found more and more power in humor, with each novel, I think, depending increasingly on that particular tool.

#### STUDENT ESSAYS

Unfortunately, some readers will now put down this essay, satisfied after reading Louis Owens's comments. However, the full benefit of this exercise for *SAIL* readers must involve a representation of our students' voices.

For teachers who have not taught Owens before and perhaps are preparing to teach this novel or his other works, our students can provide you with a sense of details and characters that speak immediately to them, as well as some insight regarding the assumptions that undergraduates may bring into the discourse. For teachers who teach Owens's work regularly, our students' essays can provide you with a counterpoint to the work of your own students. In such cases, we are interested in your comparative feedback.

Students had about two weeks between the time Louis Owens responded to their questions and the due date of their essay assignment, a three- to five-page out-of-class critical analysis of a "significant element" of *Wolfsong*. In other words, the students' creation and articulation of essay topics serve as our window into the students'

own process of signification. We thank all of our students for their hard work and good thoughts with this assignment and their willingness to contribute to our overall project. Seven student essays are represented here.

No one took up the challenge to explore the new critical terrain outlined in Owens's answer to question 6, at least directly. Almost categorically, students' essays cut across the major issues delineated in or suggested by the other questions and their answers. While they did not always refer directly to the exercise, they were certainly informed by Owens's reactions and the ancillary issues they raise. In many cases, the issue of identity was central, and often very personal.

*Student K.R.*

Identity is a very complex concept that tends to be oversimplified especially when people from the dominant culture are addressing people who aren't of the dominant culture. Every one of us white folks would probably laugh if we were in a British literature class and the professor asked which of the characters in a novel was more "white," meaning which character more embodied the true form of whiteness. We think of ourselves as individuals; every person is different, but those differences don't make some people more or less white than others. Also a question like "What does it mean to be white?" couldn't be asked because we understand that there is no common "white" experience, that it's impossible to make generalizations about what a white person would or wouldn't do or say or think. So, why can the question of whether Tom or Jimmy Joseph is more Indian be raised in a Native American literature class and not be laughed at? Somehow we have a hard time making the connection between the complexity that we see embodied in our own lives and the complexity that also exists for people who aren't of the dominant culture. . . .

Tom's time away taught him more about who he wasn't than who he was. He realized that his identity was tied to the land that he'd left in Washington, the land where his ancestors lived. Jimmy is a logger who, as far as we know, has never left the valley in search of anything.

We get the impression that Jimmy isn't too concerned with things like identity; he's a hard worker and likes to spend time after work with a few beers. There is one passage where Owens really highlights that separation between Jimmy and Tom: "He walked toward the gate and Jimmy followed. When he slid around the steel post, Jimmy stayed on the other side. For a moment they faced each other across the bars" (158). Here the emotional boundary that separates the two brothers is turned into a physical one. These two people have very different identities on one hand, yet on the other hand both are full-blooded Stehemish and have a shared identity in that way.

While this student obviously "teased out" some contradictions inherent to a sense of "shared identity," others chose to explore implications of a shared identity in the lives of the main characters. The following student (K.B.) focuses on Karen's relationship to Tom in terms of Karen's tribal heritage.

*Student K.B.*

. . . Karen is the example of what happens when identity is ignored. Karen has great dreams of loving bears, but she does not know what her dream bears expect from her. She enjoys them but does not try to figure out what they want from her: "they expect something from me. I know there's something important I'm supposed to do, but I can't figure out what it is" (72). Karen does not feel that she has to search for the answers because the answers will make themselves known. From this we can understand that she is not searching for her identity because it is supposed to find her. She nonchalantly tells Tom, "I'm in love with my dream bears. . . . Someday I'll know what I'm supposed to do" (73).

Tom knows where her dreams are coming from: "A bear dream that must have been drawn from those long-ago Cherokee ancestors across all this time and space" (72). Karen may be only part Cherokee, but that Indian blood still makes up part of her. The bear dream, is asking her to seek out that part of her identity. Yet, she shrugs it off, thinking, "they just want to take care of me," but eventually they will

leave her alone and she loses that part of herself because she did not work to keep it (71).

Karen ignores her bears; she does not search for answers in the dreams and consequently, her dreams stop and her identity suffers. Her character slips into a lonely, bitter sorrow as she loses this part of her. She tells Tom, "My dream bears are gone[;] . . . it hurts. I'm alone and I can't find my bear cave" (178). She takes up smoking and slips into a depression. Even though she has every material reason to be happy, she is sarcastic about her situation: "She laughed, 'Of course I'm okay. I'm six months pregnant, and I'm married to the richest boy in Forks. I have the biggest house on the prairie'" (176). She is miserable because she lost the Cherokee part of her identity. She is excited about her baby: "It's a white baby, almost a full blood" (178). She has ignored a part of her, she will not teach anything Indian to her baby. Her baby is going to be just about as white as they come.

Karen feels that she was trapped by her dreams because they wanted something from her. She advises Tom, "Think of your own dream, Tom. It can be a trap. Like steel" (178). The same thing would have happened to Tom if he ignored his wolf dreams; they would eventually leave him alone and miserable.

But Tom does not ignore his dreams. He is perplexed by them, seeking this identity of his own through the wolf, connecting him to his uncle and identifying him as Indian. Tom dreams of a wolf his first night back in Forks: "the rising howl of the wolf. . . . In his dream, voices spoke in a language he couldn't understand, a fragmented jumble of disordered words aimed directly at him" (41). He is very curious what the dream is trying to say and knows that they expect something from him. Even though he is not sure what they want at first, he is determined to find out what it is, no matter how hard it may be.

After trying to find the answers to his dream and understand the wolf's song, Tom has another dream. "In his dream the wolf beckoned, singing as it turned and departed. He tried desperately to understand the words of the song" (248). We see Tom throughout the entire novel struggling for this answer, and one day he wakes up from this last dream and it is clear to him. He understands the wolf's song, "and suddenly he understood. It was the dream" (248).

Tom is free at the end of the novel because he focused on following his dream. This freed the Indian part of his identity and made him complete. This was not an easy process; at the end, Tom is literally being hunted like an animal. But he is confident; he knows who he is. When the wolf calls him he is anxious and ready, his identity is complete, “listening to the rising howl of the wolf that went on and on until the night seemed ready to burst” (249).

While indulging in the “binary thinking” to which Owens refers, this essay deploys it as a provisional convenience to examine the characters, rather than an overarching conclusion. This “comparison/contrast” approach foregrounds Tom’s quest for self-knowledge, as do the essays of others who employed similar structure. The next essay applies such binaries as a means to analyze Jimmy Joseph, Tom’s brother.

*Student H.G.*

Owens creates Jimmy Joseph as a full-blooded Indian who lives in a poor white community and is as far away from tradition and his native culture as he can possibly be. The first time the audience is introduced to him he materializes “behind the screen door, distorted by the torn and rusty wire so that he looks like a dark ghost” (27). The very first description of him implies a broken spirit, unhappiness, and imbalance. He is masked out behind the screen, concealed and inconspicuous. Owens also presents Jimmy as being unconcerned with his tribal traditions or etiquette, as he carelessly speaks the name of his dead uncle, something that is offensive in his culture. He has a short haircut. He is an alcoholic. His uncle has died, his brother has gone away to college, and he lives with his aging mother in a house that is in worse shape than she is. They are the only two left of their tribe in the town, and once Jimmy’s brother Tom returns, the only three. Jimmy Joseph is very alone. Though Jimmy is not the stereotypical ceremonial and mystical Indian man, Owens creates a character that falls into another common category, one that is maybe more accurate in many cases, of a man who is removed from his culture as well as being an outcast in the one that surrounds him.

Perhaps, through Jimmy's character, Owens is in part examining what societal pressures will do to a person's behavior. The position that Jimmy is in racially has been difficult for his whole life. His means of dealing with it is assimilating himself into the prominent culture that surrounds him. When the boys were little, while Tom listened to old stories told by their uncle, "Jimmy, followed by his tilting shadow, ran off down the gravel road to play with the white kids in town" (37). When Tom wanted to talk about the stories with Jimmy, he responded with a laugh and removed himself from involvement in his own cultural traditions, saying, "Forget that old crap. That stuff's for old men and crazy longhairs. You forget about wolf spirits . . . learn about chainsaws and carburetors" (35). Meanwhile, Jimmy had been learning how to chew tobacco even though it made him sick. . . .

Jimmy's character is constructed in such a way that on the surface he plays a fairly minor part in advancing the plot. He often goes off to the bar alone, his house is deteriorating and he can't seem to keep up with the repairs. He maintains a fairly simple image: reserved and conformed for the most part. His actions, attitude, circumstances, and comments cause him to appear almost static, stuck. He has lived in the same town for his whole life, and plans to stay and "rot" with the rest of the town's population (38). After all that he has done to be an accepted part of the community, he is still not accepted in the way that he perhaps would like to be. In the bar, Buddy Hill says to him, "You injuns don't give a rat's ass what happens to the wilderness, do you?" and his reply is, "Nope, not a rat's ass" (186). No matter what he says or does, his appearance and heritage that he has ignored for so long continue to separate and isolate him. . . .

Owens directs his audience to consider how necessary one's culture is in living a happy, healthy life. He points out the situations that can drive people into isolation, and the importance of having community for support and common ground. He also questions whether or not people should resist the majority, and through the character of Jimmy Joseph, suggests that having a cause and a truly meaningful sense of identity is essential to being human. Jimmy didn't have either and he stayed behind to rot.

The recognition of Karen's and Jimmy's similar fate is significant, for both K.B. and H.G. address the longstanding urge and requirement for assimilation. This became an issue elsewhere in our readings, and students who wrote about it contributed their expertise to the discussion. Other students read the novel as a statement about resistance to assimilation in spite of occupation and removal, often leading to discussions of the novel's landscape and cosmology as well.

*Student S.T.*

... Just before Jim Joseph's death, he has a dream and the significance is not clear until the events in the novel progress.

On the ridges the wolves ran again, and he saw black feet driving into the spring snow and long, black necks stretched hungrily. The voices drummed along the ridgetops and out over the drainages. The boy listened and fasted beside the lake and when it was time he dove seeking the visions. The wolf rose on two legs and beckoned, and for a lifetime he followed, far out into the world of men (7).

In this dream, Jim sees the boy (his nephew, Tom Joseph) on a vision quest. The wolf in the dream beckons to the boy and he follows. Later in the novel, Tom goes on a vision quest and is saved from drowning by Martin Grider, the ranger. Jim's dream had predicted a future event in this novel. The dream has even greater significance since it is at this point that Tom reaches a transition. After his vision quest, the realization of what the mine will do to his land truly angers Tom. Tom then takes an active role in trying to prevent the mine from going in, just as his uncle had. The wolf that is seen in Jim Joseph's final dream has beckoned to Tom after the vision quest, and Tom's actions are guided by the wolf's spirit. . . .

The mine is being put in regardless of what actions Tom takes. However, Tom knows that he must make all attempts to save his land, the land that is rightfully his, the land that was taken from him by the white loggers who dominate the town of Forks. Tom also realizes on a subconscious level that no matter what he does, whether he ignores the mine or tries to stop it from being put in, he is trapped by the town forever. Tom has a recurring dream about a trap and "sometimes in the

dream, it would start getting bigger and would keep growing until it seemed like it was the whole valley” (104). Tom would always wake up just before the mountains in his dream sprang shut on him. This relates to the end of the novel again, since Tom escapes just before the men in the search party close in on him and either kill him or take him as a prisoner. Although Tom does escape the men, he is still in a way “trapped” by the town, since wherever he goes, the spirit of the wolf will be with him reminding him of his land. . . .

Students read these characters in varying, alternate ways and used their analyses as a means of engaging significant ideas. While some looked at them as exemplars of failed identity, others conceived of them as “helpers,” in a way, in Tom’s search.

*Student J.M.*

. . . Tom returns to Forks after his uncle’s death. As the novel develops, Tom’s thoughts and experiences lead him to believe he is in town for more than a funeral. Tom spends his first night back in his uncle’s bedroom. The passages from this section of the novel are crucial. His thoughts drift and Tom gets the “sudden impression that the peaks surrounding the valley had shifted to block the way out” (41). The peaks can be thought of as a metaphor for the events and people in Forks. Karen was a permanent fixture in his life, but she has now moved on. However, his pursuit to get her back is one factor that keeps him from returning to California. The mine could be considered a shifted peak. Tom doesn’t have total control over its creation, yet he feels trapped by it somehow. His thoughts force him to believe that he is tied to the land for a reason. . . .

Jimmy, Tom’s brother, reinforces the idea that Tom is the inheritor of the spirit when the two brothers are drinking coffee in the cold house. Jimmy says, “He told me that when he died the wolf spirit would go to you, that you would need the power, that kind of totem thing. He said I didn’t need it, so he was going to give it to you. He was worried about you, worried that you wouldn’t come back and

worried that you would . . .” (57). Uncle Jim was worried that Tom would become too detached from his Native culture, worried that he might not return home. But at the same time, he was worried that he would return home and be swept up in the fight. Tom would be participating in a battle where victory wasn’t guaranteed. Tom has big shoes to fill, he has to live up to “one of the biggest men he’d ever known” (41). But, of the members of the Joseph family, Tom is the only one able to carry on the cause. He has the heart, the education passed down from his uncle, and the drive. . . .

Jim Joseph suggested that you can’t rule out what you do not see. Native cultures still exist, like wolves, even though they are not always in plain sight. However, a culture will die without awareness and living members. In the small town of Forks, very few Native people remain. Even though the numbers are dwindling, a few individuals remain to help preserve the culture. . . .

Others thought the novel resonated with the work of other writers. Fortunately, Simon Ortiz came to campus during the semester, and since we had read some of his work in preparation, the melding of in-class reading and “real-world” participation worked quite well for some. The next essay opens with Simon Ortiz’s poem “A New Story” before it delves into a synthesis of ideas raised by both Ortiz and Owens.

*Student M.B.*

. . . Because there are very few remaining natives living in Forks, many people there consider Indians to be a thing of the past. They consider the various American Indian cultures dead. One night while in the tavern, Ab Masingale pointed out that Indians owned the valley before anyone else. Buddy Hill reflected much of the community’s attitude, saying: “You mean the injuns? Hell, that was so long ago nobody even remembers what real injuns look like” (186).

Some of the Native Americans living in Forks do view their culture as a dead one. Jimmy, Tom’s brother, reflects this attitude the

best. He feels that the only way for him to survive is to assimilate into the white society. While talking to Tom about his future in the community, Jimmy shows this attitude, saying:

He [Uncle Jim] didn't understand that Indian don't matter no more. All I know is that we're people and we have to live here, with other people like J.D. and all the rest. Hell, I don't even know what Indian means, and neither do you. All I know is there won't be any logging here pretty soon, and then what'll we do? (112)

Because many of the older members of the community are unable to pass down the tribal traditions to the younger generations, some of the values of the tribe are lost. Many younger members of tribes, such as Tom Joseph, falsely learn about their heritage through the stereotypes of movies and television (54–55). So instead of trying to revitalize the culture of the tribe, many people such as Jimmy try to assimilate into American society.

Simon Ortiz points out this unwanted, but forced, assimilation in “Toward a National Indian Literature”:

I was an Aacqumeh person in a community that was tiny compared with the larger world outside which was the American society, the United States. In a sense, as a colonized indigenous person, I was more familiar with the larger society than my own because that society, in influence, numbers and political economic impact, was overwhelming.

On the complete opposite end of perspectives is Tom's friend, McBride. Although he is only one-eighth American Indian by blood, McBride views himself as the epitome of a modern Indian. At the University of California, McBride tries to prove his authenticity as a Native American by participating in clubs, making his skin darker, and participating in Native American ceremonies. To many people like McBride, being Native American is seen more as a hobby than anything else. McBride even notes that many Caucasians, Native American hobbyists, are “more authentic” than the actual tribes (127). Just like Ortiz's poem “A New Story,” these people do not want to recognize

that American Indians are still alive and struggling today. They just want to remember the “Old West” version of the Native American, a person they can package into a nice box.

Interestingly, in Ortiz’s reading he mentioned his interest in forming networks with Indigenous writers elsewhere, noting that he was planning to meet with Kenyan writer N’gugi Wa Thiongo. Blake made reference to this connection and its possibilities in one class discussion, a connection that obviously forged a new pattern for a few students who were able to expand the discussion to a global scale, maintaining a local focus by drawing upon other course work, and thereby extending our consideration to issues of language. The next essay invokes Wa Thiongo in its analysis of *Wolfsong*.

*Student S.R.*

There is an intense relationship between language and culture. N’gugi Wa Thiongo wrote: “Language carries cultures and culture carries . . . the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture.” Language is used to define people; it helps to form an identity. Language becomes inseparable from the state of being; it is a tool and an outlet for many forms of expression. It is a necessary part of identity. However, in the novel *Wolfsong*, written by Louis Owens, the main character, Tom Joseph, struggles to form an identity because his culture and language belong to two different worlds. He is a Native American contained in a white culture, a culture that conflicts with his own. Tom identifies with Native American culture even though he can not speak his people’s language; instead he speaks the language that belongs to the white man, English. He is placed in this uncomfortable position where he is forced to define himself.

Often Tom recalls memories of his uncle telling his stories as a child. He remembers hearing his uncle slip words of his native language into the stories and reminisces about the way the words seemed “confusing, an other-world language connected with strangeness and magic. He’d

felt the words cutting him off from something at the same time they brought that something closer” (34). Tom is torn. He realizes that the words are new and different, but at the same time they possess a power that relates directly to his culture. It is as if the words are the missing piece to a puzzle that completes him. The language is a part of the past, a place Tom cannot visit, but a place he feels a connection to. He feels this association because the language bears his culture. Even Tom admits that if he lived “a hundred years ago [he] would have known [who he] was” (197). The words don’t belong to Tom, but he belongs to the words. The language barrier that Tom experiences separates him from his culture, because these words are the very catalyst of his culture. This detachment leaves Tom awkwardly straddling two worlds. . . .

In several parts of the story, Tom becomes overwhelmed by his need to uncover language and a way to express himself. He escapes to the woods in retreat and in search of himself. In the woods, he is able to contemplate his life and remember stories of the past. The woods become a place that lead to a sense of freedom. He can’t go back to the past, but he can go to the woods. He rids himself of clothing to chase the answers he seeks into the depths of a lake. He “realized then that he did not have to struggle, that one need not fight at all. That, he knew at last, was the key” (164). Tom finds himself again teetering on the line that divides him in two. “And out of the depth again the shadow approached, and he tried to call to it, to ask the question, but he knew no language. He began to struggle for the words, and then suddenly, the light broke over him and his eyes opened” (164). Tom comes so close to finding himself, but as soon as he begins to struggle his progress is halted. He is unable to construct the questions that would help explain his existence and his place in the world. . . .

Tom realizes that his search does not have to be a struggle, but he still holds fears and doubts, aspects that hinder his search. Tom participates in a sweat lodge ceremony with a friend. Everyone in the sweat lodge waits their turn to recite their own prayer. Tom recognizes several different languages but does not understand the words, even though he feels he should. As the ceremony continues, “it seemed to him suddenly he understood it all” (191). When it is Tom’s

turn to pray, he is uneasy and fearful. He questions whether his “words [are] all wrong” (191). “And then the tension was suddenly gone, and he breathed deeply and felt, for the first time since childhood, a great sense of peace” (192). Tom finished his English-worded prayer with a newfound comfort and confidence, which even takes him by surprise. He loses all fear and is able for the first time to use words and understand words that before seemed inhibiting. At the sweat lodge ceremony, Tom understands all the languages because instead of hearing many different languages the words all begin to represent the same voice, the voice of humanity.

These passages are excerpts from but a representative few of the seventy-five papers we received. While some of the students’ explorations and insights seemed relatively routine, we were forced to consider one underlying pattern—to some degree and in varying ways they all made the invisible visible. There are tens of thousands of Native Americans in northwest Washington, yet many of our non-Native students expressed a lack of knowledge of or personal experience with this population. In one way, Owens’s novel shows how people can become “invisible” in a community, and we suspect that students, through their interaction with the novel and its author, started to review their own communities and classmates. This, we believe, is a good first step, one which became a foundation for the remainder of our readings in the course, which included works of the Seattle-based artist Sherman Alexie.

#### THE TEACHERS’ DEBRIEFING

##### *Hausman’s Debriefing*

It is no surprise that the student essays focused heavily on issues of identity. Every element of our collaborative process has been conscious of the construction of personal and cultural identity—from the students’ interest in signing up for the course to the opening day reflections on our backgrounds as instructors to the issues raised by

the writers we studied, and especially in the students' questions for Louis Owens. In Owens's reply to our students, he states that he wants to create worlds "without binaries" in his fiction. As such, *Wolfsong* seems to amplify the contradictions inherent to binary forms of identity classification in order to deconstruct them. Owens's authorial comments encouraged many students to explore the potential to transcend forced binary boundaries of culture and identity in their essays. As a result, many students responded to Owens by employing "binaries" as a point of entry, then attempting to deconstruct them to move beyond such simplistically divisive senses of identity, culture, and place.

In reflection, however, I cannot help but wonder if I should have actively said more about binary divisions in relation to identity and location. Should I have more specifically encouraged students to question the problems of claiming an "Indigenous" identity because of the necessary connections between identity and place? My own sense of being Cherokee and Jewish has always been constructed upon the premise of dislocation—that there is a place where I am supposed to belong, but someone else kicked me out. I intuitively felt that Owens was encouraging his readers to view the Northwest from the perspective of an Indigenous person in the process of being dislocated. But when I found myself standing in front of seventy undergraduates thinking about land, heritage, and identity, I stood back.

I took the safest path—I bypassed my personal experiences and zoned directly into the novel, hoping that students would somehow understand my own sense of history and identity through questions, paradoxes, and osmosis. I didn't want to speak out about being Native in discussing *Wolfsong* because in *this* place—in western Washington, in the Cascades and their surrounding valleys, rivers, and coasts, the place where the novel is set—I'm an immigrant, and that's the reality. I could not "un-dislocate" myself and speak about identity in *this* place with any sense of authority, so I didn't. At the same time, I understand why the protagonist in *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta*, penned by Cherokee writer John Rollin Ridge (Yellow Bird) in the 1850s, set in California and considered the "first Native novel," was not an Indian. Was Owens doing something similar?

Did Owens's use of masks, though clearly different from Rollin Ridge's, present a link to the masks in *Joaquin Murieta*, a tribally centered commentary on the last couple centuries? More importantly, should I have asked our students these questions, thus delineating my own preconceptions in the process?

I never directly told the students about the central assumption driving my initial reading of *Wolfsong*—that the novel was a south-east Indian story (colonization of the area by non-Native people that precipitated the assimilation, removal, or eradication of Native people) that had been transplanted from the hills of what is now the South and grafted upon the Cascades of northwest Washington. I was relieved to read Louis's response to a student question about whom the Joseph family is meant to represent:

What must it be like to be living where your ancestors had always lived but be dispossessed of your home? The Native parts of my own family were displaced long ago from Mississippi and North Carolina, and then again after that, but the family I based the Josephs upon still lived where their ancestors always had, but they were marginalized, poor on the edge of a white community with strong racist views.

Many thanks to Louis Owens for affirming my hunch that the consciousness of dislocation in *Wolfsong* is a composite of Owens's own tribal histories projected upon the realities of the contemporary North Cascades. *Wolfsong* is both a Choctaw/Cherokee story and a Salish story—its beauty, and indeed its potential problems, revolve around this construction, as this mutant composite of tribal memory and lived experience is a complex metaphor that demands critical response. However, while I made several implicit references to my reading of this consciousness during class, I never came fully out and expressed it to the students. Perhaps I should have. Perhaps they wanted me to. Perhaps I would have been more inclined to share this interpretation if the students were predominantly Indian rather than predominantly white—I hate to indulge in such a binary world, but the reality of this binary world pulls writers like Owens to reflect it and transcend it in their fiction. I would feel a greater need to vali-

date my analysis with personal reality if I were speaking to a mostly Indian audience, but with a mostly white audience I am more concerned about not saying something that will be misinterpreted, taken out of context, and twisted around to perpetuate more misunderstanding and misrepresentation.

I suppose that I could have both shared my personal/tribal analysis with our students and avoided the possibility of more misinterpretation if I were more direct with the students, lecturing and providing detailed notes about how my reading of the novel was shaped by my own experiences as an Indigenous mutt who lived in the Carolinas and Georgia for almost twenty years before emigrating to the Northwest. But, I didn't. Perhaps I wanted to avoid sounding like a solipsistic cultural anthropologist performing a self-diagnostic. Perhaps I wanted to avoid re-colonizing the novel by boxing its meaning with an overly authoritative analysis. Deep down, I know that my silence on these grounds developed from a genuine desire to unleash, rather than limit, our students' imaginations. Yet in reflection, I wonder if more personal confession on my part wouldn't have opened more avenues for the students' imaginations, expanding rather than limiting their potential range of responses by using my analysis as a starting point for their own reflections on the construction of an individual consciousness within group definitions of history, place, and identity.

This experience has certainly complicated my already paradoxical understanding of how to build healthy and respectful dynamics in a humanities classroom. There are fine lines between inspiration and misrepresentation, between opening discursive channels and re-colonizing the texts under discussion, between empowering students and disenfranchising the teachers (and vice versa, of course). As a result, I found this experience very uncomfortable at times, but I think that one needs discomfort in order to learn many important things. *Perhaps the trick is learning when to speak and when to let the stories speak for themselves.* My lack of previous experience in teaching Indigenous literatures in this context no doubt led me to keep quiet about how my own biography informed my underlying analysis of the book, but I am confident that I am now better equipped to strike this balance in the

future. Indeed, the fact that I have written this essay is evidence of this new confidence, and I hope that sharing my reflections with you is something that you can use in a positive way in your own lives.

### *Purdy's Debriefing*

I believe “widening the circle” was extremely useful, for both of us, of course, but most certainly for our students. Since we began the course with our stories—telling the students who we are and how we came to be teaching the course—the presentation and reception of stories/texts became a central issue. Nonetheless, the wide array of stories we read, told, and discussed, coupled with the project on *Wolfsong*, provided an added, unexpected benefit: It illustrated, personally, the ways we read stories. In other words, some of the texts from our anthology were read from the safe distance of a college classroom, a privileged space no matter how one looks at it. This is fine, but the discussion of these texts presented a dynamic very different from the one on the novel, because it is a text that “talked back,” and by doing so, I believe the later texts also oriented students differently than the previous ones.

Also, students and teachers enter stories in different ways and for different reasons, so how do we “exit” stories with some sense of shared understanding, while respecting each other’s sometimes conflicting readings? The formulation of the questions we submitted to Owens helped initiate this discussion, and his answers helped validate the potential for multiple points of interest and readings. In other words, Owens helped validate students’ willingness to take risks with radical or sometimes personal readings.

Finally, the exchange illustrated in compelling, personal ways that literature affects readers: the wonder of a work of art that can speak to multiple audiences and in increasing depth as we involve ourselves in discourse about and with it. It was a good lesson, and, once again, it significantly shaped our later readings and discussion. Without this experience, I do not believe those discussions would have achieved the depth and sophistication they did in such quick order.

Another way of saying all of this is that the exercise made “real-world” issues out of academic ones. It personalized the text and localized its concerns. This too contributed to the later portions of the course, further breaking down the boundary between text and reader, between reading and action. I believe the students felt empowered to experiment with varied readings and to voice them in the community of the class. Simply put, this is a good thing.

#### CONCLUSIONS

We hope that sharing the experiences and outcomes of our project here will prove to be useful for others who teach or plan to teach this book or others by Louis Owens. By way of conclusion, we offer suggestions for why a student-driven dialogue is worth attempting and why the creation of an online forum for similar projects is necessary as this new century unfolds. Indeed, we hope that the true value of this experience beyond the walls of our own classroom will come from our ability to share it with others.

Our *Wolfsong* project developed because it was possible for us to bring an author’s voice directly into the classroom when discussing a work of literature. There are, of course, many ways to bring an author’s voice into the classroom discussion without having a direct dialogue between the students and the writer. As teachers, we have access to published interviews, recorded readings, and video productions. However, while texts such as interviews are strong tools, the classroom dynamics of such interviews are substantially different if the questions come from an unknown “professional” interviewer rather than the students themselves.

Students feel more connected to an interview process if it is driven by them, and likewise they feel more investment when they respond to, interpret, or critique the ideas such an interview raises. Perhaps this shift in dynamics occurs because the group identity of “student” seems more immediate, more possible, and less abstract than that of “academic.” In our experience, students will respond differently to essays written by other students than they will to an essay published by a literary critic, for the common identity as student brings both connection

and competition. Indeed, the histories and hierarchies of higher education have conditioned us all to value scholarly questions or essays as more valid or comprehensive than those created by students.

Likewise, interview questions constructed by students may also seem less static or resolved, encouraging students thousands of miles away to assert more agency when responding critically to interviews such as the one at the center of this project. As such, we encourage our colleagues to use our project in their classrooms as a means of inviting their students to respond to ours and to share their students' reactions in an open forum, perhaps (if we may be so bold as to suggest) through an enhanced ASAIL Web site.

Ideally, all students in all classrooms should have access to such experiences, but we are also realists. We realize how fortunate we were to have this opportunity with Louis Owens, and we do not expect all our colleagues to have similar opportunities with every class. While we suggest that it is incumbent upon authors to attempt to respond to their readership, either directly or by supplying connections to interviews, we know that not all writers will respond to all curious teachers. However, if you have an opportunity for this kind of direct exchange between the students and writers, consider designing one of your courses around this dialogue and sharing your results with others afterward.

We appreciate the fact that *SAIL* has provided a forum for us to share our outcomes. Perhaps, our current technology demands that we push the possibilities further. By working in collaboration with many of you, we could begin to create a more permanent online forum for teachers to share the results of classroom collaborative reading projects with their faraway colleagues, and we hope this article provides the foundation of such a forum.

#### NOTES

This article is dedicated to Louis Owens (1948–2002), who enriched so many lives with his writing and scholarship and with his unswerving dedication to his students. Our dialogue with Owens occurred in the spring of 2001. Since his death in 2002, many new texts have paid homage to Owens, acknowledg-

ing his importance as a storyteller and educator. We hope that this article will respectfully portray the degree of dedication that he brought to the field. His generous and insightful participation provided a unique catalyst in shaping our discussions. We hope that writers, students, scholars, and other interested people will find this project inspiring.

1. In recent years, publishers have also recognized the Internet as a valuable marketing tool and frequently their Web sites can provide extensive resources that are easily accessible.

2. We used the anthology *Nothing But the Truth* as the source for all assigned readings, except for *Wolfsong*.

3. Hausman is relatively new to the effort, and Purdy has taught courses such as this for over twenty-five years and has developed a Native American studies program for the university where the class was offered.

4. Gold was, of course, not “discovered” in Georgia in 1828. The name of the northern Georgia town that was the nexus of the “Georgia Gold Rush” is Dahlonega, the Cherokee word for yellow. Cherokees had known about the gold for a long time. Even then, white Georgians were not the first Caucasians to see Georgia gold, as Hernando de Soto’s 1540 expedition traveled through Dahlonega as well.

5. Though Owens’s references to Robert Johnson in *Wolfsong* are implied rather than overt, these implications open possible connections to Sherman Alexie’s first novel, *Reservation Blues*, a story whose plot is set spinning once Robert Johnson unexpectedly appears, guitar in hand, on the Spokane Reservation. As the book’s opening line states, “In the one hundred and eleven years since the creation of the Spokane Indian Reservation in 1881, not one person, Indian or otherwise, had ever arrived there by accident.”

6. In his critical work *Other Destinies*, Owens writes:

Following *The Surrounded*, however, American Indian authors would almost invariably create protagonists who are poised, like Archilde, at the dividing point. And, like the author of *The Surrounded*, they would send their characters—in nearly every case a mixedblood—down the Indian road and away from the American dream. (77–78)

7. Like Hamlet, Tom Joseph’s unintentional killing of an not-so-innocent bystander (Jake Tobin) undermines his efforts by officially isolating him from the community.

8. See Purdy, “Clear Waters.”

9. See Bevis’s study of the literary convention, “Native American Novels: Homing In.”

10. One might note, here, the fact that as Owens worked on the final drafts of this novel, he was also at work on his fine book on Native fiction, *Other Destinies*, which includes chapters on McNickle and Momaday, et al.

11. This character resonates with the character of Shadrack in Toni Morrison's wonderful novel *Sula* but also with John "Big Bluff" Tosamah in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*.

In fact, Crazy John's sign resonates with other novels as well: "Tractors die and rust forever. Jesus died so you may live forever" (21). Aside from the suggestion of a Christian fundamentalism endemic to small, rural, western communities, it also echoes both Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden* and a visit Archilde makes to the camp of his Uncle Modeste in McNickle's novel.

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# From Trickster Poetics to Transgressive Politics

Substantiating Survivance in Tomson Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen*

SAM MCKEGNEY

Our poets . . . are the only ones today who can provide this bridge, this reflective statement of what it means and has meant to live in a present which is continually overwhelmed by the fantasies of others of the meaning of past events.

Vine Deloria Jr., *New and Old Voices of Wah'Kon-Tah*

And today, we are talking about the imagination of tribal stories, and the power of tribal stories to heal. Stories that enlighten and relieve and relive. Stories that create as they're being told. And stories that overturn the burdens of our human existence.

Gerald Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse"

From 1879 to 1986 the Canadian government removed Indigenous children from their homes and communities and placed them in residential schools run by the Christian churches in an effort to, in the words of inaugural Prime Minister John A. MacDonald, "do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are fit for the change" (qtd. in Ennamorato 72). Like American boarding schools, Canadian residential schools acted as a weapon in a calculated attack on Indigenous cultures, seeking through such now infamous procedures as familial separation, forced speaking of non-Native languages, and propagandist derogation of pre-contact modes of

existence and Native spiritual systems to compel its inmates into assimilation. The results of this onslaught are now widely documented: Native children divorced from their traditional cultures while at the same time refused entry into prosperous white Canada through inferior educational practices and racism, institutionalized to occupy a liminal space characterized by disillusion, identity crisis, and despair. The legacy of the residential school system ripples throughout Native Canada, its fingerprints on the domestic violence, poverty, alcoholism, drug abuse, and suicide rates that continue to cripple many Native communities.<sup>1</sup>

In dealing with this history, narratives by residential school survivors have generally been perceived as performing two political functions: The first involves the creation of healthier communities through the cathartic re-visitation of past trauma by individual victims. According to this line of thinking, the extended critical rumination required to render residential school experience in narrative form allows the writer to purge emotional baggage associated with childhood trauma and achieve some form of closure and healing, which ultimately spills back upon the political unit of the community in the form of a healthier and more potentially productive individual. The second involves the production of testimonial evidence that forms the precondition for litigation against individual abusers and administrative overseers. Survivor testimony underlies the thousands of residential school lawsuits currently before the courts. It also forms the backbone of nearly all recent critical challenges to the Canadian government regarding its role in residential schooling.<sup>2</sup> This article examines the capacity for a text that departs significantly from both standard avenues for political effect, Cree writer Tomson Highway's 1998 *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, to nonetheless perform a significant and identifiable political function in relation to the residential school legacy.

Initially written as an autobiography, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* went through incarnations as a stage play, a made-for-TV movie, and an estimated eight-hundred-page epic before being published as a novel less than half that size.<sup>3</sup> Although the writing may have performed various psychologically and spiritually redemptive tasks for its au-

thor, the ultimate textual product—subject to editorial intervention, alterations in genre, and processes of material manufacture—can evidence those tasks solely through implication. Furthermore, although built from the raw materials of its author's life, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* explicitly distances itself from survivor testimony, stating in its acknowledgements, “This book, of course, is a novel—all the characters and what happens to them are fictitious” (v). The central questions for this article are, therefore, How can a novel that intentionally diverges from the testimonial paradigm, and as such cannot aid in the acquisition of retribution and restitution within the existing legal framework, generate emancipatory and empowering political effects beyond the individual healing of its author? And how can these effects be understood and discussed in non-hypothetical terms?

One possible strategy for exploring these questions emerges from the critical work of Anishnaabe writer Gerald Vizenor. In his 1994 treatise *Manifest Manners* and elsewhere, Vizenor develops the concept of “survance,” which he applies to Indigenous literary works that battle the dominance of colonially imposed simulations and unsettle comfortable power relations by creatively reimagining Indigenous culture and identity in the contemporary moment. Conceptualizing the battle over identity within a discursive realm dominated by Baudrillardian simulation, Vizenor divides narrative acts between those forged in the interest of ongoing domination of Indigenous peoples by Euro–North America, what he calls “manifest manners,” and those forged in the interest of Indigenous cultural integrity and survival, what he calls “survance.” In a world contaminated by the duplicitous tales of foreign parties about colonial history, and even about Native identity, it becomes essential for what Vizenor calls the “postindian warrior” to creatively re-vision her or his reality.<sup>4</sup> By controlling the self-image and imaginatively reinventing viable ways of being Native through narrative, postindian warriors defy the impositions of the dominant culture and, most importantly, define their identities for themselves: “touch” themselves “into being with words” (qtd. in Coltelli 160).

In Vizenorian terms, Highway's departure from a testimonial paradigm can thus be construed as politically charged in its staunch

refusal to emulate what Vizenor calls “the surveillance of the social sciences” (*Manifest* 77) and its actualization of narrative agency. Highway refuses in the novel to be constrained by a fact-based historiographic relationship to residential school experience; his writing acquiesces neither to the colonial storyline of inevitable assimilation crafted through residential school institutionalization nor the postcolonial storyline of inevitable victimhood crafted through revisionist history—both examples of Vizenor’s “manifest manners.” In this way, Highway’s narrative posture in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* embodies the principles of Vizenor’s “survivance.” Yet, what remain difficult to articulate with any sense of accuracy using Vizenor’s critical methodology are the political effects initiated by Highway’s artistic departure. The language of postmodern simulation in which Vizenor renders his theory tends to frustrate critical attempts to clarify the relationship between literature and life, between the simulations embedded in literary creations and actual lived experience within an extra-textual reality. In fact, given Vizenor’s contention that “there isn’t any center to the world but a story” (qtd. in Coltelli 156), it appears difficult to articulate a distinction between the lived and the literary at all.<sup>5</sup>

Certain critics, however, have identified in Vizenor’s work a keen, although covert, recognition of the boundaries between the real and the simulated. Barry E. Laga, for example, notes in his review of *Manifest Manners* that Vizenor’s work presupposes a “tribal real” by analyzing how it “has been replaced, misconstrued, and superseded by simulations of the unreal” (119). Similarly, Colin Samson argues that Vizenor’s “sympathy is always with the active and dynamic real, rather than the simulation, the sense of a native presence, rather than the markers of its absence” (55). Samson views Vizenor as distinguishing between static conceptions of “the real” simulated in the service of domination and the flexible and fluid reality of daily existence for Native people. “The real as an ‘it’ is a simulation,” he claims. “What is labelled as ‘real,’ what is concluded to be ‘fact,’ what is produced as the trump card over all other forms of making sense of the world, simulates the real experience of people” (60). Thus, according to Samson, it is the attempt to “fix” reality through language—to

identify it as a *thing*—that impairs our understanding of “real experience.” When ongoing experience is arrested as a noun it becomes, in Samson’s reading of Vizenor, a simulation. But this begs the question, How then do we speak of the “tribal real”? If conducting our analysis through the imperfect vehicle of language dooms us to, at best, perpetually misrepresenting and, at worst, perversely simulating “the real,” how can we adeptly address political problems affecting “the real experience[s]” of Native North Americans?

In “Trickster Discourse” Vizenor speaks of “the imagination of tribal stories, and the power of tribal stories to heal. Stories that enlighten and relieve and relive. Stories that create as they’re being told. And stories that overturn the burdens of our human existence” (68). Unless we are willing to explicate the course of survivance, to show what stories “create” through their telling, to trace the genealogies of “enlighten[ing]” and of “heal[ing],” and to interrogate the process through which “human existence” is unburdened, we, as critics, risk imprisoning survivance in parentheses, painting it as hypothetical through speculation. To take survivance seriously, critics must be willing to intercede in the semiotic fog of Beaudrillardian simulation and make explicit the connections between the hyper-reality of text and the political and social reality of Indigenous North America. Far from destabilizing the notion that published literature and narrative in general can alter the world, this position seeks to affirm the political nature of literature by refusing to take it as a given; it calls upon the critic to legitimate her or his reading of a particular text as political and to trace out in meaningful ways the implications of such a classification. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* enacts a significant imaginative intervention into a discursive environment dominated by simulations designed to “fix” residential school experiences in the realm of an historical discourse which maintains non-Native authority. It is, as such, a narrative of survivance. However, I will strain at what I perceive to be the limitations of Vizenorian diction in an effort to analyze and account for the tangible effects Highway’s novel has had on, and augurs for, Native individuals and communities struggling against the adverse legacy of over a century of residential schooling in Canada.

The existing body of public discourse on the residential school legacy—what I will call “legacy discourse”—has, for the most part, argued toward a small number of specific strategies for dealing with residential schooling’s adverse effects. Largely dominated by government and church interests, yet occasionally penetrated by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal criticisms, legacy discourse has generally sought partial solutions to residential schooling’s aftermath that limit the government’s and the churches’ pecuniary responsibility. As is widely recognized, the residential school issue only entered the domain of contestable public knowledge after Aboriginal disclosure in the 1980s of sexual abuse suffered at the hands of staff and administrators. Reacting to the displacement of the residential school issue from obscure academic and political spheres into the public arena, the federal government initially sought to maintain discursive focus on these specific instances of abuse, which, in effect, preempted systemic analysis of how the conditions of residential schools not only fostered the likelihood of such abuse but were abusive themselves. Emerging in the early 1990s, a second tactic for strategic evasion involved isolating public attention on a discourse of healing that situated Aboriginal people, in whom the problems of residential school would be supposedly manifest, as the primary objects of study rather than the system of acculturative violence itself. John Milloy has termed this a “focus on the ‘now’ of the problem: Aboriginal people [are] now ‘sick,’ not savage, in need of psychological, rather than theological, salvation” (302). By the late 1990s these specific tactics of evasion gave way, in the face of overwhelming dissent by Native and non-Native critics and activists and a changing political landscape ushered in by Oka and Meech Lake, to a strategic recognition of qualified culpability and a call for the historicization of the residential school system.<sup>6</sup> Offering an official apology in 1998, over half a decade after the initial apologies of the churches, the government began funding historical studies and testimonials designed to detail the “truth” of residential school history. The government’s current position thus emphasizes the connection between historical residential schooling and negative conditions among contemporary First Nations people. However, at the same time, it presumes a disjuncture

between an historical Canadian government responsible, in part, for residential school transgressions and the current government purportedly committed to dealing with their effects.

Legacy discourse has been dominated by successive simulations of what Vizenor would call “manifest manners,” from notions of anomalous abuse to the reification of the healing industry to obligatory historicization. Each of these has endeavored to delimit discussion of the residential school legacy while fixing Indigenous experiences in either the simulated past of recorded history or the simulated present of calculable neuroses. The political effectiveness of Highway’s novel in this respect resides not in its provision of support and evidence for existing avenues of compensation within legacy discourse, as might be provided by a testimonial account, but in its criticism and reimagining of current legacy discourse itself. Taking into account Kanien’kehaka scholar Taiaiake Alfred’s arguments that “the idea that indigenous peoples can find justice within the colonial legal framework” is a “myth” (83) and that “attempting to decolonize without addressing the structural imperatives of the colonial system is clearly futile” (70), *Kiss of the Fur Queen* can be read as an experiment in transforming legacy discourse, rather than in working within its existing parameters. In a Vizenorian reading, Highway’s novel overturns the burdens of externally imposed paradigms for understanding and dealing with the adverse effects of residential schooling, imaginatively articulating for both the author and his readership alternative paths of redress and empowerment. Although the novel is readily aligned with what might be termed a liberal body of texts whose transgressive potential is recuperated into mainstream thought by hopeful messages of possibility for those willing to strive against the odds—after all, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* narrates the story of two Cree brothers who triumph over their traumatic past through hard work, dedication, and spiritual reflection—Highway, in fact, employs a radical politics predicated on a complete reconfiguration of ideology.<sup>7</sup> By attacking the ideological and systemic underpinnings of the discourse that has framed and is framing governmental and some tribal response to the social, political, economic, and spiritual consequences of residential schooling, Highway

presents alternatives to current compensation strategies that seek not only economic and legal restitution but also the reinvigoration of modes of thought, spirituality, and being with the world that residential schooling sought to extinguish.

*Kiss of the Fur Queen* is a spiritually charged narrative. It employs tribal-specific spiritual knowledge both symbolically and causally throughout. However, its protagonists know very little about their cultural heritage until their later years when they begin to actively incorporate Cree spirituality in their art. As such, Highway's semi-omniscient narrator performs the role of spiritual translator for the majority of the text, while his protagonists learn, as the story goes on, to perform this task for themselves. Thus, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* not only argues for the application of Cree spirituality and orature to contemporary engagements with the residential school legacy; it also embodies this application in the texture of its narrative. It is an example of the spiritualization of contemporary discourse in practice, providing a prototype for the process it explicitly champions. This process becomes all the more fertile to the informed reader who recognizes the text itself as evidence of a similar process on the part of its author.

Contrary to some critical assumptions, however, for Highway this does not simply mean mining "a solid upbringing in the Cree tradition" (Methot 12). Despite the exoticism and air of authentication (presumably for non-Native audiences) within such biographical excerpts as the introduction to *The Rez Sisters*—which cites the author's birth "in a tent . . . in the middle of a snowbank . . . not 10 feet from the dog-sled in which [his family] travelled in those days" and his "exquisitely beautiful nomadic [youth] among the lakes and forests of remote northwestern Manitoba," during which "Cree was the only language spoken" (vi–vii)—Highway's early life was far from untouched by colonialism. As Highway acknowledges, "there was a great deal of poverty and, yes, awful things happened on [his] reserve" including the deaths of "six of [his] brothers and sisters . . . before [he] was born" (Preston, *Tomson Highway* 7). Furthermore, Highway was raised in a Christian home, "only learning about Cree mythology in bits and pieces" (Preston, *Tomson Highway* 46). Not

until his “early twenties, as he extricated himself from white, institutionalized education and began working with Native organizations, [did] he bec[o]me more interested in Native mythology” (Preston, *Tomson Highway* 46). As a result, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is not so much about accessing a personal truth placed under erasure by the forces of evangelical Christianity as it is about interrogating the ideological underpinnings of those very forces, searching for alternatives among more culturally relevant sources and determining for oneself the most endurable and empowering position from which to speak, think, and act.

*Kiss of the Fur Queen* relates the story of Champion and Ooneemtoo Okimasis, Cree brothers torn from the loving comfort of their nomadic family life in the far north of Manitoba by obligatory residential schooling in the south, where they are renamed Jeremiah and Gabriel respectively. Coming of age in urban centers hundreds of miles from their parents and the physical geography of their infancy, the two must develop creative strategies to overcome their cultural alienation and the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual aftermath of abuse incurred at Birch Lake Residential School. Based loosely on the events of Highway’s life and that of his younger brother René, who died of an AIDS-related illness in October 1990, shortly before Tomson began writing the book, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is very much an elegy. Both Jeremiah and Gabriel, like the Highway brothers, take to artistic expression—the former through piano and writing and the latter through dance—initially as a coping mechanism for past trauma and eventually as a means of combating the forces of oppression that have infected not only their own lives but those of thousands of Natives whom they endeavor to influence.

The novel’s central crisis, which will indelibly inscribe itself into the lives of both protagonists, involves the rape of Gabriel by the principal of Birch Lake, Father Lafleur. This horrible act of abuse is told from the perspectives of both brothers: the younger sibling struggling to comprehend the pain and pleasure of an experience for which he has no frame of reference; the older futilely grasping for means to reconcile his inability to save the little brother he had sworn to protect.<sup>8</sup> Even at this crucial point Highway is careful to avoid any

pretence of objective reportage. The scene, which commences with Gabriel “furiously engaged” in a dream about square-dancing, troubles the division between lived experience and (anti-historical) subconscious interference when Father Lafleur’s stroking of the sleeping boy’s penis begins to influence the reverie:

The *undisputed fact* was that Gabriel Okimasis’s little body was moving up and down, up and down, producing, in the crux of his being, a sensation so pleasurable that he wanted [his dance partner] to float up and up forever so he could keep jumping up . . . and pulling her back down.” (77, my emphasis)

Highway explicitly identifies as “fact” that which cannot be corroborated due to its occurrence within a state of altered consciousness, suggesting the inadequacy of “fact”—or as Vizenor would say, social scientific notions of the historical real—as the primary criterion for understanding experience.

Similarly, happening upon the priest’s erotic assault in medias res, Jeremiah struggles against his sleep-addled young consciousness to comprehend what he is seeing:

He blinked, opened his eyes as wide as they would go. He wanted—needed—to see more clearly.

The bedspread was pulsating, rippling from the centre. No, Jeremiah wailed to himself, *please*. Not him again. . . .

Jeremiah opened his mouth and moved his tongue, but his throat went dry. No sound came except a ringing in his ears. Had this really happened before? Or had it not? But some chamber deep inside his mind slammed permanently shut. It had happened to nobody. He had not seen what he was seeing. (79–80)

Even as Jeremiah overcomes the incapacity of his clouded vision in the darkened dormitory to determine it “*was him. Again*” (79), Highway undermines the authority of the statement by having the boy immediately repress his experience. The “permanent[ly] shut[ting]” of the chamber in Jeremiah’s mind illustrates the difficulty, perhaps impossibility, of determining with any precision the nature of child-

hood trauma. Neither brother is shown to be in a position to indisputably detail Father Lafleur's assault on Gabriel; yet the audience is never left with any doubt that the abuse has occurred, which cuts to the heart of *Kiss of the Fur Queen's* implicit critique of standard historicizing tactics for the residential school legacy. When bound by Euro-Canadian legal definitions of "truth" and "fact," contingent on the improbable attainment of "evidence," the crucial cognitive endeavor of revisiting residential school trauma is limited in its capacity to influence people's understandings of the broader causes and implications of residential school transgressions. For this reason, Highway presents the novel's most crucial incident of abuse as factually uncertain, yet with enormous symbolic and evocative force.

Careful to avoid isolating Gabriel's abuse as the anomalous act of a sadistic individual, Highway implicates a system of thought, on whose behalf the cleric functions, in the transgression:

His face glowing in the moonlight with the intense whiteness of the saints in the catechism book. . . .

Father Lafleur bent, closer and closer, until the crucifix that dangled from his neck came to rest on Gabriel's face. The subtly throbbing motion of the priest's upper body made the naked Jesus Christ—this sliver of silver light, this fleshly Son of God so achingly beautiful—rub his body against the child's lips, over and over and over again. Gabriel had no strength left. The pleasure in his centre welled so deep that he was about to open his mouth and swallow whole the living flesh—in his half-dream state, this man nailed to the cross was a living, breathing man. (78)

In a gross parody of communion, the central symbol of Christian theology assaults Gabriel's lips in the very moment that Father Lafleur's apelike hands assault his genitalia. Although wielded by the cleric—God's instrument on Earth—the power inflicted on Gabriel belongs to the "living, breathing" Christ, who actively "rub[s] his body against the child's lips," demanding entry. In an almost clichéd illustration of the symbolic rape of Indigenous cultures by evangeli-

cal Christianity, Christ endeavors to force himself into the sanctified space of the boy's mouth, presumably preparing him to pay lip-service to the "true" religion while renouncing the legitimacy of Cree spirituality. The aspects of Christianity Gabriel internalizes, however, are quite different from those adopted by the boy's proselytized parents and are directly related to the instrument of torture dangling at his lips. While aggressively averse to many of the Bible's central teachings, Gabriel cannot escape the masochistic predilection for eroticized pain that the ever-suffering Christ, tortured and penetrated, symbolizes. Examining the implications not only of sexual abuse but of sexual abuse within a propagandist evangelical environment devoted to indoctrinating victims with the "truth" of their inherent sinfulness, Highway illustrates how Gabriel learns to seek out sensual punishment in a form of bodily abnegation for which there is no noncorporeal plane. Although he recognizes that Catholicism asks him "to apologize for something beyond [his] control," Gabriel concludes that it is indeed his "most grievous fault" (81): "*Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*" (80). He also comes to accept and crave his punishment.

In contrast to the Christian symbolism implicated in Gabriel's experience of the rape, Jeremiah's perception of the act is configured in Cree spiritual terms. Upon leaving his bed to check on his brother, Jeremiah noticed:

Gabriel was not alone. A dark, hulking figure hovered over him, like a crow. Visible only in silhouette, for all Jeremiah knew it might have been a bear devouring a honey-comb, or the Weetigo feasting on human flesh.

As he stood half-asleep, he thought he could hear the smacking of lips, mastication.

... When the beast reared its head, it came face to face, not four feet away, with that of Jeremiah Okimasis. The whites of the beast's eyes grew large, blinked once. Jeremiah stared. It *was* him. Again. (79)

Given Jeremiah's tenuous connection to Cree spirituality at this point in the story, his vague identification of Father Lafleur as the

Weetigo—"it might have been"—is unsurprising. In Cree theology the Weetigo is the most terrifying of creatures; referred to by some as a cannibalistic human, by others as a monster or spirit, the Weetigo's defining characteristic is its consumption of human flesh, which renders it an appropriate symbolic tool for interrogating transgressions of the body by a Roman Catholic priest, particularly in light of the Eucharist. However, Jeremiah is not yet well enough armed with Cree spiritual knowledge to draw out the significance of this association. In fact, Highway's strategic wording of the passage makes it unclear whether the association is Jeremiah's or the narrator's. The "for all Jeremiah knew" could stand as a narrative conjecture unrelated to the character's actual imaginings, simply an expression for the incomprehensibility of the scene. Such uncertainty renders the Weetigo's introduction to the novel evocative rather than conclusive, a signpost whose symbolic fertility awaits further interrogation.

Emerging from the assimilative grasp of residential school, the Okimasis brothers find themselves in Winnipeg, two of "only three Indians in a school filled with two thousand white middle-class kids" (149). Straining against cultural alienation's attendant despair, the brothers for the first time actively revisit the oral archive of their Cree heritage. Jeremiah and Gabriel take turns piecing together their Aunt Black-Eyed Susan's censored tale about the Weetigo and the Weasel. The boys' reminiscence begins with a question—"Remember [the] story . . . about the weasel's new fur coat?" (118)—and then carries on largely in the inquisitive: "You mean where [the trickster figure] Weesageechak comes down to Earth disguised as a weasel . . . [and] crawls up the Weetigo's bumhole?" (118). According to the tale, after chewing up the Weetigo's entrails, thereby killing the monster, Weesageechak escapes covered in feces. "Feeling sorry for the hapless trickster," continues Jeremiah, "God dipped him in the river to clean his coat. But he held him by the tail, so its tip stayed dirty" (121), and, as Gabriel concludes, "to this day, . . . the weasel's coat is white but for the black tip of the tail" (121).

Highway expertly weaves the telling of this traditional Cree tale with the brothers' inaugural shopping venture in Winnipeg, as they plunge into the city's mecca of consumerism, identified as "the en-

trails of the beast” (116), to acquire the accoutrements that will mask newly arrived Gabriel’s Native otherness. In this metaphorical equation, the brothers become trickster figures while the mall becomes the Weetigo, complicating the earlier connection between the Weetigo and Christianity to suggest the implication of capitalist economics in the cultural rape of Indigenous people in Canada. Like Weesageechak, the brothers feast in what Highway identifies as “the belly of the beast” (119)—the mall’s food court—where they eat so much, “their bellies c[o]me near to bursting” (120). Then when they finally depart, “exulting” that they have recalled a “wicked . . . Cree legend[,],” “grey and soulless, the mall loom[s] behind them, the rear end of a beast that, having gorged itself, expels its detritus” (121).

Clearly the boys’ shopping adventure is meant to reenact the journey of Weesageechak to the Weetigo’s belly and back; however, significant tensions between the two tales persist. If we take the association of both Father Lafleur and the Polo Park Mall with the Weetigo to suggest a conspiracy between Christianity and capitalism in the assault on Native cultural identity, then the brothers’ excursion to the belly of the beast becomes somewhat different than that of the trickster. The boys don’t enter the mall to destroy it but rather to implicate themselves in its processes. They go there to become more Euro-Canadian. The white weasel with a black tip of the tail thus becomes, in Highway’s contemporary telling, the two Cree brothers covered by white cultural costumes, with only the darkness of their faces remaining unmasked. And whereas Weesageechak extricates itself from the dead body of the Weetigo, the Okimasis brothers are, in effect, shit out by the beast—still very much alive, although soulless—whose characteristics now taint their Cree bodies.

Oblivious to the ironies behind their retreat to traditional orature at this particular moment, Jeremiah and Gabriel are not yet prepared to interpret Cree myth in relation to their own lives. Here the tale functions for the brothers as simple comic relief, while it is the narrator who makes the metaphorical associations that become evident to the reader. The brothers cannot even determine with any confidence the tale’s meaning. When asked about the purpose behind Weesageechak’s murder of the monster, Jeremiah replies, “*All I remember* is that the

Weetigo had to be killed because he ate people. . . . Weesageechak chewed the Weetigo's entrails to smithereens from the inside out" (120, my emphasis). Unwittingly mistaking living orature for dogma, Jeremiah fixates on recovering what he considers an authoritative past telling of the tale rather than expending interpretive energy on extrapolating the tale's significance. Seduced by an historical impulse toward *fact* rather than an imaginative impulse toward creative interaction, Jeremiah remains subject to the simulations of dominance to which he was subjected in residential school. He glosses over the spiritually significant "whys" of the tale to focus on plot details. He and Gabriel, in effect, emulate in their retelling the mindless regurgitation of doctrine required of them at Birch Lake, where they were made to parrot Latin and English phrases while not yet understanding either language.<sup>9</sup> So long as the Okimasis brothers' relationship with Cree orature and spirituality is mediated by the structural imperatives of Roman Catholicism, its relevance to their lives is obscured and its capacity to aid in their healing hindered; they remain mired in the externally imposed ideological systems that have worked historically toward their acculturation and oppression.

The Cree tale forming the novel's spiritual backdrop is significantly withheld from the reader until over two-thirds of the way through *Kiss of the Fur Queen*, after Jeremiah has abandoned his dream of becoming a concert pianist and must renegotiate his place in the world. The "Son of Ayash" myth is introduced to the Okimasis brothers by their father on his deathbed: "My son. . . . The world has become too evil. With these magic weapons, make a new world,' said the mother of the hero, the Son of Ayash. . . . So the Son of Ayash took the weapons and, on a magic water snake, journeyed down into the realm of the human soul, where he met . . . . Evil after evil . . . the most fearsome among them the man who ate human flesh" (227).<sup>10</sup> Unlike the earlier tale concerning the Weetigo and the Weasel, Abraham Okimasis's sparse performance of the "Son of Ayash" is difficult to treat as axiomatic for two reasons. Firstly, the brevity of the father's telling, urged along by his impending death, belies the complexity and length of other recorded versions of the tale. Secondly, the profoundly Christian Okimasis patriarch's oral narrative takes place during his final absolution by a Roman Catholic

priest, just seconds before he accepts the host a final time. Regardless of mediation by a Christian man, however, the tribal materials found within the tale remain enormously important to the young Cree audience. The juxtaposition of the Christian and the Indigenous, evident in Abraham's "Cree descant whirring, light as foam, over the [priest's] English dirge" (227), indicates not the inauthenticity of the myth's articulation but rather the essential place of the listener in providing the context and interpretive discourse to render productive the oral materials offered. To make the Son of Ayash myth functional in his own life, Jeremiah must analyze it energetically and thoughtfully, adapting it to his contemporary moment, and retelling it in his own voice and words.

In his 1989 *âaâhkiwina and âimôwina: Traditional Narratives of the Rock Cree Indians*, ethnographer Robert Brightman provides a more detailed version of the Son of Ayash myth, narrated and translated by Cree elder Caroline Dumas.<sup>11</sup> Like all published versions of the myth, Dumas's begins with the hero's abandonment on an island by a male relative (in Dumas's version, his grandfather, in others, his father or stepfather) and chronicles his journey through many ordeals to return to his mother and remake the wounded world. In Dumas's version, the Son of Ayash (here simply Ayas) is confronted by a benevolent giant serpent who assumes the role of grandmother and assists him in escaping the island. While crossing the water on the serpent's back, however, Ayas reneges on his promise to warn her of impending thunder out of fear she may submerge causing him to drown, and the serpent is blown apart by lightning the moment Ayas reaches the shore. Awaking the following morning, Ayas goes "down to the shore . . . and scoop[s] up the [serpent's] blood with . . . two baskets he had made" (106) and places them in a tree so that the serpent can regenerate herself. Pleased with Ayas's willingness to save her, the grandmother serpent forgives his earlier indiscretion and imparts to him the knowledge that will guide him through his many trials en route to his mother—these are the "magic weapons" from Abraham's telling. According to Brightman, "All versions culminate in Ayas's reunion with his mistreated mother and his destruction of the earth by fire" (112). In Dumas's version the mother has been repeatedly burned on the face and hands by the grandfather and his wife, who are ultimately de-

stroyed when Ayas shoots his “arrow up in the air . . . [and] fire spr[ings] up and burn[s] all over the earth” (110–11).

The hero’s initial abandonment on the island clearly resonates with the Okimasis brothers’ imposed exile at Birch Lake Residential School and their separation from what Highway has often referred to as an essentially female Cree spiritual system represented by the absent mother. Like the relinquishment of the boys, which occurs in acquiescence to the will of “Father Bouchard” and “*Soonie-eye-gimow*” (the Cree term for Indian Agent), the exile of Ayas takes place because the grandfather figure believes his “spirit guardian” (Brightman 105) requires the boy as a sacrifice. Highway picks up on this fundamental violation of parental bonds by naming the Okimasis patriarch after the biblical Abraham. On the island, however, the hero receives the tools that will enable him to conquer the evils he faces and return home to his mother, which in the context of the Okimasis brothers’ experiences alludes to the acquisition of valuable skills even in the context of institutionalized abuse.

Significantly, however, the “magic weapons” provided the hero in the Ayas myth are not solely produced by the location of exile but are mediated by the instructive influence of the “*ohkoma*,” or serpent grandmother, suggesting the importance of traditional knowledge in rendering those weapons functional and empowering. It is not until the Okimasis brothers apply their respective skills for dance and music to a creative examination of Cree spirituality that they achieve purgative release and provoke the self-exploration among their audience required to potentially alter structures of power. By collaborating and combining Gabriel’s talent for the European art form of ballet and Jeremiah’s talent for classical piano in a modern dance performance based on extrapolated Cree teachings, the brothers are able to creatively interact with their own spiritualities and with a body of Cree spiritual knowledge in a manner distinct from the religious regimentation of the residential school. Looking out over the crowd at the close of their initial performance,

Gabriel knew that his magic had worked, for the audience was speaking to some space inside themselves, some void that

needed filling, some depthless sky; and this sky was responding. Through the brothers, as one, and through a chamber as vast as the north, an old man's voice passed. "My son," it sighed, with these magic weapons, make a new world." (267)

Employing their talents for distinctly European art forms in the exploration of an entirely different cultural heritage with entirely different ideological foundations, the brothers lose the structural limitations with which those activities had been imbued and create a space for introspection, something they had been unable to accomplish in their initial introduction to the Son of Ayash myth. Listening to their father's tale through the ideological lens created by a Roman Catholic residential school upbringing, the brothers immediately recognized the apocalyptic implications of the Son of Ayash's destruction of the world by fire. In fact, they "heard" and "remember," spliced into the center of their father's tale, the priest's reading: "That my Avenger liveth, and he, at the Last, will take his stand upon the Earth" (227). Situating the Son of Ayash myth within a Christian framework of divine punishment for sin, this reading suggests the Son of Ayash's "destruction of the earth by fire" to be the righteous vengeance of a wrathful supreme power rather than, as Abraham would have it and as the brothers ultimately explore in their theatrical work, the creation through art of "a new world." By initially failing to break out of the ideological system imposed upon them, the brothers are unable to access the empowering capacity of traditional Cree thought. By first interpreting the world according to simulations of dominance, the brothers endanger their struggle against the adverse aftermath of childhood trauma. To better elucidate the perils of this position, I will briefly depart from *Kiss of the Fur Queen* to analyze a character from Highway's 1989 play *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* who paradigmatically fails to break free of an unhealthy non-Native ideological framework and, as such, serves as a warning of what the Okimasis brothers are in danger of becoming.

Among the most complicated and conflicted characters in Highway's theatrical oeuvre is ex-activist turned hockey arena manager Big Joey McLeod, whose enormous capacity for violence against

women significantly influenced the debate in the *Toronto Globe and Mail* during April 1991 over whether *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing* is an “unambiguous examination/explanation of misogyny” (Scott C1) or is a “play studded with misogyny” (Fraser C1). What is intriguing about Big Joey’s characterization is the extent to which, despite his years as an Indigenous rights activist and his purported desire to “work for the betterment and the advancement of [his] community” (22), he has internalized destructive aspects of Euro-Canadian ideology.<sup>12</sup>

The communal trauma forming the psychological backdrop of the play involves the drunken birth of Dickie Bird Halked in a bar seventeen years prior to the play’s action, leaving the child, who is related in one way or another to all the play’s male characters, mute through fetal alcohol syndrome. Big Joey is particularly culpable for the boy’s condition because, as it turns out, he is the boy’s biological father and had fled the scene of the birth. To explain this and other reprehensible behavior near the play’s conclusion, Big Joey divulges:

That was me. Wounded Knee, South Dakota, Spring of ’73. The FBI. They beat us to the ground. Again and again and again. Ever since that spring, I’ve had these dreams where blood is spillin’ out from my groin, nothin’ there but blood and emptiness. It’s like . . . I lost myself. So when I saw this baby comin’ out of Caroline, Black Lady [Dickie Bird’s mother] . . . Gazelle dancin’ . . . all this blood . . . and I knew it was gonna come . . . I . . . I tried to stop it . . . I freaked out. I don’t know what I did . . . and I knew it was mine. (119–20)

Entangled in his quasi-cathartic admission of guilt are the various strands of institutional oppression through the FBI in 1973, paralyzing fear of impotence, and disgust over the sight of womanly blood. The knot nudges both audience and character in the direction of understanding Big Joey’s misogyny but not in a prescriptive way. Big Joey’s memory of the ill-fated standoff at Wounded Knee functionally dismantles any illusions of achieving Indigenous independence by overpowering the forces of colonial governments. The resulting powerlessness Big Joey experiences manifests in a recurring dream of

“blood . . . spillin’ out from [his] groin,” which, as the addendum “nothin’ there but blood and emptiness” implies, Big Joey interprets as an indication of his own impotence.

Big Joey’s projection of the source of this powerlessness onto women through such statements as “I hate them! I hate them fuckin’ bitches. Because they—our own women—took the power away” (120) reflects not only a masculinist (mis)understanding of the phallus as power’s source but also a profound misinterpretation of the spiritual significance of his dream. In Big Joey’s analysis of the dream, the “blood and emptiness” in his groin reflect a loss of self. He does not consider the possibility that the blood spilling from his groin might indicate not the destruction of the essence of his maleness but the awakening of an essential femaleness through symbolic menstruation. As Highway has stated, the play is ultimately about “the empowerment of the female principle, the reawakening of the feminine in men” (Steed D2). In most traditional Indigenous cultures menstruation is perceived as “a spiritually charged occurrence,” “central to the understanding of creative female energy” (Anderson 74); it is “a sign of the incredible power of the feminine” (Anderson 75). A symbolic example of this power from Cree orature would be the bloody pool in which the serpent grandmother regenerates herself in Dumas’s Ayas myth. Big Joey’s revulsion at the sight of Black Lady Halked’s pre-birthing fluids, however, evidences a distinctly non-Indigenous association of vaginal fluids with impurity, filth, and contamination (possibly the byproduct of Eurocentric education like residential schooling), causing him to reject entirely the possibility of his own creativity.<sup>13</sup> So invested is he in Eurocentric notions of phallic power and feminine impurity that he has denied his own creative capacity by abandoning his son.

Unwilling to interrogate the ideological underpinnings of his misogyny, Big Joey locks himself into a cycle of lateral violence, characterized by *self-imposed* impotence. His two most flagrantly violent acts are significantly failures to intervene (i.e., moments of inaction) rather than overt physical transgressions: his abandonment of Black Lady Halked and their son and his refusal to intercede in his son’s rape of a young female spiritual revitalizationist. These failures are

mutually implicated. Big Joey's refusal to acknowledge his son—and thus his own (pro)creativity—underwrites the boy's confusion, which culminates in the violent attack, while the attack itself becomes non-procreative through the use of a crucifix rather than the phallus. In fact, the rape could be considered anti-creative because it bears the capacity to cause its pregnant victim to miscarry, making it a sadistic parody of copulation whose offspring is death rather than life. And throughout Big Joey stands by as voyeur, refusing to intervene and, according to the stage directions, “*violently*” (100) preventing his companion, Creature Nataways, from intervening. Big Joey's violence, spawned from a profound misinterpretation of feminine creative power as disempowering to Native men, emerges as a further divestiture of personal power through inaction. Interpreting femininity without reference to either Cree or Ojibway traditional teachings, Big Joey escalates lateral violence and denies his own capacity to induce positive change.

The shocking violence of *Dry Lips*, while by implication the product of colonial interventions, is perpetrated by and exacted upon Indigenous people. As is widely recognized, many Indigenous communities endure extraordinarily high levels of violence.<sup>14</sup> Also widely recognized is the central position residential school has played in the historical manufacture of cultures of violence within Native Canadian communities.<sup>15</sup> For the Okimasis brothers, the latent danger of lateral violence resides primarily in the aftermath of their respective histories of sexual abuse. Sexual violence, according to John Milloy, “was not simply visited on the individual child in school; it spilled back into communities, so that even after the schools were closed it echoed in the lives of subsequent generations of children” (298).<sup>16</sup> While Big Joey's failure to interrogate the ideological underpinnings of his own system of thought and to question what he has been “taught” in the world created through colonial encounter ultimately leads to the perpetuation of lateral violence in *Dry Lips*, Highway's depiction of the Okimasis brothers' crisis to combat the potential revisitation of their abuse on others in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* offers the possibility of active mitigation.

The issue of lateral sexual violence is not raised—beyond Gabriel's

masochism—until late in the novel, after Jeremiah has devoted himself fully to writing for the theater and begun adapting Cree oral tales to the stage. At this time, due to the lack of financial stability offered by writing, Jeremiah works a day-job at a center for Native youth, where he imparts to his students the story of the Son of Ayash he had learned from his father. Restructuring the tale as a “Cree rap with a Latin stamp” (270), thereby illustrating the importance of creatively adapting myth to suit the needs of a contemporary audience (here children), Jeremiah explains: “Our hero, the Son of Ayash, has to be careful, for he is entering the dark place of the human soul where he will meet evil creatures like . . . the Weetigo” (271). Responding to a small boy’s inquiry, Jeremiah continues: “A Weetigo is a monster who eats little boys . . . like you” (271). After class the child returns to divulge the traumatic reality behind his clandestine interest in the Weetigo. Hugging Jeremiah, “the hot face buried in his groin,” the child declares, “A Weetigo ate me” (271). To the teacher’s shock and dismay the child then enacts the monster’s trademark mastication, biting into his teacher’s “faded blue denim” and causing “a needle longer than an arm” to shoot up Jeremiah’s spine. “In a panic, [the teacher] disengaged himself and squatted, his eyes inches from the six-year-old’s. He had a raging hard-on” (271).

It is no coincidence that in the song the Son of Ayash is entering “the dark place of the human soul,” as in this very moment the mythic battle between the Son of Ayash and the Weetigo is reconceptualized as one waged not against external forces but one that, for Jeremiah, must be waged within the self. While Jeremiah’s sexual abuse at residential school resonates with the more recent abuse of the child in his care, it is his latent capacity to become an abuser in the present, signaled by his unwanted arousal, that bears the weight of ultimate significance for the story. After Jeremiah determines from the Friendship Centre’s director that the child’s assailant “is being charged . . . and, hopefully, . . . will be jailed,” Highway concludes the chapter: “For Jeremiah, jail was nowhere near enough” (272). Although directed at the child’s abuser, this line elucidates the precariousness of Jeremiah’s own position, in the wake of the return of his repressed past. If Jeremiah cannot negotiate a way of dealing with his

capacity to abuse, he will need to segregate himself from the community or doom himself to superimposing the role of victimizer over the role of victim.

In the very next sentence, however, Highway identifies the productive path Jeremiah must take, a path with enormous potential for regeneration. Harkening back to the initial portrayal of abuse in the novel, wherein Father Lafleur was mistaken for both “a bear devouring a honeycomb” and “the Weetigo feasting on human flesh,” Jeremiah is described as “hunched at a typewriter,” “like a bear with a honeypot” (273). Significantly, the story Jeremiah strives to compose in the aftermath of his crisis with the child is the Son of Ayash myth adapted to his own experiences. He entwines both his distant past and the recent trauma in a mythic discourse he can ultimately control as writer. Thus, he actively prevents himself from feasting on others like the Weetigo, seeking instead emotional, spiritual, and psychological nourishment in the creative process. Rather than being consumed by past trauma and passing it on to others, Jeremiah channels his anguish into creative work that will not only aid his personal healing but will provide the cultural materials for a broader Indigenous empowerment.

Furthermore, Highway places this crisis, as well as its resolution, within the context of a culturally enabling pedagogical environment, a place wherein the future is nurtured. In stark contrast to the residential school setting that looms so heavily over the novel, the Muskoosis Club at which Jeremiah both teaches and writes offers the potential for personal and cultural growth on Native terms. Thus, in the instant in which he imparts to a younger generation its inheritance of cultural stories, and thereby provides a potential vocabulary for the articulation of selfhood, Jeremiah determines the identity he will claim, an identity characterized by creativity not violence. In this way, Jeremiah predicts a course of action Highway would himself undertake upon completing *Kiss of the Fur Queen*. Between 2001 and 2003, Highway completed a trilogy of children’s stories written in both English and Cree. Responding to a need he identifies in *Kiss of the Fur Queen* for Indigenous youth to be able to access their tribal languages and tribal spiritual systems, Highway wrote *Caribou Song*

(2001), *Dragonfly Kites* (2002), and *Fox on the Ice* (2003), which retell portions of the Okimasis brothers' story, among other things.<sup>17</sup> Thus, Highway's project as a writer, like Jeremiah's, is not simply to produce politically relevant work for a knowledgeable literary audience but also to stimulate a thirst for knowledge (Indigenous and otherwise) among Indigenous youth. Although their life-histories have included the complex and often violent interaction of disparately empowered cultural and spiritual systems, as tellers of stories, Highway and his character Jeremiah can reflect upon their experiences according to the codes they choose in processes of creative self-definition. Like Highway, Jeremiah reconceptualizes his life in narrative terms of Cree spirituality and traditional orature, made relevant to the contemporary moment through creative adaptation, invention, and augmentation, a process that affords him the creative weaponry to defeat the Weetigo of his past.

In his powerful analysis of creative literature's relevance to political struggle entitled "In Defense of the Word," Uruguayan author Eduardo Galeano writes,

At times . . . written work radiates an influence much greater than is apparent; at times, it answers—years in advance—the questions and needs of the collectivity, if the writer has known how to experience them first, through inner doubts and agonies. Writing springs from the wounded consciousness of the writer and is projected onto the world; the act of creation is an act of solidarity. (191)

Written between 1992 and 1998, Highway's *Kiss of the Fur Queen* provides valuable insight into the "needs" of the Indigenous "collectivity" within the geographic space of Canada at an important impasse in residential school legacy discourse in 2005, the year in which I am writing. Highway has stated, "I wrote [*Kiss of the Fur Queen*] for a Cree readership. . . . I hope to reach the kids in the mall in Saskatoon and Winnipeg" (Stoffman E4). Although the novel is multifarious, offering manifold insights to readers from diverse backgrounds both within Canada and without, it speaks with particular force to an Indigenous audience struggling to deal with the awful legacy of Canada's residen-

tial school system. While the large-scale, government-backed historicization of the residential school legacy had only recently begun when *Kiss of the Fur Queen* was first published, the novel speaks directly to the limitations, in terms of Indigenous empowerment, of the fact-finding pursuit as it is understood in Euro-Canadian legal and historical terms. Similarly it recognizes, far ahead of most analysts and critics, that while litigation can provide Indigenous communities and individuals with much-needed resources, those resources will never actualize Indigenous empowerment without serious reconsideration of the unhealthy and distinctly non-Indigenous ideological basis of structures that continue to mediate Indigenous relations with the state.

Highway's novel criticizes the capacity for a predominantly past-focused healing mission, like that structured by contemporary legacy discourse (through litigation and historicization), to alleviate the very real oppression of Indigenous people. In order to render historical knowledge and monetary gains productive in terms of post-residential school Indigenous empowerment, Highway argues that tribal values—analyzed, interpreted, adapted, and adopted—must be reinvigorated in Indigenous communities to provide the foundation for alternative conceptions of the position of Indigenous communities vis-à-vis the state. Institutions like the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the band council system continue to be organized around Euro-Canadian principles of leadership, favoring hierarchical governance over consensus-based equality and exhibiting a residual patriarchy over a potential Cree matriarchy. Traditional Indigenous cultures must be actively examined for their knowledge and wisdom in order to produce the possibility for newly conceived Indigenous empowerment outside the frameworks provided by the simulations of Euro-Canadian ideology and discourse.

Vizenor defines survivance as

an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy. (*Manifest* vii)

If we understand “estate” to refer to the sum of one’s identifying features and properties, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* epitomizes the exercise of what Vizenor describes as the “right of succession” by resisting the externally applied identities of “victimry”—those identifying features imposed on Native individuals by non-Native forces within residential school and after—and creatively articulating the identifying features of an empowered estate that will supplant its dominated precursor. Such acts of narrative defiance are at once “succession” and “reversion” in that they reclaim features from the estate that preceded domination at the same time that they imagine and articulate those features that will identify a newly empowered estate.

Dene leader George Erasmus states, “Our old people, when they talk about how the [traditional] ways should be kept by young people, they are not looking back, they are looking forward. They are looking as far ahead into the future as they possibly can” (Dene Nation 65). By championing the relevance of traditional Cree orature and spirituality to the contemporary difficulties and future pursuits of Cree residential school survivors, Highway at once guards against the ongoing acculturation of those previously subject to the violence of institutionalized assimilation and aggressively asserts the inadequacies of Euro-Canadian ideology. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* strikes to the core of survivance: It not only argues for the relevance of tribal spirituality and orature to the political extremity of the contemporary moment but also engages in the pedagogical project of unearthing a tribal-specific spiritual and oral archive on its Indigenous audience’s behalf. Furthermore, and perhaps most crucially, it provides a blueprint in the substance of its narrative for the process of personal and cultural introspection it champions, illustrating how the Indigenous individual can perform such crucial psychological and spiritual work for her- or himself. What I have argued in this article is that Highway’s focus on the spiritual is not in any way an avoidance of the political realities of post-residential school Native Canada. It is, rather, a reasoned response to the ideological problems underlying both Native and non-Native political realities and, more specifically, legacy discourse and the residential school claims process. *Kiss of the Fur Queen* is an extraordinarily political novel—all

the more so because of its seductive avoidance of well-worn paths of testimonial discourse and nonfictional political argumentation.

#### NOTES

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1. See Milloy, *A National Crime*; Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision*; Chrisjohn and Young, *The Circle Game*; and Knockwood, *Out of the Depths* for historical accounts of the residential school system in Canada.

2. Recent scholarly works that incorporate Indigenous testimonials in their critiques of governmental and church transgressions include the Secwepemc Cultural Education Society's *Behind Closed Doors* (2000), Constance Deiter's *From Our Mother's Arms* (United Church Publishing House, 1999), Judith Ennamorato's *Sing the Brave Song* (Raven Press, 1998), J. R. Miller's *Shingwauk's Vision* (U of Toronto P, 1996), the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's Report (1996), Elizabeth Furniss's *Victims of Benevolence* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 1995), the Assembly of First Nations *Breaking the Silence* (AFN Press, 1994), and Celia Haig-Brown's seminal *Resistance and Renewal* (Arsenal Pulp Press, 1988).

3. It is difficult to trace the evolution of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* from autobiography to novel with complete accuracy; however, Highway's interviews throughout the 1990s provide significant clues that assist in developing an educated trajectory of the novel's development. As Highway told the *Toronto Star*'s Judy Stoffman, "I thought about writing a non-fiction memoir, but it seemed too far-fetched. . . . Then I tried to write it as a stage play, then as a movie. I actually did four drafts of script, but my way was blocked. Finally, I did it the only way possible" (E4). Given the political potential of a memoir documenting sexual abuse within a government and church-sponsored institution, Highway's initial conception of the story as a "non-fiction memoir" is unsurprising. With scant historical evidence available to substantiate Indigenous calls for justice and recompense in the face of early 1990s governmental evasion tactics, a strictly autobiographical *Kiss of the Fur Queen* would certainly have caused a stir among both Native and non-Native readers. However, as Highway states, "When I tried to tell them it was an autobi-

ography, people didn't believe it. Two Indian kids from northern Manitoba become a dancer and a concert pianist—forget it! Nobody is going to believe it. It sounds like fiction, so I said OK!" (Favel 2).

With the autobiography "blocked," Highway sought to rewrite *Kiss of the Fur Queen* for the theater, his most comfortable medium in the early 1990s. However, because he references the stage play only once during his thirteen plus interviews throughout the 1990s—suggesting to Judy Steed in March of 1991 that the story of residential school abuse is one "he is going to tell in one of his next plays" (D1)—it seems likely he only entertained the notion for a short period. The effect of *Kiss of the Fur Queen* depends a great deal on the juxtaposition of a vast northern landscape with a claustrophobic residential school setting and an alienating urban south, making it difficult from a practical standpoint to stage in the theater. Thus, as early as June 1992, Highway was contemplating the potential effectiveness of the medium of television: "For once or twice I'd like to take a show into every living room, every bedroom in [my home reserve of] Brochet and to every reserve in the country. You can only do that with television" (Prokosh C28). Television carried with it the ability to disseminate information to a far greater audience than could be reached by any other medium. In light of the guarded nature of legacy discourse in the early 1990s and Highway's conviction that the "unforgivable, monstrous evil" of residential schools "should be published as the headline of every newspaper every day for 10 years" (Posner C1), the open-form medium of television seemed by 1992 an extremely attractive option. By October 1993, Kathleen Kenna found Highway "eager to discuss his TV project" (E6), and by April 1994, Paul Gessell was able to provide a detailed outline of the "four-hour mini-series" (A19). Even in 1994, however, the difficulty of solidifying a venue for his made-for-TV movie was becoming apparent. As Gessell continues:

Highway . . . seems very reluctant to discuss any aspect of scripts, money, contracts, production dates and other crucial data about . . . *Kiss*. As each question is asked, dark clouds gather over his head. . . . [W]riting . . . is a long, agonizing process. Getting [his work] to production sometimes takes just as long and requires as much creativity as the writing. (A19)

Although I can't be certain exactly when Highway abandoned his efforts to have *Kiss of the Fur Queen* produced as a television series, it seems probable that he began rewriting it as a novel sometime in late 1995 or early 1996 given the novel's publication date of 1998, the lengthy editing process required to

cut the initial eight-hundred-page manuscript down to just over three hundred pages, and the fact that Highway was still discussing the “television mini-series based on the life of his late brother” (Yanofsky J1) as late as February of 1995.

By the time Highway had settled on the story’s ultimate form, a great deal had changed in the discursive environment into which he was writing. Many churches had officially apologized for their role in residential schooling and certain influential historical works like J. R. Miller’s *Shingwauk’s Vision* had received wide publication causing the need for highly publicized disclosure to wane, although government-supported historicization had yet to begin on a grand scale. Although Highway was pressured to switch media by practical concerns beyond his control, his use of each medium reflects a keen understanding of the evolving legacy discourse with which, I argue, he wanted his work to engage. The early autobiographical version sought to participate in the substantiation of early claims against the government and the churches, and the film version sought to raise awareness through wide dissemination. As Highway turned to fiction as his final medium, he similarly strove to actualize a political effect. While his ability to reach a massive television audience or to consolidate communities through group theatrical performance had been lost, his capacity to explore the redemptive nature of storytelling and the function of narrative in understanding identity, community, and history had been augmented significantly. The relatively private engagement between author and reader, requiring on behalf of the latter a considerable investment of time and interpretive energy, allowed Highway to deal far more extensively with Aboriginal heritage materials and to illustrate their ongoing utility in the struggle toward Indigenous empowerment.

4. Vizenor illustrates this semiotic situation through the example of the word “Indian,” which is itself a non-Native imposition. The word bears no connection to tribal cultures, but rather to the imaginative constructions by non-Native society of Native-as-other and Native-as-image: “The simulation of the *indian* is the absence of real natives—the contrivance of the other in the course of dominance . . . [*I*]ndians are immovable simulations, the tragic archives of dominance and victimry” (*Manifest* vii, x). The pervasiveness of white semiotic control in this regard, and the need politically to engage in this field, has meant that, in the words of Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr., “the more we try to be ourselves, the more we are forced to defend what we have never been” (*Custer* 2). In other words, non-Native control over the documentation of tribal traditions has created conditions in which Natives endeavoring to safeguard their cultural history have occasionally had to emu-

late the simulations of dominance because such simulations constitute broader society's understandings of traditional culture; under the oppressive weight of non-Native simulations of Indigeneity, Natives have at times been cornered into becoming what Vizenor calls "kitschymen of resistance" (42). Jean Baudrillard's work on simulation provides a helpful critical bridge for understanding this development. For Baudrillard, "simulation . . . is the generation by models of a real without origin in reality: a hyperreal. The territory no longer precedes the map, nor survives it. Henceforth, it is the map that precedes the territory—Precession of Simulacra" (2). The images of Natives within the semiotic field are not simply illusory as both art and artifice, but according to Baudrillardian thinking, should bear tangibly on what might be termed Native reality.

5. The typically postmodern retreat from the "real" into the semiotic/discursive in Vizenor's criticism at times appears so complete as to undermine its capacity to address what Craig Womack has identified as the "intrinsic and extrinsic" relationship "between the world of literature and the very real struggles of American Indian communities" (11). Vizenor writes:

Some simulations are survivance, but postindian warriors are wounded by the real. The warriors of simulations are worried more by the real than other enemies of reference. Simulations are the substitutes of the real, and those who pose with the absence of the real must fear the rush of the real in their stories. (*Manifest* 23)

What becomes unclear in this formulation is the status of the "real" in response to narratives of survivance. Presumably the bleak and oppressive "real" to which Vizenor refers has been created, or at least influenced, by the simulations of dominance. The simulations of survivance, on the other hand, seek to "substitute" for this unpalatable "real" by which the postindian is "wounded." This substitution, however, seems ultimately trapped in simulation as the postindian simulator must "fear the rush of the real" in her or his narrative simulations. Because the postindian warrior strives invariably against the "real," it becomes unclear how that "real" can be affected by her or his simulations. In much the same way that Baudrillard departs from the premise that simulations affect reality to argue ultimately that reality itself is a pure simulacrum, Vizenor seems to be stymied in the realm of the image, unable or unwilling to articulate the necessary bridge on the far side of his counter-discursive program.

6. Oka refers to a land dispute at Oka, Quebec, which erupted in violence on July 11, 1990, when one hundred armed provincial police of the *Sûreté du*

Québec stormed a Mohawk barricade. In the ensuing gun battle one officer was killed. The dispute, which revolved around the desire of the non-Native community of Oka to expand its golf course on what the Mohawks argued were sacred burial grounds at Kanesatake, evolved into a seventy-eight-day stand-off that shocked the Canadian public and marked the dawning of a more aggressive posture on the part of Aboriginal resisters in relation to the Canadian State. Also in the summer of 1990, Member of Legislative Parliament Elijah Harper (Cree-Ojibwa) was instrumental in derailing the Meech Lake constitutional accord, which he and others argued didn't address Native concerns and Native rights. Harper's actions demonstrated the political savvy of the new generation of First Nations leaders, increasingly unwilling to have Aboriginal voices silenced on important political matters, and signaled a shift in political power in the country.

7. Such articles as Frad Favel's "Born in the Sky," which was published by the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, represent Highway's life within just this form of liberal narrative. Favel's article begins: "From a Disneyesque childhood in the northernmost part of Manitoba, through the nightmare of residential school, with his sheer determination and drive, . . . [Highway] is a shining beacon of hope to the Aboriginal community" (1). Highway himself has spoken about the novel in these terms, suggesting the novel is about "how if you dream hard enough you can do anything" (Yanofsky J1).

8. Isabelle Knockwood states in her historical study of a Mi'kmaq residential school in Shubenacadie that "traditionally . . . older brothers and sisters were absolutely required to look after their younger siblings. When they went to the residential school, being unable to protect their younger brothers and sisters became a source of life-long pain" (60).

9. For example, Gabriel recites the "Hail Mary": "Hello merry, mutter of cod, lay for ussinees, now anat tee ower of ower beth, aw, men" (71). As Sioux author and activist Vine Deloria Jr. has argued,

unlike many other religious traditions, tribal religions . . . have not been authoritatively set "once and for always." Truth is in the ever changing experiences of the community. For the traditional Indian to fail to appreciate this aspect of his heritage is the saddest of heresies. It means the Indian has unwittingly fallen into the trap of Western religion, which seeks to freeze history in an unchanging and authoritative past. (qtd. in Warrior 84)

10. Given René Highway's crucial role not only in providing the bio-

graphical background for one of the novel's central characters but also in acting as a source of inspiration for the author—Tomson Highway has stated that the “novel is like a grand piano that Jeremiah the pianist receives from his brother, Gabriel, at the end of his life” (Hodgson 46)—the author's choice of the Son of Ayash myth seems appropriate. In the year of his death, René was slated to direct and choreograph Native Earth's production of *Son of Ayash*, adapted to the stage by Jim Morris, which was ultimately produced in his honor between February 14 and March 10, 1991. Jennifer Preston glosses the performance:

Taken from a traditional hero myth, *Son of Ayash* is the story of a young man who falls into disfavor with his father and is sent out into the wilderness. He enters the spirit world and encounters various monsters and anti-heroes, all of whom he defeats with physical strength and magical power. He emerges into the real world and decides to destroy it, allowing the Great Spirit to create it once again. In the play, this traditional legend is told to a young dying man by his mother to comfort him. As she begins the story, the young man leaves his dying body and enters the spirit realm. When the son of Ayash returns from the spirit world, the young man returns to his death bed and is able to face his death.” (*Tomson Highway* 153–54)

11. Given Highway's northern Manitoba Rock Cree heritage and the fact that Brightman's text is one of the most recently published collections of Rock Cree narratives, it is quite possible that Highway has actually read this very version. One piece of evidence which points to this possibility is Jennifer Preston's inclusion of Brightman's work as her only source for Cree orature in her 1990 thesis on Highway's theater. Given that Preston worked closely with Highway at Native Earth Performing Arts and interviewed him on several occasions regarding Cree myth, it seems possible that they may have shared sources.

12. While not explicitly a survivor of residential school, Big Joey, identified in the play's liner notes as thirty-nine years old in 1990, would have experienced adolescence during the late 1950s and early 1960s, when residential schooling was still in full swing.

13. Isabelle Knockwood provides a powerful indictment of European-derived sexual taboos in the context of residential schooling in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia: “The nuns and the school principal provided us with their own version of sex education, which was that all bodily functions were dirty—

dirty actions, dirty noises, dirty thoughts, dirty mouth[s], dirty, dirty, dirty girls” (52).

14. According to legal scholars Anne McGillivray and Brenda Comaskey, eight in ten Aboriginal women [have] witnessed or experienced intimate violence in childhood, and the same number have been child or adult victims of sexual assault (Ontario Native Women’s Association, 1989; Kiyoshyk, 1990). Between 75 and 90 per cent of northern Ontario’s Aboriginal women are assaulted in an adult relationship. . . . [And] [p]hysical injury is the leading cause of death of Aboriginal women on reserves (Dumont-Smith and Labelle, 1991). (13)

15. Okanagan author Jeannette Armstrong calls residential schools “the single most devastating factor in the breakdown of our society. It is at the core of the damage, beyond all the other mechanisms cleverly fashioned to subjugate, assimilate, and annihilate” (x). As one survivor indicates, “The boarding schools taught us violence. Violence was emphasized through physical, corporal punishment, strapping, beatings, bruising and control. We learned to understand that this was power and control” (qtd. in McGillivray and Comaskey 44).

16. Milloy adds that a “1989 study sponsored by the Native Women’s association of the Northwest Territories found that eight out of ten girls under the age of eight were victims of sexual abuse, and fifty percent of the boys the same age had been sexually molested” (298).

17. While I hesitate to make any claims about the precise effect writing *Kiss of the Fur Queen* might have had on its author (for reasons I dealt with earlier in the article), I will posit that the recognition within the novel of Jeremiah’s need to teach Native children in culturally sensitive ways in order to deal with his own childhood trauma resonates with Highway’s decision to turn to children’s literature. Furthermore, the connection between the plot material of the children’s books and the novel, which all borrow extensively from the author’s own experiences, suggests a symbiotic relationship between literature and life for Highway that is extremely intriguing, although well beyond the scope of the present article.

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# Witchery, Indigenous Resistance, and Urban Space in Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*

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It is impossible to accurately imagine contemporary Native American identity without understanding the contribution of urban Indians. Groups such as the legendary Mohawk steelworkers on the East Coast and the American Indian Movement, which emerged from urban Indian neighborhoods in cities such as Minneapolis, Oakland, and Cleveland, give testament to a significant part of the “survivance,” to use Gerald Vizenor’s term, of contemporary Native American peoples and cultures. Over two-thirds of the approximately 2.1 million Native Americans in the United States live in urban areas (Fixico ix),<sup>1</sup> and even if this fact has not significantly infiltrated the American popular imagination, Native American literature has nonetheless represented Indian urban experience in many contemporary works, such as the fiction of Sherman Alexie and Greg Sarris and the poetry of Esther Belin.<sup>2</sup> However, the appearance of urban Indians on the literary scene is not an entirely new phenomenon. Even in D’Arcy McNickle’s and John Joseph Mathews’s novels of the 1930s, we begin to see protagonists trying to reconcile their time in cities with their lives on the reservation. These writers, according to Louis Owens, challenged romanticized notions of Indian culture and identity by portraying characters who slip “into the deracinated no-Indian’s-land” between Native and Euramerican worlds (25). However, Owens continues, these characters are ultimately unable to establish stable identities for themselves, and therefore they “never [have] a chance within a civilization bent on turning Indians into Europeans” (25).

This pessimistic forecast is reconsidered and expanded upon by some of the major works of the 1970s Native American Renaissance, especially N. Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*. Momaday's treatment of his protagonist Abel's cultural dislocation "takes the next crucial step for Indian writers: he brings Abel full circle, back home to his Southwestern pueblo and a secure knowledge of who he is" (Owens 25), while Silko makes her conflicted mixed-blood, Tayo, "a metaphor for the dynamic, syncretic, adaptive qualities of Indian cultures that will ensure survival" (Owens 27). What was for McNickle and Mathews a hopeless conundrum and for Momaday a crisis leading back to the healing of a traditional life becomes in Silko's novel a way to imagine the survival and growth of Native people and the cultures where they find significance and identity (Owens 167). The place of the city in Silko's cultural dynamic is crucial; urbanization represents an essential element of Euramerican destructiveness and a necessary aspect of Native American syncreticism and growth in her novel. She insists that, in order to progress, Indians, and indeed all people, must be transformative in their worldviews and approaches to the destructive forces of urbanization and industrialization. For Silko, Navajo tradition in particular must be adaptable to the new challenges represented by urban growth in order to encompass the contemporary experiences of Indians like Tayo. Though Tayo ultimately chooses to turn away from what he knows of the city for a more traditional and stable mode of life, he realizes that the knowledge acquired there is essential to his understanding of the forces at work in the world. His ability to incorporate this understanding into a framework that is both traditional and adaptable is crucial not just for his survival but for everyone's.

Of course, Tayo's return to tradition is preceded by his alienation from it. From the beginning, Tayo is distanced from his reservation family by a number of factors: his birth and early childhood in the encampments of homeless Indians in Gallup, New Mexico; his outcast mother and unknown father; his sense of inadequacy growing up in the shadow of his more promising full-blood cousin, Rocky; and the violence he witnessed and experienced on the World War II

Pacific front. From the start of the novel, Tayo's alienation is evident as he runs from bar to bar with his fellow reservation veterans, who have no real sense of hope, direction, or meaning to their lives. These men are haunted by the fact that their experience in the war has displaced the ethical and historical grounding of Native tradition. They mask their despair under a veneer of barroom camaraderie and tales of the battlefield and sexual conquest in the various American West Coast cities where they shipped out.

Because of their experience abroad in the war, their time away from the reservation, and in the city particularly, comes to mark an important moment of change in their lives, where the stark contrast between traditional Indian values and contemporary Euramerican values comes into focus. Tayo's time in the city is filled with alienation and bereft of possibility, as he has no friends or community to buttress him. He is mentally disturbed and unable to connect to even the most basic elements of his surroundings for support. Also, Tayo's youth in the city of Gallup, New Mexico, is marked by homelessness, hunger, and desperate fear. Though Tayo's fellow veterans do not reveal anything about their urban experience beyond braggadocio, there is also no evidence that the city offered them any lasting opportunity. What little Silko's text does reveal of their urban Indian lives in San Diego, Los Angeles, and Gallup, New Mexico, leaves us with the sense that the city offered nothing in the way of meaningful sustenance for any of them. By the same token, Silko's vision of the healing potential of the reservation is complicated by poverty and despair. She sees the danger of the reservation, exemplified by the self-destructive activities of Tayo and his companions as they drink, drive, and fight their way from one bar to the next; life on the reservation becomes as aimless and potentially dangerous as life in the city. For Tayo to survive, then, a further retreat from the encroachment of the white world is necessary.

Silko pushes Tayo's struggle further thematically as his effort to reconcile his experience of the white world with the Native one is bound up in a larger worldwide struggle for survival. Tayo must align himself with the traditional Laguna landscape, and though he can-

not forget his experience off the reservation, he must try to remove himself ideologically from the culture of urbanized Euramerica and all the ecological and social ills it breeds. The novel terms this Euramerican cultural cycle “witchery” (133) and identifies Tayo as a central individual in the struggle to combat its patterns of violence that threaten the world. Silko’s novel emphasizes the importance of language, specifically storytelling, as a way of constructing reality in a broadly politicized context. Her text insists that language is integral to the very survival and reemergence of Indigenous peoples in response to Euramerican colonialism.

Catherine Rainwater recognizes the way Silko’s narrative addresses the “dispossession of ‘home’ [that] is a primary feature of all Native American experience.” The narrative attempts to

resolve in textual space what cannot be resolved in geographical space: though Native Americans can never take back America as it existed before the European invasion, they can appropriate the textual space of the novel; and if ‘story’ precedes reality, perhaps American Indian writers may begin through semiosis to reconstruct and reinhabit their home. (119)

Silko’s narrative allows this kind of possibility by presenting Tayo’s internal reconstruction as a series of narratives that reintroduce him to his Laguna home. This process simultaneously reveals a larger conflict between two worldviews: the Euramerican city and the reservation. According to Rainwater, “Silko attributes stillness and connection to the Indian and juxtaposes these traits with Euro-American motion and alienation” (122). Silko’s narrative also enacts a process of what James Ruppert calls “mediation,” wherein she “works with two different spheres of discourse” and engages the spheres “so that she can respond to previous and anticipated discourse, and yet turn that discourse around so as to make it express cross-cultural goals” in order to “restructure epistemologically two sets of perception and understanding” (129). Through Tayo’s experience, Silko’s narrative is able to mediate the Indian and Euramerican spheres in a way that allows Tayo’s battle for survival to stand as a critique of

those spaces as they move further and further away from the principles of traditional Indigenous worldviews.

Silko starts this process by juxtaposing a traditionally phrased storytelling passage with a Euramerican-style prose passage proclaiming Tayo's chaotic state of mind. In the former style of narrative, which, according to Robert M. Nelson, resembles traditional Laguna "hama-ha[h]," or "long-ago far-away stories" ("Kaupata Motif" 3), Silko insists that stories "aren't just entertainment," but they are "all we have to fight off / illness and death" (2). Such maladies are inherent in the efforts of non-Native peoples to eradicate Native ways, and the stories are a main line of defense against destruction. "Their evil is mighty / but it can't stand up to our stories," the narrative says,

So they try to destroy the stories  
let the stories be confused or forgotten.  
They would like that . . . Because we would be defenseless then. (2)

To illustrate this, in the prose passage after the storytelling, Silko reveals Tayo's confused and defenseless state of mind as he is bombarded by a cacophony of foreign and familiar voices and jukebox music in his dreams: "Tayo didn't sleep well that night. He tossed in the old iron bed, and the coiled springs kept squeaking even after he lay still again, calling up humid dreams of black night and loud voices rolling him over and over again like debris caught in a flood" (5). A familiar Spanish love song gives way to the familiar Laguna-speaking voice of his uncle, Josiah, and is quickly displaced by "the fever voices" of angry Japanese soldiers, women's voices he thinks might be his dead mother's but that he does not really recognize, and finally a language he cannot even understand (6). Tayo cannot locate his identity out of the cacophony of his life any more than he can pick out and hold on to a stable voice inside his head. His inner consciousness is the antithesis of story, as it reveals no communicable structure or meaningful theme that might serve as a protection against "illness and death"; without these things, Tayo seems in danger of succumbing to what plagues him. All he can do is "sweat through those nights when thoughts became entangled" until he can

“think of something that [isn’t] unraveled or tied in knots to the past—something that exist[s] by itself, standing alone like a deer” (7). As an image of self-contained animal identity, the deer represents all that Tayo is not, and the project of unraveling his past in order to get to some approximated point of solid identity is precisely what lies before Tayo at the outset of the novel. He must take the knotted mess of his colonized self and try to reorganize it into something sustainable.

Tayo wakes in his family’s ranch house, and his thoughts turn to the sources of his confusion—the war and his post-war confinement in a Los Angeles veterans’ hospital. He is so lost after his discharge from the army that he hardly recognizes his own existence during his recuperation. He recalls that

for a long time he had been white smoke. He did not realize that until he left the hospital, because white smoke had no consciousness of itself. It faded into the white world of their bed sheets and walls; it was sucked away by the words of doctors who tried to talk to the invisible scattered smoke. (14)

The colonial implications for Indian identity are clearly marked in this passage, as Tayo’s thin cloud of self is inhaled by the white doctors who diagnose, categorize, anesthetize, and otherwise control his body, and he is absorbed by the very walls and tables of the industrialized antiseptic setting of the urban hospital. During his ghostly wanderings through the hospital, he is completely disconnected from the world outside. He can’t even imagine himself home; the best he can do is dream he is far away, “inhabit[ing] a gray winter fog on a distant elk mountain where hunters are lost indefinitely and their own bones mark the boundaries” (15).

The culmination of Tayo’s urban experience in California shows him barely surviving as he struggles to catch a train back home. As he stands at the Los Angeles depot, he feels that “at that moment his body had density again and the world was visible and he realized why he was there and he remembered Rocky and he started to cry” (15). Remembering his close cousin, who had died in the war before Tayo’s eyes and for whose death Tayo feels responsible, his tears at least sig-

nal that Tayo exists, that he has come back to some portion of his fuller existence; though the return is painful, it is clearly just a first step on a difficult path. While waiting for the train, Tayo's identity seems to dissolve into smoke as quickly as it reemerged. Amidst the smell of smoke and diesel, "he knew he was going to become invisible right there. It was too late to ask for help, and he waited to die the way smoke dies, drifting away in currents of air, twisting in thin swirls, fading until it exists no more" (16–17). As he collapses, he thinks that his keepers were "generous" in "sending him to the L.A. depot alone, finally allowing him to die" (17). Escape from his pain will not be this easy, though, no matter how he wants to give up.

He awakens surrounded by a concerned Japanese family at the depot, and he's afraid he is in a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. When he realizes where he is, his awareness of time seems to have failed him as well. He says to a railroad attendant, "Those people, . . . I thought they locked them up" (18). Years have passed since the internment camps closed, however, and Tayo feels his disconnectedness from the world even more acutely. He cries

at how the world had come undone, how thousands of miles, high ocean waves and green jungles could not hold people in their place. Years and months had become weak, and people could push against them and wander back and forth in time. Maybe it had always been this way and he was only seeing it for the first time. (18)

Now, not only is his own identity floating in and out of reality but also reality itself seems to have become unhinged as Tayo makes his way onto the train with his tenuous hold on the world and himself.

The noise of the war and the city and the collection of voices from Tayo's past mark his experience of the city (and the non-reservation world in general) as one of verbal and sonic confusion; he is so bombarded by his environment that he hasn't the consciousness to recognize his own existence within it. The noise in his head makes no sense to him; it does not cohere as a story. To participate in a structured narrative of self and community, Tayo has to overcome the inchoate

roar placed in his head by his experiences during his time off-reservation. Laden with the entangled discourse of multitudes and filled with the language of individual desire and justification of progress and further growth, the city does not provide the necessary cultural story that will enrich its people. It is rife with the spreading confusion that perpetuates waste and destruction and impoverishes the individual identity for the sake of the consuming masses.

As the narrative shifts to Tayo, months later, sitting in the ramshackle cottage on his uncle's ranch, there is a strong contrast between his disoriented state in the urban train station and his life as a boy in the pueblo. The dusty, hot desert air blowing over the valley reminds Tayo of a time in his youth when, on Bone Mesa, "he had felt that the sky was near and that he could have touched it" and on nights "when the moon rose full and wide as a corner of the sky, a person standing on the high sandstone cliff of that mesa could reach the moon" (19). Unlike the confusion and directionless nature of much of his adult experience, for Tayo as a boy,

distances and days existed in themselves then; they all had a story. They were not barriers. If a person wanted to get to the moon, there was a way; it all depended on whether you knew the directions—exactly which way to go and what to do to get there; it depended on whether you knew the story of how others before you had gone. (19)

Unfortunately, Tayo's exposure to the disintegrating confusion of Euramerican influence, the war, the Veteran's Administration hospital, and the city itself has hindered his ability to get to those stories, those directions to identity. Robert M. Nelson's extensive analysis of direction and landscape in the novel reveals the extent to which this need of "direction" is central to Tayo's healing. Nelson recognizes that Tayo's consciousness must become attuned "not only to the pattern of the culture he needs to reenter" but that it must ultimately become "congruent, finally, with the pattern and terrain of an external landscape" ("Function of Landscape" 141). Tayo's return to the landscape of his home and his efforts to refamiliarize himself with it are essen-

tial to his understanding of the stories and ceremonies in which he must participate to heal himself. Tayo's "encounter with the land proves to be his access to cultural tradition" and is central to reestablishing his identity after it has been shattered ("Function of Landscape" 152). Just as the confusion of the city fragments Tayo's psyche, the order and logic of the traditional landscape confirms the truth and solidity of Native story and identity.

The path to such order requires that Tayo first come to terms with his experience of the city and the war. The only other people on the reservation who do know something of Tayo's experience beyond the reservation are his drinking companions, Harley, Leroy, and Emo. However, their understanding of his experience is dulled by their own denial and swallowed pain over that shared experience. Harley's and Leroy's anger is drenched in alcohol and numbed by joking and womanizing, whereas Emo's anger consumes him, constantly emerging as racist, misogynist diatribes and anti-government harangues. Nonetheless, all of their stories and opinions have moments of insight into the difficulties faced by Indians encountering Euramerican, urban culture for the first time. Harley recalls that he felt a certain respect during his time in Los Angeles, primarily because he was a uniformed serviceman:

White women never looked at me until I put on that uniform, and then by God I was a U.S. Marine and they came crowding around. All during the war they'd say to me, "Hey soldier, you sure are handsome. All that black thick hair." "Dance with me," the blond girl said. You know Los Angeles was the biggest city I ever saw. All those streets and tall buildings. Lights at night everywhere. I never saw so many bars and juke boxes—all the people coming from everywhere, dancing and laughing. They never asked me if I was Indian; sold me as much beer as I could drink. I was a big spender then. Had my military pay. Double starch in my uniform and my boots shining so good. I mean those white women fought over me. Yeah, they did really! I went home with a blonde one time. She had a big '38 Buick. Good car. She let me drive it all the way. (40–41)

Tayo also recalls a similar moment in San Diego as he and Rocky walked down the street in their uniforms and an old white woman stopped her car and said to them, “‘God bless you, God bless you,’ but it was the uniform, not them, she blessed” (41). Tayo’s acknowledgment of white hypocrisy separates him from the others at the bar who try to tell their stories as a way of recapturing former glory. Tayo becomes fed up with the lies they tell themselves, though, and creates a story that reveals not only the truth of their situation as Native veterans but also his own anger and bitterness over it:

One time there were these Indians, see. They put on uniforms, cut their hair. They went off to a big war. They had a real good time too. Bars served them booze, old white ladies on the street smiled at them. At Indians, remember that, because that’s all they were. Indians. These Indians fucked white women, they had as much as they wanted too. They were MacArthur’s boys; white whores took their money same as anyone. These Indians got treated the same as anyone: Wake Island, Iwo Jima. They got the same medals for bravery, the same flag over the coffin. (41–42)

Tayo stops his story, because “he realized the others weren’t laughing and talking any more. They were listening to him, and they weren’t smiling” (42). Tayo continues, though, because he has tapped into the essential problem facing them all, even if the others don’t want to hear it. He rails at them: “I’m half-breed. I’ll be the first to say it. I’ll speak for both sides. First time you walked down the street in Gallup or Albuquerque, you knew. Don’t lie. You knew right away. The war was over, the uniform was gone” (42). Tayo is able to voice Euramerican dismissal of Indians as well as Indian anger over it. He becomes, in a way, like Frantz Fanon’s colonized intellectual; he is able to “speak for both sides” of a colonial culture because of his experience (and his mixed-blood status), and he struggles with his conflicted knowledge and identity because of it.<sup>3</sup> What Tayo realizes and the others seem content to ignore is the reality that they were only useful to Euramerican culture as soldiers and that after the war they were expected to return to their status as colonized minorities.

Tayo recognizes how colonialism and social marginalization have demoralized them and riddled them with self-hatred and self-blame, but what to do about it remains uncertain. His experience of the city obviously leaves no option of going back, but there is no future in a life on the reservation with his drinking buddies. Trapped in between two worlds and angry, Tayo seems to be headed for a future of violence either against himself or others, violence that would be a continuation of his war experience, an exacerbation of his psychological confusion, and a perpetuation of the witchery. He is especially disgusted by Emo, who brags about how many Japanese he killed, rattling a bag full of teeth (souvenirs from his kills) and saying things like “We butchered every Jap we found. No Jap bastard was fit to take prisoner” and “We blew them all to hell. We should’ve dropped bombs on all the rest and blown them off the face of the earth” (61). Emo even resents the reservation. He comments, “Us Indians deserve something better than this goddamn dried-up country around here. Blowing away, every day. . . . What we need is what they got. I’ll take San Diego” (55). Tayo listens to this while “clenching all his muscles against their voices; . . . sweating, trying to fight off the nausea that surged at him whenever he heard the rattle in the little bag” (55).

Tayo hates Emo because Emo is responding to inhumanity in kind and flaunting his participation and perpetuation of the destruction that is slowly devouring the world. The others follow Emo and become emblems of the violence they’ve both received and caused. In Tayo’s eyes, they are emblematic of the destructive encroachment of the violent, witching, white world upon Native peoples. Tayo eventually acts upon his rage over this situation when he attacks Emo in the bar; he is subsequently locked in a psychiatric ward for a time. During the therapy, Tayo links Emo to the broader social disintegration he senses around him. He tells a psychiatrist that something is happening to the world beyond the patterns of drinking and violence among Indian males, especially since the war; it is something that has “been going on for a long time,” but Emo is a result of the larger problem, not a cause (53). Tayo says he attacked Emo simply because “Emo was asking for it” (53).

Tayo’s attack on Emo represents his participation in the destructive violence perpetuated and encouraged by the “larger problem” of

witchery as it is presented in the novel. It becomes clear to Tayo's family that they must find a more powerful medicine to prevent losing him. They decide to send Tayo to Old Betonie, a healer operating out of Gallup. Tayo's return there plunges him back into a bleak urban space, reminding him of the desperate circumstances of his childhood and showing him how close he came to becoming like the lost Native souls he now sees on the streets of Gallup. Tayo's early life there was marked by homelessness and hunger barely sustained by his mother's prostitution. Given this link, Tayo now recognizes that his struggle to survive has always been tied up with the homeless Indians he sees in Gallup: "This is us, too, . . . these people crouching outside bars like cold flies stuck to the wall" (107). In Gallup, Tayo is reminded of the dangers of such urban spaces for disenfranchised Natives and how quickly they can be lost in the witchery of the city, much like Tayo was lost as a specter of smoke in Los Angeles. In these Indians, Tayo sees how they have become irretrievably enmeshed in the physical and psychological destructiveness of what he will come to understand as witchery.

Gallup is the real beginning of Tayo's work to return from his spiritual and psychological damage. When he and the old medicine man meet, Betonie tells Tayo, "People ask me why I live here, . . . I tell them I want to keep track of the people" (117). From his hilltop hogan, Betonie can see the area behind the railroad tracks where many of the city's Indians dwell. Betonie explains that whites don't understand that the Indians know those hills and are comfortable there, but Betonie uses the word "comfortable" with a different meaning, "not the comfort of big houses or rich food or even clean streets, but the comfort of belonging with the land, and the peace of being with these hills" (117). But, in the same instant, "the special meaning the old man had given to the English word was burned away by the glare of the sun on tin cans and broken glass, blinding reflections off the mirrors and chrome of the wrecked cars in the dump below" (117). The contrast between Euramerican notions of comfort and the comfort Betonie sees for the Indians underscores the novel's values regarding the importance of land to survival. Still more revealing, though, is the realistic notion that the squalor of the Indians' dwellings offsets the comfort of a traditional

connection to place. Clearly, if a more traditional “comfort” in the land is to present any real alternative to the Indians’ reality in Gallup, unlikely changes would have to take place in the very social structure of the city. Unless one can find a position of adaptability like Betonie, getting away from the city, as Tayo has done, seems the only viable alternative.

Singular among Gallup’s Indians, Betonie stands as an example of the evolution and survival of Indian tradition. Much about Betonie strikes Tayo (and possibly some readers) as incongruous with older notions of what a healer, or even an Indian, should be. His hogan is strewn with objects; everywhere there are boxes, some falling apart, filled with old clothes, dry roots, and bundles of twigs, shopping bags with bouquets of dried sage and tobacco (119–20). Among these more traditional items are stacks of newspapers and telephone books from all over the country, as well as “layers of old calendars, the sequences of years confused and lost” (120). Betonie explains, “We’ve been gathering these things for a long time—hundreds of years,” and it is clear that “the boxes and trunks, the bundles and stacks were plainly part of the pattern; they followed the concentric shadows of the room” (120).

In his hogan, Betonie is collecting information about the current inhabitants of North America, especially the Euramerican ones, as a way of keeping abreast of their development. He incorporates this information into his healing by being aware of the scope of the witchery as it spreads. He has collected his experience and knowledge to help Indians recognize themselves within the contemporary world and integrate it as part of their experience without letting it overtake them. At first Tayo feels overwhelmed by the objects, but eventually his eyes light upon two old calendar pictures of Indian scenes and ceremonies, and he tells Betonie, “I remember those two,” to which Betonie replies, “That gives me some place to start” (121). Soon Tayo begins to tell Betonie about his painful wartime experience and its debilitating results, and Betonie is able to put together the relationship between Tayo’s experience and the pervasive witchery in the world. When Tayo mentions the horror of imagining his Uncle Josiah’s face among a group of dead Japanese soldiers, Betonie replies, “It

isn't surprising you saw him with them. You saw who they were. Thirty thousand years ago they were not strangers. You saw what the evil had done: you saw the witchery ranging as wide as this world" (124). Tayo comes to see that "his sickness was only part of something larger, and his cure would be found only in something great and inclusive of everything" (126).

Another integral element of Betonie's vision of Indian survival and healing is the transformative quality of ceremony. Ceremonies must be allowed to evolve to meet the changing needs of the people who perform them. This idea about ceremony challenges Euramerican stereotypes of Native American ritual as codified and stagnant and thus unable to survive the change of Euramerican encroachment and expansion. Betonie presents Tayo with the idea that, once, the ceremonies "were enough for the way the world was then," but with Euramerican contact, "elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies" (126). Betonie repeats the words of his grandmother, who insisted, "Things which don't shift and grow are dead things. They are things the witchery people want. . . . That's what the witchery is counting on: that we will cling to the ceremonies the way they were, and then their power will triumph, and the people will be no more" (126). Dennis Cutchins characterizes Betonie's "fictional re-vision of history" as "perhaps, the novel's most important accomplishment" (77). Betonie's transformation of ceremony to fit contemporary needs is a central moment of what Cutchins terms "Silko's nativistic restructuring of history" (77). Eschewing a traditionalism that "simply avoids or ignores change," Betonie embodies a Nativism that "embraces change" and "is the self-conscious creation of a new culture using selected cultural elements symbolically" (Cutchins 82). Betonie, more so than others in the novel, knows that to hide in the old ways is useless and will result in death and ultimate extinction. However, he does not embrace complete assimilation as a route to survival. A rootedness in communal awareness of the self in relationship to the land and others is necessary to properly acclimate oneself to the witchery that encourages us to believe only in the self, in progress, and in expansive dominion over the earth. Betonie assures Tayo that the white people

living in the town below him “only fool themselves when they think [the land] is theirs. The deeds and papers don’t mean anything. It is the people who belong to the mountain” (128).

Euramerican culture fails to take sufficient care in its transformation of the earth and thus perpetuates the witchery. Betonie does not entirely blame the whites for the witchery but shows how they are victim to it as much as Indians. “That is the trickery of the witchcraft,” he says. “They want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening” (132). By pitting Native Americans against whites, the witchery encourages alienation between people along racialized lines, which encourages separatism and hatred, both of which contribute to cultural destruction for both groups, especially Native Americans. However, for Betonie, Indians can counter this through a simple, though radical, realization: “White people are only tools that the witchery manipulates,” he says, “and . . . we can deal with white people, with their machines and their beliefs. We can because we invented white people; it was Indian witchery that made the white people in the first place” (132). Betonie subverts the racist thinking that deludes us from seeing the real problem by presenting Tayo with a much deeper vision of what is wrong, one that posits race as part of the problem, not the problem itself. Resisting the progress of witchery requires that Indians break out of racist dichotomies and recognize that they are empowered to stop the witchery.

This intense worldview shift is at the crux of the novel’s argument about the nature of change and the way it must be managed. To reinforce it and to ensconce it in Native tradition, Silko follows Betonie’s revelation with the traditional story describing the witchery’s beginning in the world, which was

already complete  
even without white people.  
There was everything  
including witchery. (133)

A multiracial group of witches from across the globe, “some [with] slanty eyes / others [with] black skin,” engaged in competition when

one mysterious witch of indeterminate ethnic origin and gender came forward with a story that set into motion the things it described (133). The witch proceeds to tell of

Caves across the ocean  
 in caves of dark hills  
 white skin people  
 like the belly of a fish  
 covered with hair. (135)

These people being created through the witch's story "grow away" from the earth, sun, plants, and animals around them;

they see no life  
 When they look  
 they see only objects.  
 The world is a dead thing for them. (135)

These people will fear themselves and the world around them and, in turn, will lash out and destroy what they fear (135). They will migrate and bring with them disease and destruction, and in the end, the story wills itself into motion, creating the people and scenario it presents: "It's already coming. / It can't be called back" (138). With this story and all of its links to the contemporary era of ecological destruction, atomic warfare, and Euramerican expansion, "in a single, bold move, Silko subsumes all of European and Euro-American history and culture within a nativistic paradigm" (Cutchins 84). This tale, which Silko creates and presents as a traditional narrative in the book, offers a transcultural context for Tayo's personal battle. His struggle is everyone's struggle, insofar as the Nativist paradigm requires cultural revitalization for Native peoples as a way to help the rest of the world.

Tayo and Betonie go into the Chuska Mountains to perform a ceremony to help Tayo find a way out of the witchery at the heart of his sickness. As they move further into the mountains, "[Tayo] could see no signs of what had been set loose upon the earth; the highways, the towns, even the fences were gone," and he felt happy and strong (139). When he wakes the next morning, Tayo realizes that the land below

looks exactly like the sand paintings Betonie had made the night before in the hogan; he realizes that “there are no boundaries” and that “the mountains from all the directions had been gathered there that night” (145). With his faith in Betonie’s vision reaffirmed, Tayo receives his direction; Betonie draws a pattern of stars in the dirt, saying, “Remember these stars. . . . I’ve seen them and I’ve seen the spotted cattle; I’ve seen a mountain and I’ve seen a woman” (152). These four things become markers for Tayo’s journey, things he must encounter and understand in order to find the way out of the witchery.

As Tayo returns from Gallup and his encounter with Betonie, he runs into Harley and Leroy and so risks falling back into his old patterns. They are riding around and drinking with a Native woman they picked up named Helen Jean.<sup>4</sup> Tayo is hesitant to fall back in with them, but he does follow them for a while. This time Tayo is unable to fully participate in the group’s drinking and joking, because he now recognizes the system of witchery Betonie outlined for him. The next morning, Tayo ends up “trying to vomit out everything—all the past, all his life” (168). At this point in the novel, Tayo is at a crossroads where he realizes that he cannot physically and psychologically continue his life as it was:

The Scalp Ceremony lay to rest the Japanese souls in the green humid jungles, and it satisfied the female giant who fed on the dreams of warriors. But there was something else now, as Betonie said: it was everything they had seen—the cities, the tall buildings, the noise and the lights, the power of their weapons and machines. They were never the same after that: they had seen what the white people had made from the stolen land. (169)

More than the horror of killing in the war, the very social mechanisms that had made the war possible in the first place are the real source of their grief. The bare fact of the destruction and dispossession caused by witchery is what they are trying to drink away: “They tried to sink the loss in booze, and silence their grief with war stories about their courage, defending the land they had already lost” (169). The Scalp Ceremony allowed Tayo to come to terms with the war, but the violent social structure surrounding the war, especially Eur-

american colonization and imperialist urbanizing tendencies, remain. So, beyond the scope of the Scalp Ceremony, Betonie's larger ceremony must be completed to confront witchery at the source.

The next step in Tayo's transformation requires that he seek the rest of Betonie's visions in the mountains. He starts by driving south into the mountains to seek his Uncle Josiah's strayed cattle. The cattle themselves become markers in the novel for Indian resistance to white encroachment: They are skinny, unlike their more beefed up Hereford cousins; they are able to survive on the meager resources of the desert, unlike other cattle; and they prefer to range free, consistently breaking free of fences to head in a general southerly direction, where Josiah believes they originated. Despite the fact that others thought him foolish for purchasing such cattle, Josiah thought them the perfect livestock for the land where they live. They are adaptable, resourceful, and survivors, much like the Native people in the area. Josiah read stacks of books on breeding but would dismiss their ideas: "The problem was the books were written by white people who did not think about drought or winter blizzards or dry thistles, which the cattle had to live with" (75).<sup>5</sup> Peter Beidler recognizes the relation between these animals and what Tayo must do to survive: "They trust their own instincts, drift to the south, and survive by their own native and natural abilities. By the end of the novel Tayo has learned his lesson from them" (21). According to Beidler, Tayo survives by remaining closer to the natural world of the Pueblo and others around him are destroyed because they are separated from that world (21–22). The cattle provide him with a symbolic model for his survival.

While seeking the cattle, Tayo comes upon another of the four parts of Betonie's vision, Ts'eh, the Laguna mountain spirit who lives on Mount Taylor, possibly the most isolated setting in the whole novel: "There was no sign the white people had ever come to this land; they had no existence then, except as he remembered them" (184–85). In this place antithetical to the Euramerican-dominated continent, with its cities, progress, poverty, waste, and destruction, the parts of Betonie's vision converge: Tayo sees the pattern of stars Betonie marked in the sand; he is on the mountain with Ts'eh; and he is seeking the cattle that represent perseverance and survival for him-

self and his people. It is significant that Tayo has to move as far from human-developed landscapes as possible to achieve this part of the ceremony; he can't complete it in the cultural detritus of white witchery.

When Tayo locates the cattle on the land of a white rancher, he realizes that he will have to cut the fence and steal them back. This is a dangerous proposition, and Tayo wrestles with the implications of his act until he comes upon possibly the most central realization of the text. He wonders why he feels like he is stealing yet is reluctant to see the white rancher as having stolen the cattle in the first place. This is when he identifies "the lie" that "only brown-skinned people were thieves; white people didn't steal, because they always had the money to buy whatever they wanted" (191). He realizes how deeply he has internalized that lie and how it is part of the witchery he has been sent to combat:

The lie. He cut into the wire as if cutting away at the lie inside himself.

The liars had fooled everyone, white people and Indians alike; as long as people believed the lies, they would never be able to see what had been done to them or what they were doing to each other. . . . If the white people never looked beyond the lie, to see that theirs was a nation built on stolen land, then they would never be able to understand how they had been used by the witchery; they would never know that they were still being manipulated by those who knew how to stir the ingredients together: white thievery and injustice boiling up the anger and hatred that would finally destroy the world: the starving against the fat, the colored against the white. The destroyers had only to set it into motion, and sit back to count the casualties. But it was more than a body count; the lies devoured white hearts, and for more than two hundred years white people had worked to fill their emptiness; they tried to glut the hollowness with patriotic wars and with great technology and the wealth it brought. And always they had been fooling themselves and they knew it. (191)

Tayo's rage extends itself to a vision of the true extent of the witchery's destruction. He wants to scream at the whites who have hunted, fenced off, and bulldozed the natural world; he wants also to scream at "Indians like Harley and Helen Jean and Emo that the white things they admired and desired so much—the bright city lights and loud music, the soft sweet food, and the cars—all these things had been stolen, torn out of Indian land: raw living materials for their ck'o'yo manipulation" (204). Left with self-hatred and "barren land and dry rivers," Native peoples are party to the betrayal of the land as well through their participation in the witchery's course (204). Whites, too, have allowed themselves to be victims and perpetrators of the witchery:

Only a few people knew that the lie was destroying the white people faster than it was destroying Indian people. But the effects were hidden, evident only in the sterility of their art, which continued to feed off the vitality of other cultures, and in the dissolution of their consciousness into dead objects: the plastic and the neon, the concrete and steel. Hollow and lifeless as a witchery clay figure. And what little still remained to white people was shriveled like a seed hoarded too long, shrunken past its time, and split open now, to expose a fragile, pale leaf stem, perfectly formed and dead. (204)

Tayo is able to retrieve the cattle at great danger to himself, but this realization is possibly the most important thing he takes away from this part of the ceremony. Back at his family's ranch, Tayo lies on the same bed where he had previously slept restlessly with terrible dreams of the war; he realizes that "the dreams had been terror at loss, at something lost forever; but nothing was lost; all was retained between the sky and the earth, and within himself" (219). Tayo's ability to see the truth of his present position and the disorienting illusions of his earlier dreams and madness is the product of what Michael Hobbs calls a Bakhtinian "internally persuasive discourse," which allows him to "read radically" the texts and discourse presented to him by Betonie, Ts'eh, and others (304). Because Tayo can finally see the truth in these radical ways of seeing the world, he is

able to survive and overcome misleading discourses whereas others, such as Rocky, Harley, Leroy, and Emo, are not.

Tayo meets Ts'eh in the mountains as well, and her presence reinforces the sense of inner tranquility Tayo has achieved at the remote ranch. When they come across a dead calf, Ts'eh comments, "Death isn't much," and "sometimes they don't make it. That's all. It isn't very far away. . . . There are much worse things, you know. The destroyers: they work to see how much can be lost, how much can be forgotten. They destroy the feeling people have for each other" (229). The witchery clearly holds a danger beyond simple destruction by death; what it seeks to achieve is a cultural decimation and a human psychological toll that would make walking dead of everyone. This is an exact description of the kind of disconnected existence Tayo had after the war, and he recognizes himself in her words: "the thick white skin that had enclosed him, silencing the sensations of living, the love as well as the grief; and he had been left with only the hum of the tissues that enclosed him. He never knew how long he had been lost there, in that hospital in Los Angeles" (229). His existence as smoke becomes more fully realized here; the "white skin" of witchery enclosed him as it deadened him and, seemingly, left a significant part of him in that smoke-like existence in the sterile hospital buildings of the unnatural city. Ts'eh insists that the deadening comes from violence, that every time a violent act occurs in the name of witchery, it deadens the person(s) involved further, thus opening the door for more violence and the spread of witchery.

The immensity of the violence and destruction Tayo must fight is represented by the very spot where he experiences the most important moment of the ceremony. Remembering stories his grandmother told him about seeing the blast from the nuclear testing at Trinity site and the nuclear labs and uranium mines that mark the area around Laguna Pueblo, the symbolic depth of the place hits him. He is at the geographical crux of the ultimate result of the witchery, the symbolic birthplace of the atomic destruction that followed him all the way to the Pacific and back. Ironically, the all-inclusive nature of this destruction is also the possible source of humanity's non-violent resistance and regeneration:

From that time on, human beings were one clan again, united by the fate the destroyers planned for all of them, for all living things; united by a circle of death that devoured people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who had never known these mesas, who had never seen the delicate colors of the rocks which boiled up their slaughter. (246)

Tayo finds his personal moment of crisis when he almost murders Emo to avenge Emo's torture of Harley. Tayo finds that his hands go numb at the crucial moment when he can attack Emo, and Tayo retreats into the shadows away from the scene. "The witchery had almost ended the story according to its plan," he realizes (253). Had he gone through with the murder, people would have blamed him, Emo, the war, white people, or themselves and would have gone on, oblivious to the continuing destruction. However, by not participating in the violent cycle, Tayo is able to take the novel's thematic culminating moment and turn it in favor of traditional survival in the face of destruction.

After Emo and the others leave, Tayo collapses exhausted and dreams that "he was wrapped in a blanket in Josiah's wagon" and "Josiah was driving the wagon, old Grandma was holding him, and Rocky whispered 'my brother.' They were taking him home" (254). The dream signals his return home and ability to insert himself back into the comfort of his family. Harley and Leroy are later found dead in the wreckage of their truck, sealed in the vehicle "like the shiny metal coffin the Veterans Office bought for each of them. In that way it was not much different than if they had died at Wake Island or Iwo Jima: the bodies were dismembered beyond recognition and the coffins were sealed" (258–59). Pinkie is murdered by Emo, who escapes to California, which, Tayo comments, is "a good place for him" (260). Silko's ending highlights the destruction that Tayo has escaped even as it claims those around him. His ability to disengage from what the witchery wanted saves him, but it also saves others, the narrative suggests. It is imperative that "in order to remain regenerative, the power to live must not be used to destroy, ever; the question is (and was always) only whether it can survive the reality of the de-

structive potential invested here in the form of Emo and in the form of the ruined landscape where Emo feels so at home” (Nelson, “Function of Landscape” 164). The narrative concludes with a short bit of storytelling claiming the witchery “is dead for now,” having turned in upon itself. Though this is a reassuring ending, there is a note of caution in it that suggests that vigilance must be maintained to prevent the witchery’s ever returning again.

What this entails is at the heart of the thematic relevance of *Ceremony*. Not only must violence not be engaged but an entirely different way of looking at the world and society must be adopted to truly begin to see our way back from where the witchery has taken us. This kind of call to change and vigilance seems partly a product of what Catherine Rainwater calls the novel’s “spatially encoded episteme of instability” (128). From the constantly shifting plot and textual changes to Tayo’s disorienting experience of the war and the city, the subtle convergence of ceremonial elements in his healing, and the cautious hopefulness of the novel’s ending, the book requires a “model reader” to negotiate its instability just as Tayo negotiates his own mixed-blood struggle (128). Such a reader would deftly navigate the narrative and follow Tayo’s ceremonial discovery in a way that encourages a larger, revised, and radicalized understanding of the multi-faceted cultural and spiritual conflicts at work in the process of “witchery.” This kind of negotiation reveals Silko’s main point that “reality is the direct result of the versions of the world we construct” and we can do it carelessly or carefully—“we may either revise an uninhabitable reality or become its victims” (Rainwater 128).

As part of this tenuous process of cause and effect, the novel remains wary about the city with all of its facilitation of violence, poverty, and impersonal social relations. Coupled with this is an insistence on traditional landscape as absolutely necessary for ceremonial healing; it is the only place where Native peoples can properly begin to engage and resist witchery.<sup>6</sup> In the end, Tayo’s triumph is his ability to disengage from witchery with the help of his community and, in turn, to provide others with a model for breaking the destructive cycle. However, his path to healing and the ceremony he undertakes show the difficulty in standing against the destructive effects of Eur-

american colonization. Tayo's story seems to wrap up successfully enough, but Silko leaves the rest of us with a call for change that is incredibly daunting, even as we recognize its truth.

The true difficulty with Silko's vision is that her insistence on the primacy of Indigenous land bases as places of resistance leaves it unclear what is to be done in a largely urban and urbanizing world. One can't realistically envision pastoral retreat as a practical mode of resistance for most people, Indigenous or not. The city must be dealt with in order to create change in human societies. I do not think that Silko clearly resolves this in *Ceremony*, but I do believe she provides glimpses of how the urban might be reconciled with the traditional. Old Betonie is the prime example; he refuses to leave the city and, instead, finds a space overlooking it as a spot to simultaneously observe and resist the witchery, synthesizing its movements into his own ceremonial counterstrategies. At the same time, his knowledge and approach to contemporary experience is rooted in traditional Native methods, and he insists upon this same rootedness in Tayo. It is his syncretic medicine, along with Ku'oosh's more traditional methods, that heals Tayo. With such ceremony at the center of Tayo's worldview shift, it is clear that Euramerican culture will always be an integral part of his experience.

Silko's vision of Indians in contemporary culture is heavily invested in the idea of Indigenous people like Tayo and Betonie as "rooted cosmopolitans," to use a phrase employed by David Hollinger and other postethnic theorists (Hollinger 5). Tayo and Betonie fit the postethnic model of rooted cosmopolitanism insofar as they choose to maintain a connection to Native heritage while recognizing the value of cultural hybridity. As Hollinger points out, this latter aspect of cosmopolitanism "promotes multiple identities, emphasizes the dynamic and changing character of many groups, and is responsive to the potential for creating new cultural combinations" (3-4). These types of characters are central to Silko's writing as she explores the myriad interconnections between Laguna tradition and contemporary Euramerican culture, and in *Ceremony* she lays the groundwork for their processes of cultural mediation through Tayo's struggle.

Silko's use of Laguna tradition in the context of rooted cosmopolitanism emphasizes the adaptability and transformational quality of Diné tradition. In his recent history of the Diné, Peter Iverson recognizes these qualities as central to Navajo tradition and survival. He notes that the Diné always recognized the importance of prayer, ceremony, and "the promise of the Diné Bikéyah," but they also knew how fragile life and harmony were and that "contact with others might provide new benefits or pose unanticipated dilemmas" (21). However, Iverson notes that the benefits of new encounters usually outweighed the setbacks, and Navajo society was becoming "noteworthy for its members' willingness to look around the corner and over the next hill, for their curiosity about what might be gained by exploration and inquiry, and for their determination to do something well" (21). In many ways, this adaptability and willingness to experiment culturally is what set the Navajos apart from other area nations and was, in part, what allowed them to survive and maintain their sovereign status to a degree distinctive among contemporary Native nations.

Silko has been criticized for misappropriation of Laguna ceremony, and some traditionalist scholars have lowered their estimation of her work insofar as it seems to compromise Native sovereignty.<sup>7</sup> While I agree that the ethics of breaching cultural prohibitions is an important issue, we misread Silko if we limit our evaluation of her novel to this level. Whatever violations *Ceremony* makes in its use of Laguna ceremony do not preclude the novel's worth as a measure of the vitality of Native existence in the contemporary world. Indeed, her appropriation of Laguna tradition and her imagination of it as emergent and transformative is in line with the spirit of experimentation and adaptability recognized by Iverson as being central to Diné culture. Moreover, Silko's novel requires us to ultimately look beyond the specifics of Navajo cultural tradition in order to envision the role that tradition has in relation to global cultural and ecological trends. As important as Native sovereignty is to contemporary Indian lives, Silko's main object in *Ceremony* is to expand the boundaries of Laguna culture and tradition in order to show its relevance on a multicultural and global scale. Her rooted cosmopolitans, like

Tayo, must find ways to reconcile their Native sovereignty with the variety of their life experiences in order to maintain their existence, and the degree to which they are able to do this has implications for the survival of us all. The theme of witchery, as Silko posits it, and the power to resist it require a vision of human connectedness beyond boundaries of ethnicity and a view of tradition that is adaptable and expansive. Even if Tayo's immediate healing calls for return to family and tradition on the reservation, others like him will ultimately take up the battle for survival in non-traditional settings like the city. In Silko's broader vision, the battle against witchery must ultimately spread and revolutionize our cities, our energy sources, our foreign policy, and our interethnic interaction, and it can only begin person by person and must be vigilantly maintained the same way. The measure of ceremony's value, then, for Silko is its ability to illuminate ways to achieve these transformations for Natives and non-Natives alike.

#### NOTES

1. For an extensive study of the history of the development of urban Indian populations, see Fixico, *The Urban Indian Experience in America*. Also of interest is Lobo and Peters, *American Indians and the Urban Experience*, a multidisciplinary collection of essays.

2. Alexie's *Indian Killer* (1996) is a particularly bleak look at the effects of urban Indian life, while Sarris's *Grand Avenue* (1994) and *Watermelon Nights* (1998) show the possibility for community building in urban Indian neighborhoods. Belin's book, *In the Belly of My Beauty* (1999), offers a moving series of poetic meditations on the dynamics of identity at work in moving between city and reservation.

3. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon characterizes the three stages of development in the African intellectual who leaves home, becomes acculturated to the colonizing culture, and returns home only to find himself struggling with his hybridized identity. This concept can be valuably compared to that of the Indian who has experienced the Euramerican world and has returned to the reservation torn between his experiences in the two places. Though Tayo is not strictly an intellectual or a writer, as Fanon's figure is, his process of self-identification follows roughly similar lines. In Fanon's first phase, "the native intellectual gives proof that he has assimilated the culture

of the occupying power. His writings correspond point by point with those of his opposite numbers in the mother country. This is the period of unqualified assimilation" (178–79). This recalls Tayo's participation in the war and the influence of Rocky's assimilationist attitude upon him.

The second phase entails a "disturbed" state for the Native, as "he decides to remember what he is," but "since he only has exterior relations with his people, he is content to recall their life only" (178–79). Sometimes this recollection can be wistful and humorous, "but often too it is symptomatic of a period of distress and difficulty, where death is experienced, and disgust too" (178–79). This kind of reflection based on homesickness leading to disturbance and distress echoes Tayo's own descent into madness during the war. This creates an acute moment of crisis for Tayo, which sparks the rest of his journey to health in the book.

Finally, Fanon posits a third stage, a "fighting phase" where the Native intellectual "turns himself into an awakener of the people; hence comes a fighting literature, a revolutionary literature, and a national literature" (178–79). This stage can be roughly compared to Tayo's final realization of the witchery and his return home to tell of his ability to conquer it for the time being. In this way, Silko's narrative, because it is Tayo's as well, becomes a kind of postcolonial revolutionary literature that envisions sweeping change for the survival of all people.

4. In this portion of the narrative, we get a glimpse into Helen Jean's past and her impressions of Harley, Leroy, and Tayo. Having left her family home in Towac and gone to Gallup and other places in search of opportunity, she often falls in with Indian veterans and offers them companionship and casual sex in return for drinks and money. She knows that "these Indians who fought in the war [are] full of stories about all the places they've seen. San Diego, Oakland, Germany, the Philippines," and when she first left home she believed the stories she heard (163). Her credulity stemmed from her own first encounter with the city:

She had walked around, staring up at the tall buildings, and all the big neon signs on Central Avenue. Every time she rode an elevator then, she thought of the old people at home, who shook their heads at the mention of elevators and tall buildings or juke boxes that could play a hundred different records. The old Utes said it was a lie; there were no such things. But she saw it every day, and for a long time when she saw these things, she felt embarrassed for the old people at home, who did

not believe in these things. So she was careful not to make the same kind of mistake herself; and she believed all the stories the guys told.  
(163)

Helen Jean's faith in the progress of Euramerican culture echoes Rocky's; they both believe that technology and progress are unquestionably good and that disbelief in Euramerican ways is pathetic and backward. The main difference with Helen Jean is that she has lived long enough to see the foolishness in her original faith and wonder. She has begun to see the lie behind Euramerican prosperity and progress, especially as it concerns Native Americans.

5. Josiah's cattle set up a poignant moment of conflict between Rocky and Tayo. Rocky protests that the cattle breeding books are authoritative, that the authors "know everything there is to know about beef cattle" (76). "That's the trouble with the way the people around here have always done things," Rocky complains. "They never knew what they were doing" (76). Rocky's faith in Euramerican knowledge and his resentment of what he perceives as backward Indian ways confuses Tayo, who feels sad as he begins to believe what Rocky says. The cattle represent a moment where Rocky's dismissal of Indian ways is a threat to the continuation of those ways. However, after Tayo's return home after the war (and Rocky's destruction in his faith in a Euramerican cause), he is able to return to seek the cattle as a part of his healing ceremony. His seeking them represents embracing the traditional, practical ways that Josiah espoused when he first bought them.

6. Jeff Karem has critiqued structuralist readings of *Ceremony* for their tendency to read "the healing process in the novel as the realignment of intracultural vectors" particular to the Laguna people but to neglect the "extracultural factors" in the novel that globalize Silko's vision beyond the Laguna Pueblo (21–22). Though I agree that Silko's global vision must be addressed to adequately understand the major themes of *Ceremony* and her subsequent work, I also believe that in *Ceremony* Silko emphasizes the importance of traditional lands as a place where healing must begin. Regardless of where Tayo goes after he completes the ceremony, the ceremony itself must start on Native ground; it is not something that could be begun in the Euramerican city.

7. See Allen, "Special Problems in Teaching Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony*," for a primary source in this debate. Allen asserts that Silko utilizes Laguna ceremonial material not meant to be reproduced outside of the clan.

Though “teaching a native text without recourse to ethnographic as well as historical glossing is an exercise in obscurity,” she says, “to use the oral tradition directly is to run afoul of native ethics” and “using the tradition while contravening it is to do violence to it” (379). Allen gives little solution to this quandary other than maintaining an awareness of what is and is not culturally off limits and teaching and writing around it. Though I agree that sensitivity to cultural prohibitions is necessary when using traditional material, I also resist the potentially crippling effect of such prohibitions on the study of work like Silko’s. It is valuable to consider the caution provided by Karem in my note 6 regarding the importance of “extracultural factors” to understanding the global implications of Silko’s use of Navajo tradition.

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## REVIEW ESSAY

# Rhetorical Removals

DANIEL HEATH JUSTICE

In the Great American Indian novel, when it is finally written, all of the white people will be Indians and all of the Indians will be ghosts.

Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d'Alene) "How to Write the Great American Indian Novel"

The stubborn insistence by North American Indigenous peoples on surviving the ravages of colonization has been an issue of constant fascination and frequent frustration to Eurowesterners since the onset of Invasion. The long-promised vanishing never took place, in spite of centuries of slaughter, dispossession, and marginalization; lynch mobs, politicians, and well-heeled social reformers alike have failed to make Indians a memory, though not for lack of trying. The endurance of Indian nations is more than just an accident of history or circumstance—it's a meaningful and daily assertion of physical, cultural, and political continuity.

It's perhaps easy to understand why reactionaries—from extremist conservatives to profiteering capitalists to racist wingnuts—dislike Indians, considering that treaties, federal Indian policies, and the vigorous exercise of tribal sovereignty make the economic exploitation of tribal lands rather difficult (though, as the recent BIA trust fund scandals have demonstrated, by no means impossible). Yet it's always a bit puzzling why so many who present themselves as being on the side of progressive politics seem to resent Native peoples—after all, according to conventional wisdom it's those on the left who are supposed to be

the ones who defend the rights of the marginalized, oppressed, and underrepresented. From the nineteenth-century “Friends of the Indian” to anti-whaling environmentalists, New Age seekers, appropriationist artisans, and academic poachers, many who claim to admire the idea of Indians tend to have surprisingly little respect for the lived realities and opinions of Indians, especially when they don’t fit the docile stereotypes of the doomed noble savage.

Such a puzzle becomes easier to untangle when we reflect on the fact that the more superficial currents of liberal activism are posited on a model of “uplift”—that is, the idea that the downtrodden must be lifted up to the social status of the privileged but ostensibly sympathetic activist-observer. In such a model, there’s no reflection on whether or not the observer’s status quo standards hold any appeal for anyone else and no thought that those standards and values might be considered dangerous or even corrosive to those being “helped”—especially as so many models of uplift tend to ignore the more pervasive and systemic sources of inequity and oppression. Rather, the assumption is that the activist-observer comes from a morally or intellectually unimpeachable position of superiority, and that it’s not only good sense for the downtrodden to be transformed but an unavoidable duty, both for the pious person doing the lifting and for the grateful ones being lifted. Multiculturalism is thus okay as long as it doesn’t require any substantive change in the existing cultural values or economic system—in short, if it doesn’t require anything of those in power beyond a cosmetic change. When the downtrodden show little interest in modeling themselves after the uplifter’s image, when they insist on a more significant realignment of economic or epistemological structures, or when they seek to redefine the process to better serve their own needs and not the ideals of their self-ordained saviors, the response is often bafflement, anger, and, all too often, erasure.

Not all liberal politics are tainted by this self-serving rhetoric; deep and abiding bonds of friendship, mutual respect, intellectual engagement, and loving kinship have been the foundation of many successful alliances between Native and non-Native peoples and have led to stronger relations between the two and the positive improve-

ment of Indian political and social conditions. Still, the shadow-side of liberalism's shallower proponents is all too real and destructive, especially when it masquerades as respect. I was forcefully reminded of this fact while reading Elvira Pulitano's *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*. While Pulitano ostensibly asserts a provocative new model for thoughtful analysis of Native literature through interpretive strategies proposed by Native critics, beneath the revolutionary veneer her argument is remarkably retrogressive, working to actively marginalize, silence, and displace tribal voices.

In her stated attempt at mapping the contours of an identifiable Native American literary critical theory, Pulitano addresses the works of six prominent Native critics—Paula Gunn Allen, Robert Warrior, Craig Womack, Greg Sarris, Louis Owens, and Gerald Vizenor—by dividing them into two general categories: those who propose a “separatist form of discourse, one that argues for a ‘Nativist’ approach but that inevitably runs the risk of remaining trapped in essentialist positions by merely reversing Western binaries,” and those whose work is “an attempt to mediate between differing discourses and epistemologies” (5). Allen, Warrior, and Womack are placed, along with Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, Jace Weaver, and Jack Forbes, among the naïve, intellectually limited, and borderline racist “Nativists”—a term that clearly invokes legacies of anti-immigration bigotry and exclusion—while Sarris, Owens, and Vizenor exemplify the enlightened cosmopolitan hybridists who not only acknowledge their hybridity but make it central to their critical expressions. (Whether the latter are as easily separated from concerns of tribal nationhood is another question entirely. Certainly, Sarris's *Watermelon Nights*, which deals in part with the Pomo struggle for U.S. federal recognition and the material consequences of social marginalization, is to some degree an extension of the critical questions of *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*, yet the texts that would complicate Pulitano's depoliticized reading never enter the analysis.)

Pulitano reminds the reader that “those familiar with something called *Native American literature* are fully aware that such literature is, in the end, the product of conjunctural cultural practices, the Eur-american and Native American, and that, whatever our geographic,

cultural, or ideological position, we cannot dismiss such a crucial premise in our interpretive acts" (8). Sarris and Owens are praised for their direct expression of a "hybridized, multidirectional, and multi-generic discursive mode, one that reflects the crosscultural nature of Native texts and ultimately and subversively reinvents the monologic utterance of Euramerica"; Vizenor is credited with having these favorable attributes to an even greater extent, providing "the most provocative and definitely the most subversive way in which Native American authors are significantly challenging the parameters of Western, Eurocentric theory" (14). Here, at least, Pulitano's position is overt: the most sophisticated and intellectually rigorous Native literature is that which works to subvert Eurowestern epistemologies through the explicit invocation of hybridity, both of the authors themselves and of their work. It can only be reactive or responsive to the Eurowest, never proactive or concerned with something besides cross-cultural mediation. Anyone who doesn't continually exclaim the constitutive significance of Eurowestern influence on contemporary Indianness is tagged a "Nativist," an enemy of "cosmopolitanism" and cultural exchange.

If all Native literature is thus dependent upon Eurowestern influence for its very existence, by this logic it follows that any attempt to propose a Native-centered reading becomes "an ironic contradiction," especially as these critics "are heavily and inevitably implicated in the discourse of the metropolitan center" (9). To read, write, and speak English is to be indicted as a collaborator in the great hybridity experiment of North America—as Pulitano reminds us *ad nauseum*, any attempt to speak from a Native perspective "amounts to a dismissal of the mutual interdependencies that more than five hundred years of history have thrust on the American continent" (81). As a result, Allen's gynocratic realignment of American Indian texts, Warrior's insistence on closer attention to decolonizing models of intellectual sovereignty, and Womack's reading of Creek literature through Creek social history and values are presented as being more than simply misguided—their refusal to privilege Eurowestern influences becomes "dangerous[,] as they continue to ossify Native American literary production, as well as Native identity, into a sort of museum culture" (9). It doesn't matter that each of these scholars at

various times discusses Native cultural exchanges, alliances, and interactions both before and after colonization, thus demonstrating the dynamic adaptability of Indigenous North America; to place Indians at the center of inquiry on their own terms is represented ultimately as both a blind act of denial and a deadening replication of Eurowestern stereotypes about Indians.

There are many ideas in the book that are objectionable but none more than the fundamental assumption upon which its “Native American critical theory” is posited: To claim to speak as an Indian is to be deluded, as “authentic” Native people haven’t really existed since 1492. (While critiquing Warrior and Womack for essentialism that neither in fact asserts, Pulitano operates from essentialist assumptions of her own—implying that “the West” is a monolithic, static epistemological and ideological entity while Indigenosity of the modern age is infinitely compromised away from its “pure” pre-Invasion state—that are veiled in ostensibly objective hybridist positions.) Influence is thus seen as a corruptive element; there’s no possibility for Native people to adapt to alien experiences and still remain Native. Although Sarris, Owens, and Vizenor all express, to varying degrees, a concern with the lived expressions of tribal specificity—Pomo, Choctaw-Cherokee, Anishinaabe—it’s the mixed-blood matrix containing these specificities that matters to Pulitano as the most meaningful point of analytical access. She confuses Eurowestern concepts of individualistic *race* with Indigenous principles of communally oriented *kinship*; the former is a pseudoscientific measure of ultimately diminishing content, whereby intermarriage with non-Indians dilutes the pre-Invasion innocence/purity of the Indian body, but the latter, which more accurately reflects the epistemological foundations of most Native communities throughout North America, allows for adaptive context—change without erasure. Relationships don’t cancel one another out; I can be a lover, husband, son, uncle, brother, nephew, and cousin at the same time. Thus it is that Native people can encounter European materials—horses, languages, clothing, ceremonies, ideas—and integrate them into their own material cultures, value systems, politics, and world-views without losing their Indigenosity.

For example, if the chimes on a powwow jingle dress are made of Skoal can lids, do they become indigenized by their very function on a jingle dress and within the meaningful context of a jingle dress dance? Couldn't Indianness always be about relationships and their kinship contexts, rather than just a fixed racial or cultural state? For Pulitano, the answer to these questions seems to be no—anything identified as “Native” without pre-Invasion purity can *only* be hybrid and non-Indian. To insist on the validity of Native voices in all their complexity to exist or to speak of Indian concerns, as the “Nativists” do, would seem to be a hopeless task, as Pulitano insists that “such Nativist approaches are simply not viable owing to the fact that the Native traditions themselves are inaccessible except in their always-already mediated or hybridized state” (189). Again, there's no acknowledgment of the adaptive humanity of Indian people—no one expects contemporary U.S. citizens to walk around unwashed and in powdered wigs, hose, and buckled shoes to be considered “American,” but Indian traditions can only be accessible or viable if they exist in the very museum state that Pulitano condemns “Nativist” critics of perpetuating.

The problem, as mentioned earlier, is that the critics named as “Nativist” aren't dismissive of non-Natives, their influence, or their contributions to Indian communities (although Allen admittedly comes closest to that position in some of her works); rather, their primary intellectual and ethical focus is, quite simply, how Indians speak about Indian issues. Womack himself points out in the introduction to *Red on Red* that a Creek-centered literary theory isn't the only way to read Creek literature, while asserting quite reasonably that it *is* an important way to do so. The field of Native literary criticism is filled to overflowing with scholars who are interested in hybridity, mediation, cross-cultural dialogue, and other ways of communicating Indian ideas with non-Indians. These are not bad things in themselves; indeed, it's vital to educate non-Natives about the true histories, intellectual and artistic traditions, and continuing presence of Indigenous peoples in this hemisphere. Yet this isn't the only important or even most useful sphere of intellectual and pedagogical significance. To privilege as a primary audience the people whom the

literature is intended to represent hardly seems like an unreasonable or intellectually weak position; indeed, it seems a rather urgent enterprise given the systemic marginalization of Indians from every aspect of Indian-themed discourse in North America. Pulitano asserts that “to envision a Native American theory as a form of authentic indigenous discourse, one uncontaminated by the practices of European analysis, is . . . simply not possible” (190); the trouble is, of the primary “Nativist” writers she castigates, neither Warrior nor Womack make this claim, and Allen’s own position is far more complex than such a statement would indicate. It’s a straw man argument that fundamentally misrepresents both the intellectual and ethical dimensions of their works.

In Pulitano’s study, only the tricksterlike mixed-bloods (Sarris, Owens, and especially Vizenor) who seek cross-cultural understanding have an intellectually viable perspective, largely because they keep Eurowesterners firmly within the conversation. Though Allen, Warrior, and Womack are also of mixed ancestry, their commitment to tribal specificity keeps them firmly in the “Nativist” camp away from what are apparently the more cooperative mixed-bloods. Even then, however, their Indianness is a danger, as Pulitano notes in reference to the mediatory significance of Sarris’s book, *Keeping Slug Woman Alive*: “The fact that Sarris is part Indian does not make his reading more comprehensible; quite the contrary, it raises still more questions concerning his position as an Indian academic reading Native literary texts” (110). The intellectual or interpretive dimensions of personal experience are erased; Sarris’s knowledge of Pomo cultural expressions and oral traditions, while explicitly never intended to be perceived by audiences as authoritative, isn’t even given the opportunity to engage in the very dialogue Pulitano trumpets—the very fact that he assumes a voice as an Indian writer makes his words suspect and, implied by her own choice of terms, nearly incomprehensible for any sort of cross-cultural conversation. Even his Indianness undermines his Indianness.

Such a presumption is starkly self-serving, as it leaves the only possible position of justified inquiry to be that of cross-cultural mediation and interpretation, one that “devise[s] new, creative ways of

doing theory and, ultimately, challenge[s] the West to reconsider the meanings and values of its own cultural traditions” (188)—in other words, the text becomes less about American Indian literary expression and more about how that expression helps Eurowesterners better understand themselves. This isn’t a new or novel approach to the literature; if anything, it’s a substantively reactionary return to long-established traditions of playing Indian to understand and figure Eurowestern identities and claims to the land. Native texts become in essence a mirror for non-Natives to observe and recreate themselves.

We might ask, then, what happens to Native people at this moment of scrutiny, but as Pulitano repeatedly implies that Indians exist only in memory or as ever-interpolated and hybridized Eurowesterners, such a concern is ultimately irrelevant. Native literature becomes yet another resource to enrich the lives of non-Natives, and the voices, material social conditions, political assertions, and spiritual expressions of living, breathing Indian people fade away to a whisper if they don’t somehow serve non-Native interests.

In the conclusion of *Toward a Native American Critical Theory*, Pulitano makes the following statement: “On the border of different cultures, a mediator and interpreter of cultures myself, I produce a discourse on Native American theory, not meaning to appropriate or colonize, but hoping to foster genuine crosscultural understanding” (191). Given her misrepresentations and presumptions throughout the text—from the concerns stated above to her condescending dismissal of Native spiritual expressions, misreadings of primary texts, and almost total erasure of Native social and political realities—such a claim seems disingenuous at best.

Whatever her goals may have been, the book’s function is rather more insidious, as it works, both directly and indirectly, to rhetorically remove Indians from any place in the critical discussion except as hybrid trail guides and cross-cultural scouts for non-Native homesteaders, or as shape-shifting shadows playing language games that, when stripped of political or social context, are more masturbatory than meaningful. Tribal nationhood is absent here, as are the treaty rights, land claims, cultural recovery, spiritual expression, and fulfillment of kinship obligations that appear again and again as meaning-

ful and significant concerns throughout the body of texts we understand as Native literature, including works by Sarris, Owens, and Vizenor. In Pulitano's model, there are no real communities, only tricky hybrid and heteroglot individuals who tell stories to themselves or to non-Native tourists but don't connect those stories to relationships with the rest of Creation.

Ultimately, whether asserting a tribally specific or mixed-blood critical aesthetic, the only place for Native peoples in this model of "Native American critical theory" is as ghosts—invisible, voiceless, and willfully forgotten.

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## CREATIVE PIECE

### Song to Tsuguntsalala

RAVEN HAIL

Little Spirit Bird, I wonder would you sing for me?  
Little Spirit Bird, for I have gone a-wandering.  
Sing The Rising Sun, The Bright and Honey-Golden One.  
Little Spirit Bird, O let me hear you sing.

Little Spirit Bird, in The Light of Day each day,  
Ask Her, Spirit Bird, to keep the dark away.  
When will I be One with The Nantahala Sun?  
Little Spirit Bird, O let me hear you say.

Hear the echoes ring from Heaven there above us.  
Make The Mountain sing your litany of love.  
Sing an Evensong to keep me from all wrong.  
Give me by choice the voice of The Turtledove.

Little Spirit Bird, I wonder could you pray for me?  
Tell The Midnight Sun I will change my way today.  
Tell me, what must I do to be truly like you?  
Little Spirit Bird, O let me hear you say.

Little Spirit Bird, please let me hear you pray.

#### NOTES

Tsuguntsalala is a bright, beautiful little bird, possibly red, possibly speckled—like an Oriole—one of the Immortals.

The Sun and Sunlight are references to the Cherokee Sun Goddess.

## Book Reviews

Patrice E. M. Hollrah. *The Old Lady Trill, The Victory Yell: The Power of Women in Native American Literature*. New York: Routledge, 2004. 195 pp.

Kathryn W. Shanley

Discussions of scholarship on gender in Native American studies bring to mind the work of academics such as Paula Gunn Allen, Beatrice Medicine, Clara Sue Kidwell, Patricia Albers, A. LaVonne Ruoff and Rayna Green, women who began, during the 1960s and 1970s, to explore topics about Native American women's lives, their literary, political, cultural, and historical legacies. In the 1980s, Wesley Thomas and Sue-Ellen Jacobs, among others, extended the discussion considerably with their focus on sexualities and gender formation—their recognition of the multiple genders within tribal societies and the lives today of people who have come to be called two-spirits.

Patrice E. M. Hollrah's book *The Old Lady Trill, The Victory Yell*, fits well into the scholarly conversations of the past three or so decades on Native American gender issues but more in the strand that re-envision the roles of women in tribal roles as mothers, partners, and community activists than in the strand that examines sexuality. Hollrah focuses her study on depictions of Native American women as characters in contemporary Native American literature with the assertion that “the political ramifications of gender complementarity

in Native American literature result in strong female characters” (1). In relation to the concept of complementarity, Hollrah offers readings of the works of four major canonical figures in the field: Zitkala-Ša (Lakota), Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo), Louise Erdrich (Turtle Mountain Chippewa), and Sherman Alexie (Spokane/Coeur d’Alene).

Hollrah’s phrase, “the political ramifications of gender complementarity,” carries tremendous weight as an assertion of the importance of Native women’s lives and work within their own communities—especially if we accept that gender complementarity “exists regardless of whether the tribe is matriarchal, patriarchal or both” (172). The full picture of what that may mean has to be fleshed out in scholarship beyond literary criticism; nonetheless, this book contributes to that process despite the fact that it does not take up ideas about traditional tribal societies that socially construct(ed) multiple gender roles—beyond the two implied in complementarity. The broad stroke of gender studies (without reference to alternative sexualities) offered by this text fills a gap in scholarship and offers close readings of important works in the canon of Native American literature.

Extensive evidence in ethnographic, folkloric, historical, and other materials on Indigenous thought and worldview(s) does exist to change popular conceptions of Indigenous women as flat, single-dimensional figures. Unfortunately, American popular culture perpetually spins out the old stereotypes. Hollrah’s effort to move away from the tired clichés is refreshing and lends help to teachers, in particular, who want to focus on the roles of Native women in their classes. Quoting Erdrich, “Women are strong, strong, terribly strong” (*The Blue Jay’s Dance* 12), Hollrah unites the ideas of Native survival and individual women’s ability to act to hold families and communities together.

Touting the strength of Native American women, however, begs the question: strong as opposed to whom? In other words, are Native American women strong in relation to white women or men, in relation to non-Native women, or in relation to Native men? Or is the strength Hollrah explicates a strength that stands in opposition to the American popular culture portrayals of Native women—as prin-

cesses, drudges, concubines, or guides through the wilderness? At times, we get clues in all directions to these questions, but Hollrah could be more explicit in addressing her purpose. For example, she writes, “Expectations of women who subscribed to the Victorian model contrast to those of Yankton women. [In addition to the taking on domestic duties . . .] Zitkala-Ša maintains political power typical for a Yankton woman” (40). A Victorian white woman, she argues, would be subjugated to her husband. While Hollrah’s observation seems valid in many ways, ethnographic or historical evidence would strengthen her argument. Moreover, not all Victorian women lived the lives depicted in Henry James novels; many labored day in and day out to provide and care for their families without support from husbands.

Although I found all chapters of the text engaging, I most appreciated the chapter on Zitkala-Ša’s life and work for its rich historical contextualization. Hollrah leaves her readers with a deep sense of what it meant to Zitkala-Ša to be a Native American woman in a time of world-shaking change for American Indigenous peoples. She played a vital part in fighting for policy reform. The chapter, “‘We Must Be Masters of Our Circumstances’: Rhetorical Sovereignty as Political Resistance in the Life and Work of Zitkala-Ša,” hones in on Zitkala-Ša’s imperative to herself and others to do something “now before any more people die” (50). In contrast to many of Erdrich’s women characters whom Hollrah describes as living “autonomous lives” and succeeding at “whatever kind of work they choose” (131), Zitkala-Ša often suffers a disconnect within herself, for “when she return[s] to her reservation, . . . she is caught within a relationship of negative reciprocity: She is not able to feel comfortable giving to or receiving from her community” (36). Hollrah captures the poignancy of grief in Zitkala-Ša’s position.

Hollrah provides Native contexts for grasping the historical trauma and strength of endurance of Silko’s Ayah in “Lullabye.” She pulls together connections among all of Erdrich’s finely drawn women characters and locates in Alexie a deep respect for the central place of women in Indian communities. Much of the book, however, seems aimed at dispelling popular culture myths and contrasting

Native American women's power to the image white feminists might have of Indians. The author might have engaged the complexity of current feminist thought and theory more. Dropping the Native-white feminism oppositional structuring device would also have enriched the conversation considerably.

*The Old Lady Trill* provides tremendously valuable background information on the authors and their works, with astute close readings to guide readers and teachers. The work contributes in important ways to the study of female depictions in Native American literature for more probing of questions related to gender construction, oppression, and diversity itself.

LeAnne Howe. *Evidence of Red: Poems and Prose*. Cambridge, UK: Salt Press, 2005. 112 pp.

Craig S. Womack

Many of us first became aware of LeAnne Howe as a satirist of the first order after reading her short story "An American in New York," anthologized by Paula Gunn Allen in 1989 in the collection *Spider Woman's Granddaughters*. Before that Howe was an Indian, a Choctaw to be exact, a job she has managed to hold on to until this day. I only mention this because when one is called to be a satirist this is not always easy, at least if one is good at what one does. Along with Creek writer Durango Mendoza's story "Summer Water and Shirley," which appears in Natachee Momaday's very early collection of Native American literature, titled *American Indian Authors* (1972), Howe's "American in New York" is one of the finest short stories in literature of the American, Native American, or any other sort.

In "An American in New York," Howe's poetic riff on America's most sacred words (all have to do with money), her depiction of Indian reoccupation of former Indian-held lands, of no holds-barred sexuality, commitment to sense of place down to the details of garbage on New York City streets, and of the nuclear meltdown of the melting pot create some of her most delicious ironies.

Readers will not be disappointed in her latest work, *Evidence of*

*Red*, easily as sassy, saucy, and sexy. “Naked, she goes down on us, / her flaming hair burns us brown” (7). Lines about the sun in the poem “Hashi Mi Hali,” in case you are wondering.

Everything I write for *SAIL* is always too long (OK, everything I write for anyone is always too long), so I will limit my comments to a single piece, the prose writing “Choctalking on Other Realities,” in order to get the most out of my word allotment, even though I am just as enthusiastic about other parts of the book. Like “An American in New York,” “Choctalking” is a story about intersecting and competing jurisdictions, the tensions going in and out of borders, in short, disputes over who constitutes the indigenes of a given geography. What better city to illustrate this point than Jerusalem? The significance of Howe’s imaginative act is an insistence that Indians have something to say about the world beyond Indian country, that Native studies is not inherently parochial, that tribally specific approaches have global implications.

Thus the title. The Otherness of “Other Realities,” is alleviated to whatever degree the Choctaw narrator of the story is willing to scrutinize her relationship to the rest of the world. Imagining Jerusalem in relation to Choctaws might be seen by some as a largely romantic act. Such a vision is not idealized in the story, however. In fact, it is most contentious. A Jewish resident of the city tells the narrator her great-grandmother was Cherokee, yet neither narrator nor Jerusalemite is able to agree on the terms of Indian or Middle Eastern history. It is not a warm and fuzzy story about overcoming cultural differences.

Add to this complexity Howe’s movement in and out of spatial and temporal frames—from the restaurant at Will Rogers “International” airport where the narrator was waitressing in 1970, which became its own entry point into battle as young men left for boot camp and beyond (the “beyond,” of course, being Southeast Asia) to the narrator’s return to the streets of Jerusalem, culminating in a 1992 Palestinian protest she witnesses that ends in violence. Somewhere in there she’s also back in Bethany, Oklahoma, as a school girl who sings “Jesus Loves the Little Children” the wrong way and has to run for her life. This is one part of the story no Oklahoman will read as metaphorical.

Howe has a knack for resurrecting characters in multiple time frames as we know from her other creative works. The characters in “Choctalking” resist straightforward reenactments of previous lives, becoming something different each time they surface in a new time zone. Nina, the Ukrainian Jew, who survived the Nazis and the massacre at Babi Yar only to end up working in an airport restaurant in Oklahoma City in 1970, is leading a Palestinian protest on the streets of Jerusalem in 1992.

In both “An American in New York” and “Choctalking,” the narrator is a tourist, an expatriate of sorts, even in her own country. In “Choctalking” she ends up mediating between various warring factions: as a union steward in 1970 trying to keep the peace among her restaurant workers at the OKC airport, marginalized and displaced persons whose sufferings fail to unite them, and on the streets of Jerusalem in 1992 as she intercedes on behalf of those the Israeli soldiers drag away, including Nina, her former employee.

What happens to the American (in literature) who ends up abroad? Perhaps the foreign environment confronts him with external realities that illuminate aspects of his character that are less than noble. Or, away from home, confronted with a different set of mores, he feels inclined to bust loose and let his crew cut down. On his more moderate days, he might form relationships with an American colony abroad, those buoying each other up against the onslaught of an unfamiliar environment, usually a group of friends whose exodus from America only opens them up to a new set of problems, often due to their own moral failings. He might encounter a whole different set of rules in the “Old World” that throw him into a state of confusion regarding his “New World” upbringing.

Yet the narrator in “Choctalking” seems to have been set on foreign soil for a somewhat different purpose: to see and to intercede. To the soldiers she pleads, “Don’t hurt her, it’s Nina. Can’t you see? She’s a survivor of Babi Yar.” Yet the Israelis, rather than recognizing Nina as an elder, demand that the narrator return home and forget about Nina. In response to the admonition, “*No one gets hurt if they do what they’re told,*” (italics in the original) the narrator screams, to anyone wise enough to listen, “No, it’s a lie. RUN.”

This is a different kind of gait than “keep that Indian girl running,” one that involves a resistance, rather than capitulation, to power, including a protest against Israeli violence over Israelis of various racial, religious, and cultural hues, and, closer to home, American dominance over fellow Americans. (Consider these lines from another story titled “The Lie”: “After September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush told Americans to go shopping—if it would make us feel better. So I headed first to Jordan. From there I decided to shop in the Souk in Syria into the homelands of Abraham and St. Paul” [93].)

All of this may seem a bit presumptuous. What gives a Choctaw the right to assess the state of the state of Israel? A scarier question, I believe, is what happens if Choctaws default from just such assessments? Sovereignty has to be able to see past its own belly button. Such vision, in fact, is in its own best interest. This does not have to sink into mysticism. At the moment of this writing there is probably not a city of any size anywhere within Choctaw jurisdiction in Oklahoma that does not have sons and daughters in Iraq. Scrutinizing situations beyond Choctaw country such as the one in the Middle East is essential to Choctaw survival in the most literal of senses. How much information are young people in Oklahoma Indian communities getting in regards to the war the United States is waging?

While to some degree “Choctalking and Other Realities” may seem a bit Felliniesque with its absurd comings and goings, the narrator does not give in to hopelessness or a sense of relativism that bogs down in futility given the existence of all these competing groups with contradictory claims about who owns what. Those who pray, both Muslim and Jew, palms toward the sky, strike the narrator as interceding with the sun. One layman, a vendor outside the mosque, attributes this interpretation to the narrator’s cultural ignorance. She gets the idea from her recollections of Choctaws praying in a solar fashion she recalls from back home.

It is these points of resistance to the official story, to the accepted definition of what constitutes prayer, nation, and boundary, that seem to be the defining moments here: the Knesset member who prays for Palestinians, the Ukrainian death camp survivor who protests Israeli injustice, the school kid who dares to revise “Jesus Loves the Little Chil-

dren,” the storyteller who heads for the Middle East instead of the mall, the narrator who insists on the facts of history before claiming relations with a Cherokee descendant.

Howe’s insistence on fighting the powers that choose our definitions for us and rigorous empathy, one that both seeks connections and examines the things that separate us from other peoples, are essential in today’s world.



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SAM MCKEGNEY recently defended his doctoral thesis, “Reclamations of the ‘Dis-Possessed’: Narratives of Survivance by Indigenous Survivors of Canada’s Residential Schools,” at Queen’s University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. The present article is a refined excerpt from one chapter of that endeavor. Sam has published on the Jesuit relations and Native writers such as Anthony Apakark Thrasher. His research interests include modern Cana-

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JOHN PURDY is a professor of English at Western Washington University. His works include *Word Ways: The Novels of D'Arcy McNickle* (1990) and *The Legacy of D'Arcy McNickle: Writer, Historian, Activist* (1996), which he edited. He has published poetry and fiction in national journals and numerous articles about and interviews with Native American authors, including James Welch, Leslie Marmon Silko, N. Scott Momaday, Louis Owens, Simon Ortiz, Sherman Alexie, and Elizabeth Cook Lynn. His most recent book, with James Ruppert, is *Nothing but the Truth: An Anthology of Native American Literatures* (2000).

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CRAIG S. WOMACK (Oklahoma Creek-Cherokee) teaches American Indian literature in the English department of the University of Oklahoma and is the author of *Red on Red*, a literary history of the Muskogee Confederacy and *Drowning in Fire*, a novel.

## Major Tribal Nations and Bands Mentioned in This Issue

This list is provided as a service to those readers interested in further communications with the tribal communities and governments of American Indian and Native nations. Inclusion of a government in this list does not imply endorsement of or by *SAIL* in any regard, nor does it imply the enrollment or citizenship status of any writer mentioned; some communities have alternative governments and leadership that are not affiliated with the United States, Canada, or Mexico, while others are not currently recognized by colonial governments. We have limited the list to those most relevant to the essays published in this issue, thus, not all bands, towns, or communities of a particular nation are listed.

We make every effort to provide the most accurate and up-to-date tribal contact information available, a task that is sometimes quite complicated. Please send any corrections or suggestions to *SAIL* Editorial Assistant, *Studies in American Indian Literatures*, Department of Writing, Rhetoric, and American Cultures, 235 Bessey Hall, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI 48824-1033, or send email to [sail2@msu.edu](mailto:sail2@msu.edu).

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Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma  
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Tahlequah, OK 74465  
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