Storyteller's landscape: A consideration of authorship in American Indian literatures

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THE STORYTELLER'S LANDSCAPE:
A CONSIDERATION OF AUTHORSHIP
IN AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURES

by

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B.A. Middlebury College, 1983
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Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Master of Arts in English Literature
University of Montana
1992

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With recent debates over the expansion of the literary canon in the academy, many scholars have focused increased attention on Native American Indian texts, both oral and written. Rigid systems of analysis and interpretation have been used to classify and contextualize these texts, and in doing so have perhaps inadvertently perpetuated a Western colonization of such literatures by subjecting them to non-tribal standards and criteria, including those found within the English language system. As such, a conflict arises between the more individualistic, materialistic perspectives of the West and the more communal, nature-oriented beliefs found in tribal traditions. This conflict shows itself clearly in the notion of authorship, whereby a writer either claims or disclaims "ownership" of the stories he or she has heard and subsequently (re)-tells. In tracing these two tendencies through representative moments in the history of American Indian literatures since the time of settlement (beginning with Indian "oral literatures" as told to anthropologists and ethnographers, moving on to consider two representatives of the first American Indian "writers" — Zitkala-Sa and Mourning Dove, and finally looking at two modern Native American writers — Leslie Marmon Silko and Gerald Vizenor), the changing roles of the storyteller and author can be compared and contrasted. In considering the context of those roles, readers and critics can gain insight into the ideologies from which notions of authorship developed and, through time, changed in order to ensure cultural survival. A variety of critical enterprises (reader-response theory, post-structuralism, and chaos theory) each offers insights on the problems discussed, yet fails to provide ultimate or definitive answers. Instead, we are led to question our preconceived notion that such answers exist or are enforceable. In so doing, we look toward opportunities provided within tribal texts to re-orient ourselves in relation to the entire ecosystem and come to a more productive understanding of how we go about interpreting and ensuring that relationship through the act of storytelling.
"Visionary power
Attends the motions of the viewless winds,
Embodied in the mystery of words:
There, darkness makes abode, and all the host
Of shadowy things work endless changes there"
-- William Wordsworth, Book V of The Prelude
Preface

In the introduction to his recent book of criticism *Other Destinies*, Louis Owens writes:

Native American writing represents an attempt to recover identity and authenticity by invoking and incorporating the world found within the oral tradition — the reality of myth and ceremony — an authorless "original" literature. Yet through the inscription of an authorial signature, the Indian writer places him- or herself in immediate tension with the communal, authorless, and identity-conferring source, at once highlighting the very questions of identity and authenticity the new literature attempts to resolve. (Owens 11)

In the pages that follow, I hope to pursue this line of inquiry, to look at the problems associated with ownership and authorship of a text and to glean some insight into the human condition here at the close of the second millenium. In doing so, I have considered as my primary references works by and about "Native American" authors. I realize that the term itself raises significant difficulties and demands further qualification; for example, I limit my study to only a small handful of the many different tribes which once inhabited the North American continent. To claim that these tribes are all somewhat "representative" would be a mistake, yet they do allow us to address certain similarities. What interests me most about these authors, however, is not necessarily their racial bloodlines or their adherence to any
orthodox tribal tradition, but the ideological backgrounds which shape them and lead them to question or at least re-consider the inheritance they have received, from whatever source.

I begin with a discussion of oral literature in the Native American context, and the forces which came to bear upon that literature and thus problematize an establishing and ongoing tradition within tribal communities. From there, I will look at two early writers, Hum-Ishu-Ma (Mourning Dove) and Zitkala-Sa (Gertrude Bonnin), both ostensibly crossbloods, who wrote fictional stories from autobiographical perspectives. Such a strategy prevails in the two modern authors I have chosen, Leslie Marmon Silko and Gerald Vizenor. Both provided opportunities to cross between cultures — to look at what is "traditional" within the texts while also looking at what is "modern" (or, more accurately, "postmodern") about the texts (if in fact we are tempted to call them "texts" at all).

All this leads to another rather tricky disclaimer. While referring to these works as "Native American," I do not wish to suggest or endorse an implicit separation of these works into a special or privileged category. My aim is not to justify the development of a specific canon, despite my admiration for those like Arnold Krupat who advocate such an undertaking. Instead, I wish to show how the construction of such a canon might lead us to break down the very notion of sub-cultural or multicultural canonization. I believe that the walls containing such distinct libraries might eventually serve as barriers to intercultural understanding, if they have not done so

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1 In particular, I note his book *The Voice in the Margin: Native American Literature and the Canon*, which finds a critical as well as cultural context for the study of Indian texts in the academy.
already, and that though they may serve a variety of purposes today, we should nevertheless remain open to their removal tomorrow. In the best tradition of a novel like *Ceremony*, we should be ready and willing to change our cultural practices when the need arises, and in so doing be open to the possibility of changing or (re)developing our own identities much in the way the halfbreed veteran Tayo does throughout Silko's book.

For that reason, I use "Native American" and/or "(American) Indian" as descriptors here from a particular cultural and critical context which I have myself inherited through institutional education. Likewise, I use them interchangeably, for I have come to know that many of the elder tribal members prefer the term "Indian" rather than the more modernized, politically correct "Native American." "Indian" is as much their word now as the early European's word; it is a term they have come to know and be known by for generations and which some claim to have "taken back" in a symbolic fashion to rise above its formal mistaken and oppressive connotations. It is my hope that like Vizenor's tricksters, I might use both terms even though I may not always fully endorse either one, and that I might at any time (in my conclusion, for example) trouble the waters by questioning or dis-believing their validity today in certain contexts such as literature. I ask that the reader of these pages grant me that opportunity, and also that he or she not disqualify certain points simply because they are mentioned by Native or non-Native writers. As we might all agree, a non-Native writer such as Gary Snyder may very well understand tribal traditions to a greater extent than certain modern-day full-bloods; there is room on that
ideological spectrum for all of us, despite our racial and biological backgrounds.

In that spirit, I offer this consideration of writers whom I feel to be closer to the heart of the world than many others I have read in my lifetime. I also thank all those who have helped me along (and when appropriate, off of) this path, and to those who will no doubt help me continue beyond these pages. Life, as many of the writers considered here will tell you, remains ever open to possibility. To those who live their lives fully in accordance with such a creed, I dedicate this work.
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"Hey?" Joe Bruchac tips his head toward the audience and waits for response. Seated in a semicircle around him, listeners young and old call back: "Hey!!"

Bruchac, an Abnaki storyteller, nods with a grin and continues the story of how Turtle and several other small animals once paddled downstream in a tiny canoe to wage war on the humans. Outside, an April shower falls almost unnoticed through the foggy Vermont evening. In a few weeks, Bruchac will pack away his storytelling attire and his painted drum in order to devote his energies to other tasks. Only later in the year, after the fall harvests, will he once more gather audiences like this one into a circle around him to listen to old and new Abnaki tales, to help them sing with him the songs of the cultural heroes as they lived out their adventures in the natural world, and to keep their attention focused on the telling of the tale as he calls out "Hey?" and waits for the appropriate response.

Audiences such as this one on the campus of Middlebury College should consider themselves increasingly lucky as the ancestral art of Native
American storytelling gives way to a new generation of tale-tellers whose allegiance resides in the written word. Whereas before one might have had sufficient grounds to contest the very notion of an Indian "literature," more and more Native Americans are investing their efforts toward that goal. Many have developed what might be called a "halfbreed" or "crossblood" writing style, one which owes as much to their remembered ancestral oral tradition as it does to their learned Westernized literary strategies. What's more, these innovative writers are finding themselves increasingly considered a vital part of the American literary canon - an academic validation that early writers such as John Rollin Ridge and Mourning Dove might never have anticipated when first setting pen to paper. Indian authors such as N. Scott Momaday and Leslie Silko have shouldered their ways into the company of literary figures such as Faulkner and Twain, and in so doing have reminded us all that even before the arrival of the first immigrants in the fifteenth century, the North American continent contained cultures as rich and diverse as its remarkably varied landscape.

No written record of those pre-Columbian cultures — at least none that was penned by the people themselves — remains for us to study today. Only the Cherokee tribe had a written alphabet, a sign system developed by Sequoya and submitted for approval to a tribal council at the relatively late date of 1821 (Grant 281-282). Even after the European colonists forcibly taught Indians how to read and write, many of the elders continued to argue against

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2 It should be noted that even as Sequoya worked on his alphabet, he faced a great deal of ridicule. Hostile feelings continue to this day as more and more latter generation Indians learn the "white man's writing" rather than the traditional oral languages of the tribes.
the commonly-held idea that writing was superior to orality, that writing was in fact a mark of civilization. When speaking to the anthropologist Knud Rasmussen, for example, an Utkuhikalingmiut Eskimo elder named Ikinilik referred to the pen-scratched notes of the scientist as "talk marks" — something distilled from and thereby somewhat subordinate to the spoken word (Lincoln in Swann 10). The same might be true of tape-recording which occurred at a later date, for their the hand gestures and body movements were lost, as was the dynamic interaction between the storyteller and his or her audience.

Some storytellers such as Bruchac, however, remain faithful to the old ways. Though Bruchac himself has subsequently assembled both written and recorded collections of tales and myths, he is quick to point out that there are some stories which he does not give over to print or taping and will tell only to specific groups of people. These remain part and parcel of the oral tradition of the Native American, one more closely aligned with the sacred world view of the various tribal peoples who once populated this continent. One need only to listen to the story of the Abnaki cultural hero Gluskapi fighting the great monster who has dammed up the Hudson to get a sense of the important links established between man and his environment — links necessary for the very survival of the Abnaki in their landscape. Without such a relationship, the tale of Gluskapi would have little relevance to the

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3 Such links become even more vital for tribes like the neighboring Cree, who face the devastation of their homes and hunting grounds by Quebec's James Bay hydro-electric project, which would dam up a great many waterways and flood vast regions of Cree territory.
listening audience, and without a living, embodied voice such as Bruchac's, the story would have lesser life and power in the Abnaki community.

To further understand that relationship, we might look both to the stories themselves and to the various theories and practices which have led to their consideration in the literary academy today. As Arnold Krupat has often pointed out, it would be a mistake to do so in the hopes of developing an "oral poetics" which could then be applied like deconstructive theory to the tales (Krupat in Wiget, *Critical Essays* 117).4 Rather, we should be working backwards, moving away from written culture and its traditional methods of textual study toward a contextual analysis of oral narrative within the Native American environment. In so doing, we will discover that in choosing an oral form for the telling of traditional tales, Indian storytellers both defined and reinforced tribal notions concerning man's place in that particular environment, and therefore sought to ensure the survival of the tribe within that environment.

Indian life followed the rhythms of nature; the pulse of the people was the heartbeat of the planet itself. Unlike the colonists who arrived on American shores with a Judeo-Christian belief in the superiority of man to nature (a belief made explicit in such concepts as Manifest Destiny), North American tribal peoples saw themselves as an integral part of nature, brothers and sisters to the other forms of life around them. Daily patterns of living

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4 We will soon see that Krupat stands virtually alone in this position, since much of the current writing being done today on the subject (mostly by non-Natives) engages in just such an enterprise.
developed according to what they observed in their environment. Cycles such as those displayed in the turning of the seasons figured prominently in the landscape, leading to its high level of significance in various ceremonies and rituals of tribal life. Certain activities were accorded their own related seasons; as we have seen with the Abnaki, storytelling occupied (for the most part) the period between harvest and planting, when the workload was relatively light. Other tales served as crucial parts of particular ceremonies, celebrated only at specified times of the year. Like the birds and the animals, the myths and tales themselves had and continue to have lives and souls, a concept which gives pause to many European-trained scholars. Words work with a vital force; as Kenneth Lincoln states: "The spoken, sung, and danced language binds the people as the living text of tribal life" (Lincoln 4, my emphasis).

Speech realized the active potential of language and provided a means for storytellers to tap into the power of the world around them. Here too their link with the environment shaped perception; stories existed independently of people, and thus held powers which were not theirs to claim or own. For this reason, tracing the actual origin of individual stories proves quite difficult, if not impossible, for the modern ethnographer. According to tribal belief, the tales and legends pre-existed humans in the world, and were only shown to the people through dreams and visions. A similarly inspired artist in the Western tradition would then endeavor to create a cultural product, a poem or story which would, in the words of Karl Kroeber, "serve as a locus

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5 Even the great anthropologist Franz Boas understood the futility of such a task, particularly since the tales have changed in and of themselves over time to suit the needs of the tribe. See Boas' essay "Mythology and Folk-Tales of the North American Indians" in Wiget's Critical Essays on Native American Literature, p. 46 and pp. 49-50.
for collecting power to itself, rather than passing it on into socially productive activity" (Kroeber in Swann 332-333). The Native American artist, on the other hand, felt compelled to realize the vision somehow, to share its power with the fellow members of his or her tribe and in so doing "give it back."

Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux medicine man, speaks quite directly of this as he discusses his visions with John Neihardt:

I think I have told you, but if I have not, you must have understood, that a man who has a vision is not able to use the power of it until after he has performed the vision on earth for the people to see. You remember that my great vision came to me when I was only nine years old, and you have seen that I was not much good for anything until after I had performed the horse dance near the mouth of the Tongue River during my eighteenth summer. And if the great fear had not come upon me, as it did, and forced me to do my duty . . . I am sure it would have killed me in a little while. (Neihardt 204)

Despite questions raised as to whether the book can truthfully be considered autobiography, many scholars consider Black Elk Speaks one of the seminal works of Native American literature, and yet here Black Elk would have us emphasize the word "speak" in the title - his story, as told to Neihardt, is more performance than text, and must be in order to continue the flow of power emanating from his original visions. As Kroeber states, "Always the Indian poem exists as utterance. It never exists as text, only as act" (Kroeber in Swann 106).

\[6\] Neihardt's role in writing the book was more than simple transcription, as an analysis of his notes and the heavily-edited final product will attest. The author/editor relationship in terms of authorship will dominate the second chapter of this work as I consider the cases of Zitkala-Sa and Mourning Dove.
Because of this power-relationship between the personal vision and the public life of the tribe, the storyteller in the Native American oral tradition functions as a conduit for an ongoing energy exchange between humans and their environment. The telling of stories serves both a social and a cultural purpose; it draws the tribe together for the important retelling of the tale, and it also passes on information relevant to the history and survival of the tribe in the world. The place of stories within tribal life is thus enhanced as they factor significantly into tribal ritual and ceremony. An example of this can be found in the Cheyenne story of Arrow Boy, whose performance of magic among the medicine men of his tribe led them to incorporate his robing and binding ritual into the yuwipi ceremony (Erdoes 29-33). Stories provided access to the powers employed by cultural heroes such as Arrow Boy, and did so in a manner that bestowed shamanistic powers to the storyteller who passed on the vision, as Black Elk demonstrates above.

As such, stories were often treated as sacred objects among the North American tribes. Their re-enactment in ceremony and ritual created a direct and dynamic link between the members of the tribe and their environment. Such experience strengthened the subsequent relationship between man and nature in ways unknown to those brought up in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Lakota medicine man Lame Deer addresses this point in his comparison of the controversial Sioux Sun Dance and the story of Christ's crucifixion as told in the Bible:

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7 A more detailed description of the yuwipi ceremony can be found in Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions pp. 172-186.
The difference between the white man and us is this: you believe in the redeeming powers of suffering, if this suffering was done by somebody else, far away, two thousand years ago. We believe that it is up to every one of us to help each other, even through the pain of our bodies. Pain to us is not "abstract," but very real. We do not lay this burden onto our god, nor do we want to miss being face to face with the spirit power. (Lame Deer 197)

Lame Deer suggests that via ceremony nothing separates the participant from nature; that his "religious" experiences are gathered first-hand. As Lame Deer states, the pain is "real," not "abstract;" it is felt, not read. Likewise, in the telling of a story little or no separation exists between the story, the storyteller, and the audience. Each interacts in a powerful way in order to realize more fully the complete circuit of energy existing within nature. We encounter an immediate locus of power present in the telling of the tale, not removed from direct and active involvement as in writing on the page. From Lame Deer's words, we can also infer an understanding of the Indian's different perception of the "abstract" and the "symbolic," and how this too creates difficulties in analyzing their oral narratives from a chirographic framework, a point to which I shall return below.

Despite such difficulties in cross-cultural interpretation, recent developments in literary theory do offer us a means of understanding the relationship between the stories and their audiences, if not the stories themselves. Reception, or reader-response theory, as described and discussed by such literary critics as Wolfgang Iser and Stanley Fish⁸, posits great significance on the act of reading and its various contexts. As such, a great deal of interpretative power shifts from the text itself to the reader or

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⁸ For a concise review of these theorists, I have relied upon and suggest Eagleton pp. 78-90.
audience. Roland Barthes forthrightly proclaims that such a decentering of power leads to the imminent "death of the author" in his essay of the same name. Barthes writes: "It is language which speaks, not the author; to write is, through a prerequisite impersonality, to reach that point where only language acts, 'performs,' and not 'me'" (Barthes in Lodge 168). Following up on the tenets of Sausurrean linguistics, Barthes implies that language influences thought and thus predates writing, something which the Native Americans had known and acknowledged long before the development of structuralist and post-structuralist theories. Language was, after all, a system of ordering the world which arose out of the powers in nature and which was subsequently handed down to humans. Leslie Silko describes how thought led to creation in this genesis story from the beginning of Ceremony:

Ts'its'tsi'nako, Thought-Woman
is sitting in her room
and whatever she thinks about
appears.

She thought of her sisters,
Nau'ts'ity'i and I'tcts'ity'i,
and together they created the Universe
this world
and the four worlds below.

Thought-Woman, the spider,
named things and
as she named them
they appeared. (Silko, Ceremony 1)

In the Native American scenario, language predates human reality, conceptualizing an extension of metalinguistic theory which some post-structuralists themselves might hesitate to consider. As humans, we intuited
the real names for things through our connection with nature; these names originated not from the people, but from those (such as Thought-Woman) with original power in nature. We see a derivation of this notion in the many names which some tribes give to their individual members. Some of these names are used openly in daily conversation, while others are reserved for ceremonial use. Still others remain secret with their owners for life. To know a person's secret name is to have power over that person, power associated with the original powers of those like Thought-Woman who could create (and conversely destroy) through naming alone.

With language and words thus originating elsewhere and being spoken through a chosen storyteller, the concept of human authority vanishes. Stories exist independently of authors or origins, and for that reason, many Native American tales remain either wholly uncredited or associated to a long and open-ended list of predecessors who, in turn, inherited the story from unknown others. Black Elk realized that his vision "belonged" to the people who witnessed his performance of it, and that once he had told the story, it was no longer his to own. In fact, it was dangerous to make such a claim, to hold back the power for himself when he was only intended to be its messenger. In truth, all tales originate from and must eventually return to the landscape. The concept of ownership thus created many problems for the Native American when an anthropologist would ask "Whose story is this?", much in the same way the question "Who owns this land?" created problems for the Indian being asked to answer.

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9 This cycle is most clearly described in Leslie Silko's essay "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination" and will be discussed at greater length in Chapter 3.
In order to survive in their environment, Native Americans depended on a strong sense of community rather than individuality. European colonizers, however, prized the individual, and institutionalized systems of written texts with attributable authors served to sustain and perpetuate that system of beliefs. The written word came to be regarded as a product (i.e. the physical fact of the book itself) via technological systems of production, and as such warranted ownership of some sort. More recent theoretical perspectives such as reader-response criticism also lend themselves to a more materialistic world view, one centered around the individual who, in the act of reading/interpretation, begins to regard the work as his or her own. In his meditation on the storywriter Nikolai Leskov, critic Walter Benjamin describes this process of claiming the text and shows how it differs from the oral situation:

A man listening to a story is in the company of the storyteller . . . . The reader of a novel, however, is isolated, moreso than any other reader . . . . In this solitude of his, the reader of a novel seizes upon his material more jealously than anyone else. He is ready to make it completely his own, to devour it, as it were. (Benjamin 100)

Benjamin thus links writing to consumerist culture, a Marxist interpretation justified by the act of interpretive reading as well as on the level of textual production. This move, and the subsequent risk of exploitation often associated with capitalist or consumerist explanations, heightens the sense of

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This transformation is discussed quite effectively in Arnold Krupat's Marxist-oriented essay "An Approach to Native American Texts" in Critical Essays in Native American Literature, pp. 116-131 and his subsequent The Voice in the Margin. Krupat and Swann also discuss similar arguments concerning the notion of autobiography in the introduction to their anthology I Tell You Now: Autobiographical Essays by Native American Writers, pp. ix-xv.
individuality associated with texts, and further diminishes the immediate effects a written story might have on the tribal or communal level.

Such difficulties also lead to problems of self-identification for modern Indian writers whose works, though arising from a traditional cultural heritage, rely on a non-traditional means of communication which places emphasis on the individual. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn exemplifies the dilemma as she sets about the task of defining her role as poet in present-day Dakotah Sioux culture:

I claim to be a Dakotah poet by disclaiming that I speak for my people... I am not greatly surprised that this dichotomy does not exist for "real" poets of our tribes, the men and women who sit at the drum and sing the old songs and create the new ones. That is an entirely different matter, for it remains communal. (Cook-Lynn in Krupat and Swann, I Tell You Now 58)

Cook-Lynn understands that in the context of her tribal culture, "real" poetry belongs to the tribe and is thereby necessarily oral in nature. Because she writes her poetry in the language taught to her in American schools, she can only speak for herself - not for her people. Authority (in the sense of owning a particular text) limits her active participation in certain tribal traditions, and the role she plays within that tradition becomes one which she must create in the very act of writing her poetry. Likewise, she must create her own idea of audience, for a readership differs in many ways from a group gathered around a storyteller. She cannot be sure of this connection (after all, no writer can accurately predict how well or poorly his or her books will sell, or whether the buyers will actually read them from beginning to end), and thus her link
to her audience is unstable and perhaps, as she herself worries, ultimately unreliable.

Cook-Lynn realizes that stories must not only be told in order to continue the flow of energy from the environment through the tribe; they must be heard as well. We may return to the "advances" made by reader-response theorists who followed the lead of the structural theorist Roman Jakobson as he looked to the context of language and verbal acts in his 1958 essay "Linguistics and Poetics" in order to analyze and explain the concept of verbal "works of art." Jakobson went on to discuss the function of verbal communication as a transfer of some kind of energy or information from an addresser (author or storyteller) to an addressee (audience) (Jakobson in Lodge 32-57). What is most important here is Jakobson's consideration of the role of the audience, something hitherto only studied as a matter-of-fact by-product of the creative arts. The link established with an audience in the Western literary tradition relies on high-energy means of production and distribution — namely, the writing and subsequent printing of the work itself, as well as, to some extent, the critical enterprise associated with the literary world.\(^{11}\) Both exert control over the text, and in so doing lessen the amount of control afforded the author. The resulting chain of association between text and reader may thus bypass consideration of the author completely. For example, Leslie Silko cannot know when some unknown individual will enter the

\(^{11}\) I am indebted to Karl Kroeber for the transfer of this idea via his essay "Poem, Dream, and the Consuming of Culture" in Smoothing the Ground, p. 332, wherein Kroeber describes the poetry of John Keats as "energy-consuming" in a manner that "demands critical exertion which is absorbed into the poem," reinforcing the notion of the work as a locus (or place) of power and authority.
public library, chance upon a favorable review in a literary newsletter, and subsequently check out her latest book to read at home over tea that evening. A traditional storyteller, on the other hand, retains control of the verbal act and uses that control to re-direct the power contained in the story he or she is about to tell. This represents, in some ways, a more complete realization of the transfer process developed by Jakobson, and as such should provide response theorists with an ideal testing ground for their ideas.\(^\text{12}\)

Considering the stories in such a critical context would not, however, find justification within the text. If we are to approach such texts theoretically at all, we must first realize that we arrive at them from outside, bearing our own culturally-specific tools of interpretation and analysis. From this we can understand that not only is the act of writing and publishing a high-energy enterprise; so too is the modern process of reading and interpreting. English/literary (or, to use the current terminology, "language arts") instruction in the Western ideological mode thus constitutes a complicated and often limiting part of education, as Gary Snyder humorously points out in his book *The Practice of the Wild*:

Language teaching in schools is a matter of corralling off a little of the language-behavior territory and cultivating a few favorite features - culturally defined elite forms that will help you apply for a job or give you social credibility at a party. One might even learn how to produce the byzantine artifact known as the professional paper. There are many excellent reasons to master these things, but the power, the virtu, remains on the side of the wild. (Snyder 17)

\(^{12}\) Such a notion finds support in Krupat's essay "Post-Structuralism and Oral Literature" in *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*, edited by him and Brian Swann, pp. 113-127.
Thus, in order to survive in the Western academic literary tradition, one must learn those aspects of language (that selected set of limited features of the rich, broader spectrum of linguistic possibilities) which will assist one in surviving within that same environment. In the mainstream American context, however, that pre-constructed environment itself relies more on man's perceived relationship to the capitalist enterprise than on his link to the natural (or, to use Snyder's term, wild) world.

It is not difficult to transfer this type of thinking to the Native American. The Indian decision to structure their stories as oral narratives and to maintain that tradition in the face of imported writing techniques speaks to their faith and belief in the effectiveness of that system. Such modes of myth and legend production follow the same guidelines with which the Indians once ordered their physical environment into landscape; both story and landscape thereby become concepts imbued with cultural meaning.

This is true of European-based literature as well, though the intended result is survival of the individual within the non-wild\(^\text{13}\), anthropocentric landscape described above. To further develop Snyder's previous observations, this means that in order for an American professor of literature to advance in the academy, she or he must appropriate texts for the purposes of scholarly research and publications. This activity subsequently functions as a means of developing the literary canon, which in turn produces a new

\(^{13}\) I refer here once again to Gary Snyder's definition of the term "wild" as the potential for a diversity of living and nonliving beings to flourish according to their own sorts of order (Snyder, p. 12). This definition is half-paraphrase, half-quote. Snyder offers requisites for wildness on p. 24: "The wild requires that we know the terrain, nod to all the plants and animals and birds, ford the streams and cross the ridges, and tell a good story when we get back home."
context or environment within which to evaluate certain written works. Critical theory thus becomes a self-perpetuating system of ordering that particular verbal "landscape," of identifying certain works as significant and worthy of our attention while others are identified as lesser or trivial.

These standards of value created problems for the inclusion of oral or "primitive" works within the academic literary enterprise, as they were at first considered "inferior" to the written word and thus not worthy of study. This is not to say that oral narratives had never been encountered before; the inclusion of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* in the Western canon shows that stories from the oral tradition have been included, though only when transcribed somehow into the written format.

Even so, creating Native American "texts" out of oral narratives posed particular problems. Right away, there was the question of how to translate them. A number of methodologies have been developed, each with its own definitive self-validation: Dell Hymes argues in favor of an "ethnopoetic" treatment based on translation into lines rather than sentences (Hymes in Krupat and Swann, *Recovering the Word* 41-84); Dennis Tedlock focuses on performance aspects of the story and develops a typographical style of "dramatic poetry" which relies on printed effects such as size, line alteration, and capitalization to represent vocal inflection, speed, and volume (Tedlock in Krupat and Swann, *Smoothing the Ground* 57-77); Anthony Mattina considers both of these approaches to be somewhat "outlandish" and asks for proper ethnographic support and dialectical documentation in place of mere "versification" of the recorded/transcribed words (Mattina in Krupat and
Swann, *Recovering the Word* 129-148). In each case, we find an example of a learned scholar trying to force the round peg into the square hole, taking something out of one cultural context and attempting to stuff it into another rather than admitting that any transition from oral to written will effect certain unavoidable changes within the story itself. At best, each can only seek to limit the number of these changes; they cannot hope to over-ride them.

Such naive attempts recall a Cree story of the trickster Wesucechak, who convinces the crows to let him fly with them. As they are circling above the earth, Wesucechak decides to test his "crow voice" and calls out to his fellow fliers. They regard him crossly, and one of the crows subsequently informs him of his social faux pas: "Those are the voices we use on the ground!" Even in the act of translation, we must consider the context established by our interaction with the created Native American text. Scholars such as Arnold Krupat are right in demanding that we state our biases up front in the study of such literature, that we state, for example, whether we are writing about them in a language of the ground or the air. He confesses to his own unavoidable cultural limitations in this respect:

> Although I believe some deep experience of the performed power of Native American poetry or narrative must underlie any powerful understanding of it, it does not seem to me that understanding can come from experience alone, and for this understanding one needs texts - to such an extent I am indeed a creature of that print-oriented phase of Western literacy presently coming to an end. (Krupat, *Recovering the Word* 126)

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14 I borrow this story from Harold Norman's article "Wesucechak Becomes a Deer and Steals Language: An Anecdotal Linguistics Concerning the Swampy Cree Trickster" in Krupat and Swann's *Recovering the Word*, p. 430, realizing that my appropriation changes the story somewhat in its placement within a new context.
It's hard to find a more honest yet telling statement regarding one of the major problems facing scholars in Native American studies today.

In a very real sense, the isolated study of texts rather than the communal experience of oral storytelling leads us to a scholarly tradition of postmortem examinations; Barthes' death of the author propels us toward the death of the story, something which Krupat and others claim to be imminent. In this regard, any attempt to reverse such a tendency and re-instill life into the transcribed narrative amounts to little more than literary necromancy. Even "translations" such as Tedlock's poetic ascriptions, Dell Hyme's theatrical treatments (breaking down into scene, act, and line), and Anthony Mattina's development of a "Red English" written dialect (discussed by Krupat in *Recovering the Word* 139-142) seek to stop the beating heart of Native American oral tales - to fix them in the moment and preserve their meaning on the page. That meaning, if left alive in the tribal culture, might otherwise continue to grow and change with the fluctuations of the environment. Native American belief does not posit power within the written text; it exists temporarily within the living storyteller, within the living spoken word, within the living listener of the tale. To look for power where it does not reside would be a foolish and futile endeavor, and yet, as Krupat realizes above, for Western scholars, this is nearly all that is possible in the standard university context.15

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15 In reconsidering the concept of the university elsewhere, I have suggested that we invest our energies toward founding a "multiversity," one which would break away from such restrictive and exclusive cultural limitations and afford opportunities for the experience of other cultural systems of knowing, be they written, oral, or non-linguistic in nature.
In that context, oral literature has been dominated by (and therefore subservient to) written literature. Early anthropologists realized the significance of this when they decided to undertake the recording of the oral narratives before the indigenous tribes of North America became entirely extinct. Luckily, many tribes avoided that prophesied fate, but nonetheless, as N. Scott Momaday points out with chilling effect: "For as many times as the story has been told, it was always but one generation removed from extinction" (Momaday, "The Man Made of Words" in Gill 51). Taken collectively, traditional stories represent what Momaday calls "racial memory," which in turn provides a crucial link back to the environment:

Once in a life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures that are there and all the faintest motions in the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk. (Momaday in Gill 46-47)

Modern Native American writers such as Momaday encounter this challenge by crossing over into the "other" tradition, literature, and though they often momentarily suspend their belief in their own oral tradition to pass through the gates of academe, in no way do they surrender the ecological perspective which informs that tradition. Writing becomes another "angle" from which to look at the landscape, though one with clear limitations.
The decision to shift to the written word remains, for many Indian authors, a matter of cultural survival, despite its inherent problems. No longer willing to leave the transcriptions of traditional stories and myths in the hands of Western ethnographers, Native American writers have been taking on the task themselves. Often, they have done so in a fictional format intended to recreate somehow the experience of the spoken word in a manner reminiscent of Tedlock, Hymes, and Mattina. Silko, for example, often resorts to a somewhat poetic figuration of lines on the page to represent a story's telling. At the beginning of his book Seven Arrows, Hyemeyohsts Storm devotes a number of pages to address the reader directly and inform him or her of the cultural background from which the subsequent stories will emerge. This constitutes a written attempt to recreate an actual context, one which lamentably has passed into antiquity in all but a few isolated circumstances. Even so, the word remains powerful, and Storm encourages the reader — whether he or she be Native American or not — to tap into that power by verbalizing the words, reading the stories aloud. Storm speaks of this strategy with optimistic anticipation:

Within Seven Arrows, and particularly within the old Stories, the words to which the Teller would have given inflections are capitalized. These words are symbolic Teachers, and it is very important that you approach them symbolically rather than literally. These capitalized words may sometimes seem inconsistent, but do not be confused by this. The Coyote is known among the People as a gentle trickster, and his Way is part of Sun Dance Learning. (Storm 11, original highlighting)

This passage reflects in an emphatic manner one of the most difficult adaptations Native Americans have encountered: the shift from the fluid
symbolic resonance of the verbal utterance to the literal meaning of the printed word. Storm employs Tedlock's typographical method of offering cues to the reader/speaker, but the true teaching remains rooted in cultural practice. As novice storytellers, we may well be confused by the "meaning" of the words if we do not know how to properly translate them back from print into speech.

This notion of "meaning" brings us back once again to the literary theorists. We have already come into contact with theorists such as Barthes who wish to decenter authority from the author of the written word. Likewise, many post-structuralists have sought to decenter authority in the word itself, claiming that absolute "meaning" as such cannot be attributed to a "trace"-related system such as language. To demonstrate how subjective associations with words ("traces" in and of themselves, somewhat) further complicates the notion of language's ability to serve as a reflector of any "real" or objective world, let us consider the theoretical debate in a Native American context - in this case, from the perspective of the medicine man Ku'oosh as he tells Tayo that the world is a "fragile" place in Leslie Silko's *Ceremony*:

The word he chose to express "fragile" was filled with the intricacies of a continuing process, and with a strength inherent in spider webs woven across paths through sand hills where early in the morning sun becomes entangled in each filament of web. It took a long time to explain the fragility and intricacy because no word exists alone, and the reason for choosing each word had to be explained with a story about why it must be said this certain way. This was the responsibility that went with being human, old Ku'oosh said, the story behind each word must be told so there could be no mistake in the meaning of what had
been said; and this demanded great patience and love. (Silko 35-36)

Like Thought-Woman at the beginning of the novel, telling a story is likened to spinning a web, one which goes out into the world rather than staying put on the page which seeks to contain it.

Likewise for the post-structuralists, language calls up all sorts of associations and therefore acts like a trickster figure, a simile made more explicit in the critical and fictional works of Gerald Vizenor. Vizenor claims that the trickster is at home in the postmodern context and that as an author himself, he is capable of gently misleading the reader to think that he or she has fixed upon the "true" or "essential" meaning of a word or phrase when in fact the reader has been deceived (Vizenor, *Narrative Chance* 187-190). Native American figures like Ku'oosh revel in the resulting chaos and see it as an opportunity for the creation of even more stories. Meaning was therefore not fixed in a system of order; it was possible only in the dynamic interplay of chaos which trickster stories and retold tales permitted, even invited. Words written on the page were a trickery — a reference to order which did not actually exist or which, at the very least, was not originated by humans.

Such an approach to the production of meaning via story pervades cultures which focus on the oral rather than the written tradition. Orality in and of itself implies a kind of temporality and openness to change, a fluidity which allows alteration from context to context. In contrast, the fixity of the printed word strives toward permanence and verisimilitude. Krupat suggests

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16 See Krupat in *Recovering the Word*, pp. 117-118. As Krupat notes, the seminal work on this topic has been done by Walter Ong in his book *Orality and Literacy*, wherein Ong relates literacy once again to high-energy modes of production found in technological societies.
that the concern for implicit meaning in language has developed as a by-product of technologies such as the printing press (Krupat, *Recovering the Word* 118), and yet more recent technologies such as the personal computer and Hypertext are ironically leading us away from the supposedly absolute holding power of the printed word. Even so, linguistic studies such as Saussure's "Nature of the Linguistic Sign" problematize both written and spoken forms of language as bearers of "true meaning" capable of establishing "essential links to reality" (in Lodge 10-14). Native American storytellers such as the "real" Storm and the "imagined" Ku'oosh remain unconcerned inasmuch as they prioritize the symbolic over the literal in the first place. It is only when the spoken word is set down or fixed in writing that it acquires pretensions of invoking some essential "reality;" otherwise the wisdom remains contextually-oriented, tailored for the moment and amenable to slight alteration when circumstances warrant.

Once again we find an understanding of literary theory previously contained in ancient traditional wisdom of the Native Americans. As Krupat writes:

Stated this way, it seems to me that the ancient sense of these matters is really not so far at all from the contemporary post-structuralist sense, particularly from the theory of the trace when it asserts that no single element of a system - no written word alone - can be presumed to function meaningfully in and of itself, to mean only by itself. (Krupat, *Recovering the Word* 123)

As we have seen repeatedly, meaning in Native American stories finds its development through performance, through context and relation to the audience. Words are ephemeral, important not so much as entities in and of
themselves as conveyors of symbolic power capable of bridging the human and the non-human world. As living entities, the stories' power cannot be fixed or frozen or trapped without their death. At that point, in written form, for example, they become vulnerable to the probes and scalpels of ethnoliterary theorists seeking to expose their "meaning."

Native Americans understood that their environment was a fluid and changing thing and that their subsequent relationship to it had to reflect that impermanent nature. For that reason, their works show an affinity with chaos theorists currently at work, as shall be discussed in further chapters. Oral narrative accepted the notion of a fluid and potentially random world, and in so doing assisted the tribe as it adapted to the changing landscape in which it chose to live. Technological man, however, sought control over that landscape, altering it in an attempt to produce a stability and fixity which was previously not there. Chaos (or the "wild," as Snyder might say) was construed as bad and evil through Judeo-Christian belief; whereas order was prized and sought after by many of the settlers in the "New World."

Chirographic culture mirrored that philosophical perspective, seeking to preserve meaning and maintain order via the written word.

In their efforts to preserve Native American culture from the devastation of colonialization, anthropologists and ethnographers collected what they considered to be "cultural objects" from the Indian societies. In his description of such missions, Gerald Vizenor likened the collections to "dead objects" and "dead voices," items without a living context in the natural world (Vizenor in Coltelli 164). Inventoried along with the cooking utensils,
hunting tools, and jewelry were stories, often transcribed into English using the accepted conventional literary standards of the time. These items often found new homes in museums. Art became artifact and thus existed, as Kenneth Roemer puts it, "in a vacuum." As though to recognize this problem and reassert the sacred nature of the narratives, Leslie Silko has called for the return of tribal stories, songs, prayers, and chants along with the return of tribal remains and artifacts from museums (Silko in Hobson 211-212).

For the Native American, tribal narratives represent far more than stories in an anthology which look back nostalgically to the "olden days." They symbolize an ongoing means of survival rather than an end, and in so doing reassert that they are not merely traces of a "vanished breed." Instead, their power looks forward to a continued relationship with the physical world in which that same power flows back and forth in an endless dialogue between man and the landscape. Lame Deer envisions this power as building once again as he describes to Richard Erdoes how mankind waits at the verge of an apocalyptic reversion to natural ways:

I guess it was not time for this to happen, but it (the world as it was before white men) is coming back, I feel it warming my bones . . . a new-old spirit, not only among Indians but among whites and blacks, too, especially among young people. It is like raindrops making a tiny brook, many brooks making a stream, many streams making one big river bursting all dams. Us making this book, talking like this - these are some of the raindrops. (Lame Deer 113)

17 Kenneth Roemer, "Native American Oral Narratives: Context and Continuity," in Swann's Smoothing the Ground, pp. 39-46. Roemer appropriately discusses the academic context into which much Indian literature has been placed, particularly as it has been shifted from department to department within the university.
This "new/old spirit," perhaps the confluence of oral and written traditions, has indeed been building with the guidance of contemporary Native American poets and prose writers such as Silko and Vizenor among many others. In each, the people's social relationship with their environment continues to assert its prominence. Jarold Ramsey understood this relationship quite well when he wrote:

Ecological science is not enough, I think, to bring us around to the simple but radical recognition that we belong to the biosphere more than it belongs to us; we must find ways to institutionalize the sense of that relationship in our very imaginations. (Ramsey in Swann 309)

That process of institutionalization goes on today as Native American literature, both oral and written, is accepted into the literary canon, the same weapon which had been used previously to question the significance of such "primitive" cultural stories.

"Language is not a carving," Gary Snyder writes, "it's a curl of breath, a breeze in the pines" (Snyder 69). It is an active force in the physical world, a natural part of human existence and thus a part of nature as well. Though we try to trap and tame it, it continues to elude us, even as we troop after it with cumbersome theoretical arsenals at our disposal. We become victims in our own game, fighting against enemies which are not there, struggling to pin down the invincible. Literary theorists have spent a great part of the past few decades coming to this conclusion, and yet their findings reflect traces of wisdom which Native Americans have known all along as they pass down stories from generation to generation by word of mouth and gesture of hand. They understand that a living language provides the bridge to the powerful
spirits and forces visible in the world around us. Written language rebels against such power and seeks to keep and own it, to take it from the land much as high-energy forms of technological development strip away the fertility of the earth. With this same fervor, scholars of Native American myths and stories seek to capture the sacred and mystical forces which the Indians have associated with their tales. But as Paula Gunn Allen states of the academic context, "non-Indian students are not inclined by training or culture to view the sacred as that which has power beyond that of economics, history, or politics" (Gunn Allen in Wiget 21)

As Western-trained scholars, we continue to miss the main point; that power manifests itself through the act of telling the story, not within the story itself. We try to posit authority in the tellers of the tale, and once again miss the mark. "Some historians would say that 'thinkers' are behind the ideas and mythologies that people live by," writes Snyder. "I think it goes back to maize, reindeer, squash, sweet potatoes, and rice. And their songs" (Snyder 61). Whose songs? The songs of maize, reindeer, squash, sweet potatoes, and rice, perhaps. The links are natural, not necessarily human. The stories bring us back to what we see around us, our physical environment. To deepen our relationship with that environment, we constantly imagine ourselves into it, as Momaday writes above and as Vizenor states in his many works (as we shall see). We interact with it, engage in dialogues with it, listen to the stories which occur within it and tell those stories to others - all as acts of respect and appreciation. In other words, we return to an ecological consideration of our relationship with the world, admitting to at least some degree of "wild" order
even as we strive to impose our own order on parts of that world. In so doing, we help to create the landscape we call our cultural heritage.
Chapter II

Hum-ishu-ma and Zitkala-Sa: Caught in the Crossworld

By the time the first true Native American "writers" attracted the attention of the reading public in the United States, their contemporary cultural landscape had already become a montage of the familiar and the foreign. Tribal movements initiated by government policies of relocation and eradication forced many tribes away from the homelands, westward across the country on what the Cherokee came to call the "Trail of Tears." Throughout this period, inter-racial relationships continued, further diminishing the numbers of Indians who could lay claim to being "full-bloods." Tribes mixed with tribes; white and black mixed with red. This erosion of genetic biological boundaries resulted in the rise of the "half-blood" or "breed," a human being with roots in both worlds yet seemingly without sufficient claims to indigeneity in either cultural landscape.

From this displaced group of people, perhaps the first true representatives of the "colonized" New World, emerged the first Native American writers whose claims to traditional stories and mythological perspectives relied not on the flow of ink to the page but the steady rush of blood in the veins. Names such as Mourning Dove/Christine Quintasket, John Rollin Ridge/Yellow Bird, Charles Eastman/Ohiyesa, and Zitkala-
Sa/Gertrude Bonnin gained some degree of recognition and notoriety in the literary world during the latter half of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth. Each had labored hard to translate his or her experiences into the English language, with varying degrees of help and success. Educated in the white settlers' schools, each brought to the task an understanding of two sets of cultural demands: that of the European literary society, and that of their own tribal oral tradition. Though their material may have been mined in the country of its origin, it was more often than not refined elsewhere, whether in the Anglicized classroom or the editorial offices of journals and booksellers.

By and large, the reasons for the publication of these and subsequent materials were political, as Charles Larson noted in his book *American Indian Fiction*.

Larson categorizes tribal writings under four rubrics: assimilationists, reactionaries, revisionists, and qualified separatists. Such categories roughly coincide with U.S. governmental Indian policies of the day, and as such are all in some ways "reactionary," responding to the perceived crisis facing the Native American at a given time in history. In order to place texts correctly, the reader was encouraged to look at its content first, and always in relationship to European influences. In other words, the reader must ask "assimilating into what?" or "reacting to what?", "revising what?" or "separate from what?" Such questions instantly draw us away from any "pure" or "true" tribal narrative in Native American literature, and lands us squarely in the world of the cross-blood or half-breed even in its criticism.

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18 As discussed in Gerald Vizenor, *Narrative Chance*, p. xi.
This shift takes us away from any valid consideration of collected oral "literatures" and leaves them behind for the ethnohistorians and socioanthropologists, a move favored by some (like Gerald Vizenor, who often casts great doubt and suspicion on the work of social scientists) yet disdained by others such as Louis Owens, who writes in the introduction to his book *Other Destinies*:

> Literature — oral or written — by Indians was, with the exception of a few individuals, such as Yvor Winters at Stanford, universally shuffled aside into the realm of folklore and anthropological "local color" by literary professionals. (Owens 16-17)

In his own discussion of Native American literatures, Owens, like Vizenor, borrows heavily from the theoretical toolboxes (mostly non-American) of post-structuralist and postmodern literary academics. This, one might deduce from the above statement, is the "center" from which literature was once shuffled "aside" and to which it now seeks restoration. The inclusion of Native American texts in literary canons and curricula has prompted an ongoing debate on campuses around the world and provides the central motivation for books such as Arnold Krupat's *The Voice in the Margin* which also relies heavily on the Western theoretical context to support the author's arguments. From here, the texts are brought in for consideration and evaluated once more by Western standards and perspectives, much as the Indian schoolboy or schoolgirl found his or her own traditional beliefs and customs studied and categorized by the missionary schoolmasters of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These children quickly discovered the
significance of context; the four-walled schoolroom was no place for sharing trickster tales.¹⁹

Zitkala-Sa, also known by her Christian name Gertrude Bonnin, was one such schoolgirl in the late 1800's, and she wrote eloquently of such experiences in various articles and books published in the early 1900's. In an apt metaphor from American Indian Stories, she tells about her missionary schooling and signals the effects of an industrial civilization bearing down upon her traditional culture:

It was next to impossible to leave the iron routine after the civilizing machine had once begun its day's buzzing; and as it was inbred in me to suffer in silence rather than appeal to the ears of one whose open eyes could not see my pain, I have many times trudged in the day's harness heavy-footed, like a dumb sick brute. (66)

The mechanical metaphor used to describe Zitkala-Sa's manacled feelings in school shows her surrounded by those who do not attend to her needs but rather use her to attend to their own — the need to succeed in their mission to "civilize the savages." In her zeal to reap some form of revenge, Zitkala-Sa acts as a subversive and returns to this same school system later as a teacher, but only after she has bested the white man on his own terms in the context of a debate contest between colleges. Even here, however, she realizes the hollow nature of her achievement: "The little taste of victory did not satisfy a hunger in my heart. In my mind I saw my mother far away on the Western plains, and she was holding a charge against me" (80).

¹⁹ Some of those same dangers persist through today. Those students devoting significant time to Native American literature are considered by their peers to be "wasting their time on primitive stories" while the "real challenges in literature" beckon from the contemporary theory classrooms.
Later in her recollections, after she has reunited with her family on tribal lands, Zitkala-Sa returns to metaphor as a means of describing her condition. Here we see the importance not only of her thoughts and feelings, but also of the language and imagery used to convey those inner states:

I made no friends among the people I loathed. Like a slender tree, I had been uprooted from my mother, nature, and God. I was shorn of my branches, which had waved in sympathy and love for home and friends. The natural coat of bark which had protected my oversensitive nature was scraped off to the very quick. (p. 97)

The natural imagery here stands in direct contrast to the mechanical imagery of the school-machine, and for Zitkala-Sa comes to represent an assimilation not into white society, but back into Indian society, where her "true" roots in nature are more accepted. The new context of the white man's world had challenged that part of her being and tried to strip it away from her. Like the shorn tree above, her hair was cut early on in the educating process, an event which in her Native American upbringing was associated with the role of mourner or coward (p. 54). The complexity of these metaphors, the manner in which they lap back upon one another, signals a retreat away from the realm of the literary, back into symbol and tradition, and ultimately back into nature itself. From there, storytellers were able to explain the development of such symbols and practices, linking them to the environment.

Theorists such as Owens and Krupat are quick to point to those western thinkers who would support such a dynamic interplay of symbols and voices, primarily Bakhtin and his concept of "heteroglossia." Even so, they remain so obsessed with the means of communication (i.e. language and the structures
of fiction) that they often miss the significance of the content. Zitkala-Sa wakes up to this fact even as she fulfills a dream and rides east in the "iron horse," away from her homeland to the school in the near-mythical "Land of Red Apples." Though she has previously been entranced with the expectations of entering a new and foreign world, she now longs to see "one familiar object" from the train window, something which would reconnect her with the stories and memories of her family and offer her comfort and companionship on the long ride. Ironically, she finally fixes on the recurring figure of a telegraph pole, which reminds her of her childhood: "Often I had stopped, on my way down the road, to hold my ear against the pole, and, hearing its low moaning, I used to wonder what the paleface had done to hurt it" (48). This means of communication, a living thing "planted" in the landscape which Zitkala-Sa inhabited as a child, has suffered some kind of attack from the white man, but Zitkala-Sa is yet unable to name it. She does, however, realize that it contains some sort of meaningful message for her. She continues on her journey toward the white school, unaware that her consideration of the pole as a living being will be one of the many beliefs the Western-influenced academic institution will try to strip away from her.

In his foreword to the 1985 edition of American Indian Stories, Dexter Fisher cites these conflicting beliefs as one of the reasons for the book's ultimate failure:

... she struggled toward a vision of wholeness in which the conflicting parts of her existence could be reconciled. That she did not fully succeed is evident in her work, which is a model of ambivalences, of oscillations between two diametrically opposed worlds. (Fisher in Zitkala-Sa xviii)
This oscillation, which might be termed "dialogic" by those critics who cite Bakhtin as a significant influence in understanding the polyvocality of many Native American texts\(^{20}\), is quite often perceived as conflict, particularly among critics in the Western tradition. As Paula Gunn Allen points out in her book *The Sacred Hoop*, such a perspective of literature is not only Western, but intrinsically patriarchal as well (Allen 76-82, 194-208). Both serve to create distinctions and conflict between things, whereas Native American and female impulses tend toward the synchretic, the drawing together of perceived opposites into a unified whole. Whether we agree with Allen or not, we should at least allow that any evaluation such as Fisher's stems from a particular theoretical context, and that such a context derives from certain ideological world views. True, Zitkala-Sa travels between two worlds, the white and the red, yet her decision in the end to return to her tribal heritage and to the natural world which nourishes it, even while maintaining contact with the white world via letters and articles, contradicts the failure which Fisher imparts upon her. Had she chosen instead to subordinate that Native voice to her increasingly learned "Western" voice, Fisher's final judgment might have been substantially different.

Whether *American Indian Stories* fails or succeeds, Fisher feels the need to make some sort of claim for the collection, to place it somehow in a framework relative to academic study and thus validate it as an object worthy of attention. He does this by making the claim that Zitkala-Sa "represents one of the first attempts by a Native American woman to write her own story

\(^{20}\) I include Owens and Krupat among these and, to some extent, Vizenor as well, each of whom draws heavily upon Bakhtin's essay "Discourse in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination*. 
without the aid of an editor, an interpreter, or an ethnographer" (vi). Such a claim suggests that Zitkala-Sa wrote and published in a vacuum of sorts and completely overlooks the influence of her western schooling. It also seems rather naive to suggest that her manuscripts went untouched between the time they were penned and the time they were published. Several discrepancies in the text suggest that they were indeed altered. For example, in describing a ride on horseback, Zitkala-Sa writes of encountering a coyote along her way. A few lines later, the coyote has suddenly become a wolf, and then on the following page, the creature has become a coyote once more (71-72). Surely a Native American would have known the difference between a coyote and a wolf, though perhaps the editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, which originally published the story in 1900, did not, and wished to avoid repetition of the word for the sake of improving the story's literary "style."

In her own writings and letters, Zitkala-Sa describes herself as a patient and dedicated observer, gathering up the stories of others and using them as the "material" for her written endeavors. She does this rather unabashedly following the initial printing of her first stories:

> While the old people last I want to get from them their treasured ideas of life. This I can do by living among them. Thus I mean to divide my time between teaching and getting story material.\(^{21}\)

Such a passage suggests that perhaps Zitkala-Sa did not go so uninfluenced by Western ideals after all. Her rationale for writing echoes that of the earlier anthropologists and ethnographers, and she has begun to see the world — her own, Indian world — in materialistic terms. Even time has become

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\(^{21}\) From a letter to Carlos Montezuma written on February 20, 1901, as quoted in *American Indian Stories*, p. vi.
something capable of division, a concept against which most Native
American elders would have rebelled. Whether Zitkala-Sa perceived these
subtleties remains unclear, for they are points drawn from the language she
uses — the language of the white man. The words were not stripped of their
hidden meanings and connotations before they were taught to her, nor was
she necessarily made aware of the ideological biases present at the base level
of language itself. These things acted as invisible influences on her writing
and thinking, and serve to contradict Fisher's claim that she wrote in a state
free from the intrusion of outsiders.

With such a view of culture-bound language in mind, we can further
understand how most European settlers came to (dis)regard the indigenous
peoples of the American continents. Without a written alphabet and
subsequent literature, the tribes were deemed uncivilized, without a valid
"culture" of their own. Many people didn't even acknowledge that Indian
tribes had languages at all. Witness the following description of the nine-year-
old Zitkala-Sa as reported by Harper's Bazaar magazine in 1900: "(She) was a
veritable little savage, running wild over the prairie and speaking no
language but her own..." (p. vii, my italics). Here, the language Zitkala-Sa
speaks is something of an imagined, unreal language, not even that of her
tribe. It is, in effect, "no language" at all, for that which is "savage" or "wild"
has no civilized voice. Such a view, nearly the direct opposite of that held fast
by Native American storytellers in the oral tradition, sets the stage for the
difficulties Native American writers would face in the decades to come. Already, their voices were being disregarded.²²

While Zitkala-Sa might have maintained a great deal of control over the amount of editing her material underwent prior to print, her contemporaries were not so privileged. Mourning Dove (or Hum-ishu-ma, as she was sometimes called) relied a great deal on a white editor in the production of her novel *Cogewea, The Half Blood*, as well as in the native tales she assembled under the heading *Coyote Stories*. So drastic were the changes and revisions to her original material that she once wrote to her helper, Lucullus Virgil McWhorter: "I felt like it was some one elses (sic) book and not mine at all."²³ This claim, which has sometimes jeopardized the standing of *Cogewea* in the Native American canon by virtue of its dubious "authenticity," complicates the question of Indian authorship even further and leads us to reconsider the relationship between writer and editor. In the case of *Cogewea*, one might argue that such a relationship developed into an honest and open collaboration between two writers, though McWhorter clearly retained the authoritative privilege afforded most editors. He was, after all, the skilled link to the publishing world.

Any reader of *Cogewea* will recognize that these two distinct voices share the narrative task of the novel. Each bears with it a related agenda and a distinct expectation of audience. For Mourning Dove, the central concern of

²² My original intentions were to use the word "erased" for its many possible meanings, one of which would be the postmodern critical interpretation suggesting linguistic indeterminacy. Since I do not intend to discuss this notion in detail, I have omitted the possible inference.
the book is the question of identity faced by the halfblood Cogewea and the possibility of her assimilation in the white world. McWhorter's chore, on the other hand, is to make the text and the interwoven Indian traditions comprehensible for a white, primarily east-coast audience. To do this, he justifiably senses the need to explain various tribal customs and beliefs. He also exploits these opportunities within the text to elaborate on the deplorable treatment of Native Americans up to that time in history, thus grafting political concerns onto the practical exposition. Both writers, it could be argued, work with altruistic intent, seeking to find a common ground which will help the Indian in his/her predicament vis a vis reservation allocation and continued mistreatment by the government and civilian populations. In some ways, the protagonist Cogewea and the similarly cross-blood author Mourning Dove symbolize the physical meeting of the two worlds, but such a meeting is often interpreted by critics of the text to be a counter-productive collision rather than a unifying confluence.

Cogewea's experience at the 4th of July county fair horse races demonstrates this perceived counter-productiveness effectively, both in its actual description and in its subsequent critical treatment. Having bested her opponents in both the white "ladies" and the Indian "squaws" races, Cogewea is dismayed to learn that a white judge has registered a complaint regarding her eligibility for the "ladies" race. The halfbreed contender quickly realizes that in his consideration, her blood is tainted by the Indian element, not elevated by its white component. She is not "pure," therefore she cannot be white; she must be considered "Indian" by default. Turning this biased mode
of thinking on the judge himself, Cogewea labels the prize money "tainted" and "polluted" and throws both cash awards "full in the face of the fuming judge" (70). The moment is not, as some readers would argue, a moment of defeat for Cogewea; it is instead a moment of recognition and moral victory. Despite her loss of dignity in the face of the white men, she stands for who she really is: neither "lady" nor "squaw," but someone in between, for whom no category has yet been acknowledged. The desire to define this category then becomes for Mourning Dove the motivation behind the writing of the book.

In his own reading of the scene, Louis Owens betrays his personal/political expectations of the confrontation and mis-reads the final outcome, casually yet incorrectly stating: "As is to be expected, the mixedblood is refused entry into both races" (Owens 47). As a reader, Owens ignores the potential victory of the crossblood, for Cogewea's success goes against the desired effect he is looking for: the alienation of the halfbreed in both the white and the Indian context. His revisionist reading of the text enforces a particular interpretation despite its efforts to break free of confining or restrictive categorization. This leads him to join those critics who ultimately find Cogewea unsatisfying, a failed attempt to reconcile the differences demonstrated in the mixed-blood protagonist. As Gerald Vizenor might argue, they have subscribed so fully to the "hypotragedy" of the Native American Indian, the myth that the tribes constituted a quickly vanishing race during that period of time, that their readings are affected to the point that they are no longer readings at all, only "pleasurable misreadings" (Vizenor, Narrative Chance 5).
Paula Gunn Allen justifies her own negative judgment of the book on aesthetic grounds, arguing that Cogewea serves as a failed attempt "to satisfy white and tribal literary requirements." Once again, there is no in-between category in which Mourning Dove may compete; she is judged lacking in both "pure" categories. Allen goes on to suggest that Cogewea be read as a "martyred" book in light of its purposefully troublesome assimilationist intentions (Allen, The Sacred Hoop 83). One question we might well ask is what Allen considers to be the "requirements" of "tribal literature," since such a genre had not yet come into existence at the time of Cogewea's printing (unless, of course, we include oral literature, though here too we may be hard-pressed to offer a definitive list of "tribal" requirements for evaluation). As the involvement of Lucullus McWhorter and the education of both Zitkala-Sa and Mourning Dove make clear, "tribal literature" was more often than not evaluated in terms of "white literature," and as such evolved from it as a sort of tangent or sub-genre, relying on similar stylistic techniques and grammatical usages of the English language.

Though Mourning Dove incorporates the crude "lingo" of the ranchhands in her novel, she herself, in the guise of Cogewea, seeks to rise above such verbal roughness and puts herself forward as a refined, cultured (some might argue white) woman. Witness the following meditation, modelled on the romantic style in vogue at the time in Euroamerican literature:

Cogewea could not understand herself. She could find no place in life. Her mind burned with an undefinable restlessness. Her longings were vague and shadowy; as something not to be attained within the narrow limits of her prescribed sphere. If she gazed at the mountains, she imagined that they beckoned her.
Called to her as if she were a part of them. If she gave heed, there was disenchantment; a volatilization of a jocose dream. (22)

In such a passage, the reader can track the transformation from simplistic to complex thought, from the ordinary to the sublime, from "common talk" to "literary expression." After familiarizing ourselves with the letters written between Mourning Dove and McWhorter, we recognize the movement from the voice of one to that of the other, with a trace of Wordsworth thrown in for effect. This, after all, is the language both aspire to, for Mourning Dove wishes to write about her experiences as a crossblood for herself, and as such writes with the only requirements she has been taught concerning written literature — those of the white educational institution. If she had written with "tribal" literary requirements in mind, she would never have written at all, since few Indians of her day and age placed any high value on such an endeavor.

The romanticized notion of the Indian writer, like the archetypal image of the "noble savage," persists even today. Nearly all of the existing literature written by Indians was in fact penned by crossbloods such as Mourning Dove, yet when critics consider such texts as *American Indian Stories* or *Cogewea*, they are often relegated to the "Squaw's" race rather than the "Ladies" race in literary study. Their value as literature rests in the context of the Native American canon; beyond that, they are vulnerable to consideration as "melodramatic dime-novel westerns." As critical readers of "literature," we approach such texts with certain expectations firmly in mind. We expect that Cogewea and Zitkala-Sa will "return" to their "own"

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heritage — that of Native American society — rather than subscribe to and be accepted by their "other" heritage — that of white society. Like the judge in the horse race, our biases come pre-packaged and pre-determined and will not be altered by independent rational circumstance.

Likewise, when critics consider the authorship of Cogewea, they look to its Native American sources rather than its obvious white derivations. Some critics like Dexter Fisher seek to overlook the duality entirely and cast Mourning Dove in the role of determined Indian author, one who "took her battered old typewriter and tried to work after long hours in the field or orchards" (Fisher in Cogewea vii). Alanna Kathleen Brown disputes this romantic fabrication, relying on letters written by the Okanogan Indian herself to deflate Fisher's attempts at conferring "heroic" status upon her (Brown 161). Jay Miller, who later edited Mourning Dove's autobiography, further alleges that Mourning Dove's half-breed ancestry might itself have been a clever marketing myth, since her autobiographical information was often "denied by her family and the tribal census" (Miller as quoted in Owens 41). Miller argues that Mourning Dove realized the potential inherent in the crossblood claim and capitalized on it (most likely with McWhorter's encouragement), giving her license to cross into both white and red camps and claim a unique understanding of each. Likewise, it was McWhorter who first instilled political and humanistic ideas in Mourning Dove's mind by advising her of her "duty . . . to her poor people". Like Zitkala-Sa, Mourning Dove had intended originally to write fiction and gain recognition for herself.

25 Quoted by Fisher in the introduction to Cogewea, p. viii.
as a writer, not as an advocate or revisionist historian for Native American causes. For those like McWhorter, there could be no such simplistic title conferred. Mourning Dove's ancestry made her a novelty and, as such, more marketable. Had she written as Christine Quintasket with no autobiographical information known about her, we might not even consider reading a novel such as Cogewea today. For better or worse, McWhorter realized this, and subsequently capitalized on it.

This market-based mentality influenced Mourning Dove as well. She considered the stories and tales of her tribe to be "material" for her own use and incorporation, thus perpetuating the perspectives of the folklorists and anthropologists, who scoured the camps alongside her buying up stories to satisfy their own academic ambitions. In her letters to McWhorter, Mourning Dove expresses her frustration at having to compete for these often "incorrect" stories:

This Mr. James Tait has collected folklores among the Indians and has been paying five dollars apiece for good Indian legends and naturally that has spoiled the natives and of course they wish the same price from me whether the story is worth a nickle to me. A lot of times the same stories are told to me a little differently from one party and another will say, that is not the true fact, but I know the straight of it and will tell me with a little addition which is no help but only a waste of time of listening and taking note. (Mourning Dove quoted in Brown 168)

This scene later finds a home in the final version of the book, when Jim tells Cogewea and Densmore about a woman "would-be writer" who comes looking for information about Indian terminology and ends up with a great deal of lies and misinformation. Mourning Dove uses the opportunity to defend the authenticity of her own work as she has Cogewea turn to the
white Densmore and declare quite articulately "I contend that the whites can not authentically chronicle our habits and customs . . . It is practically impossible for an alien to get at our correct legendary lore" (168). Such a passage only heightens the irony implicit in the story behind the production of Cogewea itself. Mourning Dove originally sought the assistance of McWhorter at the insistence of J.W. Langdon, who wrote to her that this particular white man "is perhaps the best versed individual in that section of the country on Indian tradition" (Quoted in Brown 162). Throughout the ensuing correspondence, her main obsession was making sure that she got things "correct," with McWhorter acting as final arbiter.

The partnership which developed between Mourning Dove and McWhorter spanned many years and encompassed both the writing of Cogewea and Coyote Stories, the latter of which gathered together a number of explanatory folk tales for children. At first, as with Cogewea, the two writers worked at cross purposes. McWhorter, by then a well-known philanthropist on Indian causes, saw in the young female Indian writer an opportunity to spread certain political messages concerning the Native American situation. Mourning Dove, however, intended the book to be a children's collection, since those stories had been told to her while she was a small girl herself. By the time Coyote Stories neared publication, another editor, Dean Guie, arrived on the scene to assist McWhorter in the task of helping Mourning Dove. His idea of help, as Brown notes, was to pressure Mourning Dove even more into "being ethnographically correct" in the tales, which he in turn defined as "reinforcing what social scientists believed"
(Brown 175). Once again, despite what we read of Cogewea's discussion concerning tribal stories with Densmore, the frame of reference and evaluation employed by Mourning Dove herself was ultimately a white one.

Such an analysis expands our conception of authorship beyond that of the individual who initially held the pen or touched the typewriter keys. That ideal, still clung to by many in the academy, ignores or trivializes the influence of those such as editors who often effect great changes on the text prior to publication. Likewise, it assumes that the source of a fictional work is the author himself or herself, and that those who may have originally provided pre-structured tales such as Stemteema's "Story of Green Blanket Feet" (Mourning Dove, Cogewea 165-176) surrender any claims to authorship upon their incorporation into the main text. After all, in the European tradition, referential plagiarism was a common practice, unpunished and even expected of truly great writers as a means of honoring those writers whose past successes continued to inspire and inform the current practitioners of belles lettres. Whereas before Native American oral storytellers disclaimed any direct ownership of particular tales, those who were beginning to practice in the realm of the written word laid claim to certain material and, by placing it between the margins of the printed page, made it their own.

The materialistic enterprise in which both Zitkala-Sa and Mourning Dove engaged demonstrates such practices in action. Like the ethnographers before and beside them, both closely observed their Native families, friends, and neighbors and collected relevant information for their writing.
Mourning Dove went one step further, placing a monetary value on the stories gathered in order to compete with the seemingly wealthy and generous anthropologists. Myths and legends thus became commodities, ultimately sold through the publishing marketplace and thereby introduced into the mainstream readership. Along the way, the stories were often changed and distorted for one reason or another, often by unknowledgeable and disassociated businessmen. Finally, the reading public brought their own critical apparatus to bear on the texts, often reading the "savage stories" out of curiosity and not with a consideration of their possible artistic or academic merit.

In order to fully understand the concept of authorship, then, we need to consider the process which serves as its context: the production and distribution of the text as material object. Marxist critics, whose political aim was to combat the oppression and subordination of groups such as Native Americans on all fronts, including the literary marketplace, understood this widened focus quite well and aided significantly the push toward the inclusion of other-cultural voices in the publishing world. In his introduction to Other Destinies, Louis Owens realizes how such a critical perspective can become a thematic consideration within the Native American text itself, and in so doing alludes indirectly to the problematic crossblood author:

It can be said of the protagonists in American Indian fiction that they suffer from alienation in the Marxist sense, for the self from which they are alienated is, in fact, shown to be potentially coherent and dependent upon a continuing and coherent cultural identity. (19)
For the half-breed Cogewea, Marxist alienation exists on a number of levels ranging from the self to the community to the culture (if, in fact, we can understand the very notion of a "crossblood culture"). For the author Mourning Dove, articulating this alienation validates its existence — and thereby validates the self. What is unusual here, however, is that such validation does not occur in the context of the Native American culture; it occurs in the camp of the perceived oppressor, the white Western tradition. Contrary to the end of the novel, in which Cogewea returns to a more tribal perspective and marries the fellow halfbreed Jim, Mourning Dove returns time and again to McWhorter as a vehicle for success in the white-governed publishing world. As Alanna Kathleen Brown so succinctly points out, "There was no one else who truly supported the author in her" (Brown 169).

What remains curious about such a statement is that Brown constructs the "author" in Mourning Dove as something within yet somewhat distinct from Mourning Dove herself. Her observation regards the Muse as a foreign entity of sorts, adding yet another layer to the complex understanding of Native American authors in the literary context. We might add this fragmentation to the already established division between real and romanticized visions of the Native American, as well as the more important "Indian" and the "white" divisions Mourning Dove evoked in her meditations on the term "half-blood."

Further still, we find interesting discussions of gender roles within Cogewea and might cast a critical glance at the community of men which frequently surrounds the half-blood protagonist. Mourning Dove herself
anticipates such a perspective via the white ranch initiate Densmore, who
tries to convince himself of the folly in his growing affection for Cogewea:

(Women) are alright as objects of amusement and pleasure, but there it must halt. Fairly educated, she can show refinement when the mood strikes her, but she makes easy to fall into the rough, uncouth ways of her associates — the ill-mannered rowdies of the cow-trail. None of such for you, Alfred Densmore! A be-pistoled woman who can swear a little on occasions may be picturesque, but she is no mate for a gentleman of the upper society. Had she strings to a good mine there would be an inducement, but a squaw without compensation — a sacrifice without adequate requital — bah! (81)

Densmore considers Cogewea as an object, and as such, a thing whose value can be ascertained via a list of preconceived criteria. Among these are Cogewea's manners and femininity (which receive a negative value), her social and cultural background (again negative), and her wealth (minus signs again) among other things. Seen from the perspective of the author Mourning Dove, this checklist judgment demonstrates an uncanny self-consciousness and feminist awareness on the part of the half-blood. To make matters even more problematic, however, we must also consider that perhaps the adopted perspective of the white Densmore is, in fact, not adopted at all, and imported into the text via the voice of McWhorter. In this context, a consideration of the passage is quite different, changing any critical conclusions we as readers might make and leading us to suspect even more that McWhorter treated Mourning Dove herself as an "object" whose true value was determined by her marketplace worth. Both McWhorter and Mourning Dove alike hoped and prayed that the novel Cogewea would be the "good mine" Densmore wishes for of the halfblood.
Given this example, we can see how important this question of authorship can become in a text as multivocal and convoluted as *Cogewea*. Worlds clash and collide not only in the content of the story as it is presented on the page, but in the very words and phrases used to present that story, in the very voice(s) used to tell the tale. Beyond that, the jostlings continue in the reader's mind, for while it is quite often clear which passages belong to Mourning Dove and which to McWhorter, their close working relationship ensured a high percentage of gray (or should I say pink) areas which could belong to both simultaneously. Such moments represent what Louis Owens has described as:

> The presence of a political disturbance permeating the text as the voices of Mourning Dove and McWhorter struggle to be heard over one over the other — with Mourning Dove's easily winning out. (Owens 44)

In this scheme of analysis, collaboration becomes competition, a transition which in some ways precedes the introduction of politics into the text. The warring influences of red and white blood pumping between the printed lines transfer to Mourning Dove and McWhorter themselves, despite the outward placid and productive nature of their work together. In such a way, a political reading of the text leads to a political reading of the authorial forces which produced the text, and with that, the possibility of a mis-reading.

One might also be tempted to demand that Owens surrender his scorecard if his final analysis has Mourning Dove "winning out." Just prior to his announcement of the victor in this literary conflict, Owens speaks of McWhorter's "more privileged discourse, appealing as it does to the power of
cultural hegemony with its high degree of literacy" (43). Later in his critique, he declares something of a stalemate, citing that the book ultimately "ends on a note of stasis, with nothing resolved, none of the many questions answered" (48). The winner here seems to be Owens himself, aided and abetted by a critical apparatus whose accuracy in selecting victors is suspect at best yet "privileged" by virtue of its own discourse, its own high degree of scholastic study. It is this critical perspective which can hold Mourning Dove up in one hand as a victor in a bipartisan text, and then hold her down with the other by ultimately considering the book "a failure." The two cancel each other out, and such a reading reinforces the stasis which leads a reader such as Owens to question the hope presented (however crudely or romantically) by Mourning Dove in the final scenes of the novel as she does indeed lay claim to a "good mine" inherited through her long-lost father and subsequently marries the half-blood Jim. In her final appearance, Cogewea feels "the blood suffuse her cheeks;" in his final appearance, Densmore "suddenly turn[s] pale" on reading about Cogewea's good fortune (284). She finishes a blushing red and he, a stunned white.

Before claiming that Mourning Dove has either triumphed over the white influences of McWhorter in the text or succumbed to them by presenting Cogewea with a rather contrived happy ending, we might better ask why the presence of multiple voices within a text such as Cogewea necessitates conflict, if it does at all. Owens suggests an implicit hierarchy by which McWhorter is judged the more "privileged" voice, perhaps owing to the fact that he as editor had the final word (and often did not consult
Mourning Dove on his revisions). His sense, and that of others, is that the resulting "struggle" must somehow be resolved, though exactly what that means in the context of fictional literature remains unclear. In terms of personal psychology, the stakes are even higher. The multiple "voices" which exist in the multicultural heritages of both Zitkala-Sa and Mourning Dove also perpetuate conflict, yet here the Native voice appears to win in the end.

We are faced ultimately with a paradox. In terms of literature, the white/Euramerican/western voice often overwhelms the texts written by crossblood writers, and with that comes a set of traditionally-influenced language patterns, stylistic decisions, and imagistic systems. The original experiences of the author filter through these learned literary structures and devices, with further refinement and polish added by primarily white editors. Ostensibly, then, the texts "speak" with white voices and seek to gain some of the "privilege" which has been accorded to that voice throughout history.

In terms of authorship, however, the Native American voice commands our attention. This is, after all, what distinguishes the book for the reader and makes it somewhat "exotic," which in the early 1900's was a primary selling point for such anomalies. Such a treatment remains in slightly altered form today in the literary academy. There, critics turn to the content of the book and search for traces of Indian heritage, even if these traces (as in Cogewe'a) are sufficiently mixed with others to alter them dramatically. We manufacture a set of revisionist or reactionary expectations associated with such texts just as previous literary endeavors matched potential masterpieces with their abilities to satisfy the "great themes of
conflict" in the western tradition. Though written by crossbloods, the books are labelled "Native American." The focus fixes on that part of the author's heritage and ignores or dismisses the "white" part, for if we were to consider them in the "white" literary tradition, they might be considered, as Paula Gunn Allen said earlier of Cogewea, merely "dime-store westerns."

Even as readers come to detest the stereotyping and prejudices contained within texts such as American Indian Stories and Cogewea, they are often enforced all the same in the very nature of our consideration of those texts. Zitkala-Sa's experience as an orator is perhaps representative of this state of affairs. When asked to recite a speech for her school in a competition, she felt privileged to compete equally with white students and ultimately gained second place, a victory in her eyes. But more significantly perhaps than the award, what Zitkala-Sa took away from the match was the memory of a huge white banner hung in the back of the auditorium "with a drawing of a most forlorn Indian girl on it" and "words that ridiculed the college which was represented by a 'squaw'" (Zitkala-Sa 79-80).

In her heart, Zitkala-Sa feels the burning frustration and savors the sweet revenge achieved when she wins her prize. Though we as readers may share these reactions with her, Zitkala-Sa is quick to label them as belonging to "the evil spirit" within her. She returns to her room and realizes that the situation is far more complex than the previous conflict demonstrated:

I laughed no more in triumph when thus alone. The little taste of victory did not satisfy a hunger in my heart. In my mind I saw my mother far away on the Western plains, and she was holding a charge against me. (80)
For Zitkala-Sa, true resolution cannot come about through vengeful conquest. Instead, it requires a return to her home, to her personal (matrilineal, since no father figure is present) heritage, and to the landscape which contains both. In the mother/daughter relationship, as in the grandmother/granddaughter relationship in Cogewea, the focus returns to the individual, to her "educated" (re)consideration of that traditional community and her place within it.

As Lucullus McWhorter was quick to inform Mourning Dove, the individual in Native American society has a duty to the people of that community, and from the moment white and red met on the shores of the "undiscovered" continent, that duty became the crux of survival. Political obligation inspired a great many of the early translated and transcribed speeches of the Indians, and today, authors are still viewed as somehow representative of their individual or collective tribes, even if these authors are, by and large, crossbreeds. The focus on the individual, or at least on the various aspects of the individual, diminishes in significance, leaving us with an enforced typology prevalent not only in the selection of materials which went to press in the early days of Native American writing, but also in the survival of those texts into the interested realm of literary criticism today.
Chapter III

Leslie Marmon Silko:
The Survival of the Ever-Changing Storyteller

Survival, both of the culture and of the individual, is a central theme in much of the work of contemporary writer Leslie Marmon Silko, whose two works *Storyteller* and *Ceremony* deserve a place of highest prominence in both the American and the Native American literary pantheon. As Silko herself observes in the narrative poem "The Storyteller's Escape" from *Storyteller*:

(The storyteller) says "With these stories of ours
we can escape almost anything
with these stories we will survive." (247)

For Silko, this survival is inextricably linked to the landscape, for that serves as both origin and home for the stories she tells. This might explain the inclusion of photographs among the poems and stories collected in *Storyteller;* in order to gain even a basic understanding of the material, it is necessary to have in mind a vision of the landscape in which the events took place, whether in reality or in fantasy. For Silko, landscape serves as a kind of memory, with stories inscribed on the various geographic features and locations. Place becomes the focal point upon which all else depends, and
subsequently, the survival of the cultures she tells about depends upon the survival of those particular landscapes. As an author, she both reads from and writes upon that landscape. As a storyteller, she finds validity within that landscape, as well as within the community that inhabits the land.

As we have seen earlier, Silko considers the stories of her people to be part and parcel of their cultural heritage, and as such, once more they exhibit the "material" status conferred upon handed-down myths and legends by Mourning Dove and Zitkala-Sa. Silko takes this perspective a step further, however, in demanding (albeit perhaps satirically) that the stories be returned along with all of the tools, trinkets, and remains of the dead appropriated by institutions such as universities and museums. Though a story cannot be "called back" once it has been told (as we shall see in her description of the witchery contest), it can be given back, since it has become a real object. By real I mean an object which has effect on the world, which has some sort of discernible power and place in a given context, which exists as productive and influential part of a cultural landscape.

Stories not only serve to describe or define the world which surrounds us, they also serve to create it. Such a notion, handed down in Western literature from the period of the Romantics, has always been with many of the Native American peoples. In her retelling of the witchery contest, found both in Storyteller and Ceremony, Silko connects the telling of a story with the creation of reality (Silko, Storyteller 130-137, and Ceremony 132-138). In an effort to prove itself superior to the other witches assembled, one particular witch spins a story about the creation and arrival of white people
on the shores of North America, and describes the horrible death and
destruction which follows them. As she tells the story, the witch claims that
the events are "set into motion," that the spoken words make it real. Such
creative powers, though not always used for such horrible purposes, exist
within all of us, for the process of storytelling relies on a community that can
tell, hear, and retell the stories over time. This constant re-telling becomes a
crucial part of the plan for survival, one which reaches beyond the limits of
story and touches all members of the community. As Linda Danielson
explains: "Silko identifies herself and her community with the creative
power of Thought Woman. Thus the creation of the world is something
humans are responsible for, day after day" (22). Though such an explanation
undercuts the obvious recurrent power of animals to share this creative
ability with humans, it does lead to a sense of interconnectedness which
implicates all members of a particular community (or, in the extended sense,
ecosystem) in the (re-)creation and continuance of that community.

Like Darwin well before her, Silko realizes that a creature's
evolutionary stamina depends upon a certain degree of adaptability, an ability
to change in response to the demands of the environment and, possibly, to
change the environment itself. Native Americans understood this kind of
change in ways quite different from the scientific rationalism of the European
settlers (Deloria 4); their world view was more animistic and included many
elements common to Greek and Roman mythology yet without the
anthropocentrism which predominates in that tradition. As can be seen in
Zitkala-Sa's Coyote Stories, an animal's lot in life depends in great part on his
or her interconnectedness with other creatures, and his or her actions can have decidedly significant consequences. This tradition is carried on by Silko in *Storyteller* as she tells about how coyote lost his original fur coat (236-237) or how butterflies came to be (15). She also tells about how humans adapt to their environment in more life-sustaining ways, telling, for example, how the Laguna people first learned to hunt buffalo in a time of great hunger in "Cottonwood Part Two: Buffalo Story." Quite often, her stories revolve around natural disasters such as drought and famine, hard times when the knowledge of a particular story — or at least the basic premise of a story — could mean the difference between death and survival.

Like her contemporary N. Scott Momaday, Silko realizes that the stories of her people risk being "one generation removed from extinction" (Momaday 51). Both also realize that the greatest threat to their communities stems from colonialism and the subsequent co-opting of traditional Indian culture. In an interview with Laura Coltelli, Silko talks about how colonialist impulses affected Native Americans at the very heart of their world-view - the level of language (Silko in Coltelli 143-144). Missionary educators replaced the nature-borne language of Indian children with another tongue, one derived more from the rational world of the sciences than from religion or philosophy. Here, the mythical influence of spirits and animals, who often invented and controlled the use of certain words and expressions in Indian legend, was replaced by etymological considerations often based on foreign

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26 I use anthropomorphic pronouns here in respect of the Native American personification of animals, not to imply any kind of political animal right's agenda (though the two are obviously linked somewhat).
linguistic roots and practices. Such a language was in some ways just as
foreign to the new Americans as it was to the Indians, yet Silko saw the need
for expression in this language to be a common endeavor: "The great struggle
is to make whatever language you have really speak for you" (Silko in
Coltelli 144). Such a struggle was as much a challenge to those seeking to
develop a distinctive American "voice" in literature as it was to the Native
Americans who adopted writing as a new means of expression and,
ultimately, of cultural storytelling.

Of course, this comparison only stretches so far, and doesn't begin to
take into account the many linguistic variables which differentiated Native
American languages from English as well as from each other. For example,
the Comanche language demonstrates a linguistic morphological process in
which individual words can come to represent the distinctions "near" versus
"far" or "visible" versus "invisible" as commonly as English words
distinguish between "singular" and "plural" (Language Files 145). Translating
these ideas into another linguistic system is not impossible, but it does strip
such awareness of the natural world of its prominence in the original
tongues. These concerns must then be articulated in other ways, and may at
times produce problems similar to those encountered by early transcribers of
Native American oral tales as they attempted to show in writing the various
speech inflections and hand gestures which accompanied the telling of a
particular tale. In all cases, the language embodies limitations which the
speaker or writer must work to overcome; what changes from one language
to the next are the sets of limitations present, and the various strategies which might be utilized to offset them.

Thus, all of us work toward the goal of making a language "speak" for us, as Silko suggests. Our approaches differ a great deal, however, as Arnold Krupat notes in his comparison of Silko's texts and Momaday's. Basing a great deal of his critical strategy on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, Krupat contrasts a perceived "monologic" impulse in Momaday with a relatively "dialogic" tendency in Silko, particularly in the "strongly polyphonic" Storyteller (Krupat, The Voice in the Margin 161-187). Though reviewer Kathryn S. Vangen notes that such a classification of Momaday is an overly reductive and somewhat "harsh" reading (Vangen 27-28), Krupat's observations bear consideration in terms of the strong outside influences (predominantly European) he notes within works such as The Way to Rainy Mountain:

What power there is in Momaday's own words, for example, comes from their relation to the words of other — Mooney, Catlin, Euramerican artists, even Momaday's own earlier words, as well as the words of a great many Kiowa people living and dead. What is fascinating to me is the way in which Momaday's autobiographies attempt to assert the independent word and the single voice while yet demonstrating, along with most Native American autobiographies, that words are always interdependent, that other voices always sound. (Krupat 187)

This intermingling of influences, once the product of editor/writer relationships in early Indian writers such as Zitkala-Sa and Mourning Dove, has now been internalized somewhat in the works of contemporary Native American authors. Here, as in Owens's problematic interpretation of Cogewea, we see an established academic hierarchy at work, one which on the
one hand faults Momaday for the presence of an authoritative voice or style capable of suppressing the polyvocality of the text via its monologic restrictions, yet on the other hand acknowledges the presence of "other voices" within the same text.

As with most postmodern critics, Krupat wishes for a certain "decentering" of the writer's authority, something which challenges the hierarchy of voices he finds so limiting in certain European literary traditions. In his desire to find such a model in Silko, however, he overstates his case and risks recasting the actual stories by claiming that "there is no single, distinctive, or authoritative voice in Silko's book (Storyteller) nor any striving for such a voice (or style); to the contrary, Silko will take pains to indicate how even her own individual speech is the product of many voices" (Krupat, 163). Perhaps, given the comparison of critiques, Krupat criticizes Momaday for trying to disguise his polyvocality in the guise of a single, governing, authorial voice. Yet with Silko as well, he points to "her own individual speech" as a source of authority, one which "will take pains to indicate" its own varied origins.

Such a synthesis of voices contradicts an actual reading of certain passages in Storyteller, which echo the internal editorial commentary many critics find so frustrating in a text such as Cogewea. Consider, for example, the explanatory function of the italicized "voice" as it appears in one of the "Aunt Susie" stories:

Waithea was a little girl living in Acoma and one day she said

"Mother, I would like to have
some yashtoah to eat."

"Yashtoah" is the hardened crust on corn meal mush that curls up.

The very name "yashtoah" means it's sort of curled up, you know, dried, just as mush dries on top.

She said

"I would like to have some yashtoah." (Silko 8)

Silko had previously characterized Aunt Susie as "a brilliant woman, a scholar of her own making," and we find this to be true in her educational asides interspersed within the telling of the tale. This "scholarly" voice, clearly authoritative in purpose and tone, seeks to preserve and impart vital cultural information for an uninformed audience, and as such mirrors the intentions of editors such as Lucullus McWhorter as they tried to make Native American texts understandable for the general reading public of the day, mostly non-Indian. In Silko's text, such commentary has been assimilated (partially due to need, since Indians as well may not know what "yashtoah" is any more) and arises from within one of the voices of the text. Its integration moves from "outside" of the text (if editors are to be considered outside influences — not always the case, as I have argued above) to the inside, from the margin to the center. The editor becomes part of the storytelling "voice" of Aunt Susie, and she has adopted its authoritative power. This power passes on to Silko as well as she writes what she heard ["I write when I still hear/her voice as she tells the story" (Silko 7)], but only through Aunt Susie. Silko herself makes no explicit claim to authorship here. To claim that Aunt Susie's voice becomes part of Silko's "individual" writing voice (which is, I believe, what Krupat intends us to believe in his discussion
of the text's "strongly polyphonic" nature) is to enforce a westernized literary convention on a text which often stands in the face of such conventions.

Krupat's analysis of Storyteller becomes somewhat more understandable if we consider that the text itself has a voice separate (though not necessarily distinct) from that of the author. This voice, which is the sum total of all the voices utilized in the writing, provides us with the necessary second half of the following equation offered by Krupat:

Storyteller is presented as a strongly polyphonic text, in which the author defines herself — finds her voice, tells her life, illustrates the capacities of her vocation — in relation to the voices of other storytellers Native and non-Native, tale tellers and book writers, and even to the voices of those who serve as the (by-no-means silent) audience for these stories. (Krupat 163, my emphasis)

Here, Silko's voice is contextually dependent on all those that have come before her — "Native and non-Native" — and seems "individual" only in an ironic manner. To follow this line of thinking would bring us to the point Krupat tries so desperately to avoid in the opening chapter of his book, to the "death of the author" as previously theorized by Roland Barthes in his essay of the same name:

A text is made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused and that place is the reader, not, as was hitherto said, the author. (Barthes in Lodge 171)

Krupat's difficulties with this multiplicity of voices, this polyvocality he so clearly favors in Silko, is betrayed by the enforced monologism in the title of his book, The Voice in the Margin (my emphasis). Authorship becomes
generic, and as such invites rather than resists simple placement or
categorization. In his continued argument for a Native American canon,
Krupat extends this line of reasoning, and the truth in Barthes's words
(however difficult to admit) is borne out: Inasmuch as readers and critics
determine the content and validity of a particular canon, they serve as the
"place where . . . multiplicity is focused," not the author.

Though Barthes's theories, and subsequently those of others like him,
offend many critics and writers alike, they do not seem entirely new or
dangerous in the context of most Native American writing. In Storyteller, for
example, Silko values her role as listener as much as teller; she is happy to sit
down and listen once again to her Aunt Susie "speak" through her, and she,
like the anthropologists and ethnographers before her, only serves to set it in
writing. As mentioned earlier, this form of re-telling is akin to memory, and
necessary for survival of Indian cultures:

   As with any generation
   the oral tradition depends upon each person
   listening and remembering a portion
   and it is together —
   all of us remembering what we have heard together —
   that creates the whole story
   the long story of the people. (Silko 6-7)

The multiplicity of the readers, not the multiple voices of the writer, is the
essential element of the passage. Listening and remembering (and the
subsequent communal responsibility to re-tell) are the factors crucial to
survival, not just writing. Storytelling serves as part of an ongoing process,
the continuation of culture, and cannot be separated from that context to be
seen as an isolated act of creation. In this sense, the power of storytelling
continues on its circuit, perhaps not as effectively as in the old days of the oral tradition, but enough to provide survival of the old traditions and beliefs and to bring a sense of cultural security back to the people.

With this retelling, however, comes inevitable change. Tradition dictates a certain context for the act of storytelling, as we have seen in Chapter One, and the audience of listeners dictates yet another. While one may be rooted in the past, the other (in the act of telling or reading) is fixed in the present. Silko seeks to understand her own role as a writer in her letters to James Wright, a great number of which contained stories of Silko's daily life in New Mexico and elsewhere. Silko was not always sure of their relevance to the correspondence, yet felt all the same that they "needed writing," as did the stories in *Storyteller* (Silko, *The Delicacy and Strength of Lace* 88). She comes to understand this multi-faceted notion of context while grappling with the equally complicated problem of the multiple versions of particular stories:

> I am learning now that there is no such thing [as a "single" or "same" story], that every time [Aunt Susie] told a story and told it like it was the only version, well, it *was* the only version of *that* story; and it is just a certain training we have, a training that makes us want to group ideas or stories together, which leads us to want to or try to lump together all the stories, calling them 'versions' of the same story . . . . There actually is "the story" which people hear and tell, with different details, according to how their family or village tells it. But there is also another sense of the story, and that is "the story" of a particular telling (as with music, I suppose), the story that will never again be told in quite the same way with quite the same context. (Silko 86)

This "sense" of the story provides flexibility for the various "versions" of the stories, and makes not only for a dialogic voice within a text, but for a dialogic "text" as well over the course of time. We must be careful to put this "text" in
quotations, for there is, perhaps, no such tangible thing, at least not that we as humans have access to in our earthly existence. Such a perspective would be in keeping with the views held by earlier storytellers, who saw the original text existing within nature and saw themselves only as limited conduits through which parts of the story might be delivered to the community. Though writing seeks to fix such stories as "texts" on the page, it can never seek to fix the "story" itself on the page, for that story is ever-changing.

This, too, is needed for the survival of culture, and the point is made clear in the pages of Silko's novel *Ceremony*. Tayo himself has no form at the beginning of the book; after his experience in Viet Nam, he returns to his home as "white smoke," a physical presence without conscious substance: "He inhabited a gray winter fog on a distant elk mountain where hunters are lost indefinitely and their own bones mark the boundaries" (Silko 14-15). In order to find himself again, Tayo must eventually undergo a ceremony, one devised for him by the medicine man Betonie. Unlike the traditional medicine man of westernized Indian lore, Betonie makes use of various non-traditional artifacts such as calendars and phone books in his rituals — all things given to change over time, which he sees as essential to their powerful influence in the world:

"At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, the elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong . . . . Things which don't shift and grow are dead things." (Silko, Ceremony, 126)
Tayo, who suffers in a death-like state at the beginning of the novel, must renew his identity through tribal ritual, but ritual as interpreted by and individualized by Betonie, the modern-day medicine man. William Clements, in his discussion of *Ceremony*, realizes the vital implications of this updated application of shamanism:

In her novel, Silko suggests that culture change ensures health for the individual participant in the culture as well as for the culture itself. She does not dwell upon the destructive aspects of change, such as those felt by Momaday's Kiowa ancestors. (Clements, 73)

For Silko, then, change is a progressive force, somewhat reactionary in its origins perhaps, but capable of ensuring the survival of an entire culture even when it is enacted one individual at a time.

This philosophy serves as the bannerhead for much of Silko's own work as a writer. Clements realizes the significance of this view and seems to seize upon the essential difference between Momaday and Silko in the following observation:

The Laguna writer regards her heritage as a living entity of which her own work is not so much a memorial as a development which introduces the kinds of changes essential for its continued life. (Clements 75)

The most significant of these changes is her decision to write, and to do so not in opposition to the traditional oral culture from which she emerged, but as part of the continuing transformation of that culture. (It would be wrong to deduce from this that writing is therefore perhaps superior to orality, or that one necessarily follows the other; the two are different but connected by threads which can be travelled both ways.) Gone are the days when writers
and editors alike scurried to gather up the stories before they vanished, a
tendency still carried into contemporary times by writers such as Momaday,
whose fears of cultural extinction — while still very real — dominate his
own aesthetic intentions in many of his works. Though memorializing
remains part of Silko's endeavors, it no longer serves as her primary or
necessary raison d'etre, for to claim as much would be to surrender to the
impulses of "dead things" which do not "shift and grow." She, like Tayo,
learns to adapt, to carry tradition forward in a new and meaningful way, and
to find her own identity both as a writer and as a tribal member in the process.

Finding one's identity in this respect is tantamount to finding one's
place, both within the community and within the landscape which supports
that community. Reyes Garcia follows this notion throughout Ceremony, and
in so doing moves beyond a simplistic notion of storytelling toward one
which has certain geopolitical consequences:

... landscape is very much an expression of communally-held
beliefs and values and of interpersonal involvements. I suggest
that the self-renewing power of community and land resides in
the ability of their members to communicate wholly with one
another .... Telling their stories, people speak most truly to one
another of their lives and most eloquently, compellingly,
transmit their senses of land and place, and their values, to
others. (Garcia 38-39)

For a character such as Tayo, such communication is essential as he attempts
to realign himself with the traditional values and beliefs of his tribal
community. This effort comes after the incredible displacement of identity he
experiences while fighting in Viet Nam. In opening himself to the healing
ceremonies offered by Betonie and others, Tayo discovers that his developing
sense of place extends beyond an individual sense of belonging; it moves forward into a communal sense of responsibility deriving from his interconnectedness with the landscape and all living things contained within it. Though terrifying, this vision imparts an ironic sense of hope as he "places" himself in proximity to the Trinity Site and Los Alamos, testing spots for the atomic bomb:

There was no end to it; it knew no boundaries; and he had arrived at the point of convergence where the fate of all living things, and even the earth, had been laid . . . . 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. (Silko, Ceremony 245-246)

Here, community, in the sense of either human society or natural ecosystem, begets responsibility, a characteristic which Louis Owens sees at the heart of the Native American oral tradition (Owens 184). In Ceremony, Silko implies that such responsibility is not the exclusive burden of the Native American. Tayo's discovery and his developing world view affect all readers of the novel, whatever their races may be, and serve as a call to awareness not only of the possibility of nuclear holocaust, but more significantly, of an impending environmental Armageddon.

With such threats hovering above the entire planet, Silko's emphasis on storytelling as a survival strategy demands increased attention and stands like an aesthetic imperative to all who read or listen, Native and non-Native alike. Throughout Ceremony, Silko's use of thread and web imagery, linked symbolically to the creation myth of Spider-woman employed to great effect
by both Silko and Paula Gunn Allen, furthers the notion of interconnectedness between all living things in all living landscapes. It also alludes to the fragile nature of such a relationship, a characteristic represented once again in the title *The Delicacy and Strength of Lace*. That which is so fine and vulnerable can also serve as our most solid, most resilient protection in the ever-changing world.

Such inherent paradoxes can also be found within storytelling itself, as the witchery contest demonstrates. The storytelling witch proves to the others how stories not only create but also destroy, for by invoking the "white skin people," she "set[s] in motion" a race whose primary impulse is "to destroy/to kill" (Silko, *Ceremony* 135-136). Silko may exercise great respect for language, but she is not ignorant to its exploitation by others, as she demonstrates in *The Delicacy and Strength of Lace* by pointing out to James Wright that she feels "overwhelmed sometimes and feel[s] a great deal of wonder at words, just simple words and how deeply we can touch each other with them, though [she] know[s] that most of the time language is the most abused of all human abilities or traits" (Silko 74). In describing the animate world with inanimate symbols rather than living voices, for example, we accept inanimacy as a fact of nature. Such a philosophical perspective would only increase the sense of detachment we feel from nature, and lead us to perpetrate the kinds of atrocities prophesied by the witch in her tale of the "white skin people." Rather than make conscious efforts to control the evil which exists naturally within the world, we seek to kill and destroy it, thus giving in to the impulses we originally wished to shun.
Owens makes an astute observation concerning Tayo's fullblood rival Emo, a representative of evil who stands opposed to the traditional respect offered to nature even as he abides by what appear to be tribal customs and traditions. These, however, have been customized by Emo to reflect his bitterness, and part of his own personal ceremony involves "two or three swallows of whiskey" and the presentation of his sack of human teeth before he could tell as story (Silko 55). Owens extends this perspective even further, claiming that "Emo seeks to divide not only Indians from mother earth (in a recognizably European pattern of thought), but Tayo from the community and from himself" (Owens 178). Back from the war and spinning his own stories of rape and pillaging, Emo goads the halfblood Tayo into violence, tempting Tayo with his own storytelling witchery. The scene is discouraging, for Emo has gathered around him an appreciative following, marking Tayo as the outsider, the "other," damned on account of his half-white blood. Yet Emo's fullblood heritage seems ironic in the context of his own "ritual," which Silko describes as progressing

from cursing the barren dry land the white man had left to them, to talking about San Diego and the cities where the white women were still waiting from them to come back to give them another taste of what white women never got enough of. But in the end, they always came around to it. (Silko 61)

In this instance, "it" signifies Emo's killing stories, which end with the apocalyptic genocidal statement "We should've dropped bombs on all the rest and blown them off the face of the earth" (Silko 61). Whirling witchery has permeated even the red man here, showing that none are safe from its influence.
In warning all of humanity about the very real threats posed by viewing the world as "a dead thing" in which "the trees and rivers are not alive/the mountains and stones are not alive" (135), Silko moves beyond the perceived (and at times critically enforced) traditions of Native American writers, which prioritize the preservation of the past or propose a revisionist interpretation of historical events. Such a categorization, which Gerald Vizenor borrows from Charles Larson's *American Indian Fiction* in the preface to *Narrative Chance* (Vizenor xi-xii), limits the potential reach of Silko's message since it is communicated within the restrictive context of "Native American" writing. In fact, Vizenor goes a step further and suggests that *Ceremony* belongs in a category labelled "qualified separist," despite the novel's final appeal for unity and harmony. Once again, we find that such critical canonical inquiries limit the power of the text by insisting that it conform somehow to enforced academic rubrics, despite the apparent irony that many of same theorists struggle against the authoritative imposition of textual boundaries and limits.

As a writer, Silko herself struggles against such boundaries, such strict interpretations of events, and in the end resorts to what Garcia calls "living boundaries" (Garcia 39), those which change along with time and place. The story or text, in such a system, is never "fixed," as we have seen from Silko's discussion of the various versions of oral narratives. We see a demonstration of such open-endedness in *Storyteller* as Aunt Susie tells of how some

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27 I find such a view ironic in light of earlier comments of Vizenor and his general disdain for categorization and the institutionalization of Native literatures. These views will be presented in the subsequent chapter, which might lead readers to view Vizenor's presentation of these categories as somewhat tongue-in-cheek, a trickster subversion of his own academic text.
Laguna people once escaped a flood by moving to the top of a mesa, where they are suddenly "all turned into stone:"

The story ends there.
Some of the stories
Aunt Susie told
have this kind of ending.
There are no explanations. (Silko, Storyteller 42)

With this as our model, we see that quite often Silko offers no answers, only relevant questions. In places where she does seem to offer answers, we might best back up a bit and say that she offers perspectives, ways of perceiving which might help us as listeners to glean something from the story yet which resist imparting any sort of ultimate authority upon the storyteller himself or herself. Quite often, as we see above, one of the basic qualities of such a perspective would be its open-endedness, its ability to exist as an unfixed point along an ongoing continuum, something which could change and adapt as its context or environment demands.

Silko's status as a storyteller depends upon this sort of perspective. Otherwise, one might be tempted to discount her significant cultural contributions by adhering to an orthodox prioritization of oral stories and ignoring the relatively recent and growing tradition of written expression. The tension between the two, which influences Silko's writing and leads to some of the more self-conscious revelations within a text such as the largely autobiographical Storyteller, stands as an obstacle to other Native writers such as Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, who writes:

The best way to begin a philosophical discussion concerning the nature and substance of the work of a contemporary Dakotah poet is to admit, oddly enough, to a certain kind of timidity and
lack of confidence and to conclude by saying that I do not speak for my people. (Cook-Lynn in *I Tell You Now* 58)

Such internalized insecurity and intimidation points to the ironic suppression of voices by the same postmodern theories which many thought would free the voices of non-dominant-cultural peoples. Previously, considerations of biological heritage created tensions between cross-blood authors and the supposedly full-blood tradition of which they wrote. Now, aesthetic differences dislocate the author's claims to write as something of a tribal representative. The move from a cultural mode of myth-production to a more individualized (and mechanized) system has shifted the critical context as well. Cook-Lynn goes on to say that she is "not surprised that this dichotomy does not exist for the 'real' poets of our tribes, the men and women who sit at the drum and sing the old songs and create new ones" (58). The dichotomy stems from the handed-over (not handed-down) written tradition, from a symbol system which remains fixed on the page and does not change from one reading to the next. In essence, it claims a sort of permanence previously (and perhaps currently) seen nowhere else in nature.

We have seen earlier how the most effective change, as Silko demonstrates in *Storyteller*, takes place in the listener and reader. This, for example, might account for our different interpretations of the witchery story as it appears in both *Storyteller* and *Ceremony*. In the one, we pay particular attention to the story's function as story; in the latter, we sense the links between Tayo's discoveries and the apocalyptic visions contained within the content of the story. Once we receive that the story in a particular context, it becomes a part of our seeing or perceiving the context itself. In her letters to
James Wright, Silko tells the poet that what is most important to her is to have "as many of the stories as possible and to have them together and to understand the emergence, keeping all the stories in mind at the same time," a rather postmodern condition in some respects, but one which she hopes will reunite her with the Pueblo world view of her ancestors:

You know, Jim, sometimes I feel almost like I can begin to see (or maybe "sense" is a better word for it) the way the ancient Pueblo people viewed the world and happenings in the world . . . . It seems that the old ones took nothing for granted, at least not the rising of the sun. And that they did not limit experience to "single episodes at single times." (Silko 87)

That "almost," italicized by Silko herself, warns us that perhaps the traditional Pueblo perspective is in fact gone forever, having transformed into something new. There can be no true recapturing of it, just as there can be no true rerun of sunrise or sunset. Each time it happens, it happens anew.

For that reason, the only thing which connects the sunrise at the beginning of Ceremony with the sunrise at the end is the word itself. Each sunrise is a distinct event, perhaps even beyond the scope of language to illustrate. What does differentiate between the two is context — the story which surrounds the language. We have not come "full circle" as Tayo greets the dawn at the end of Ceremony, despite the suggestions of some critics, but have instead followed a cycle, the points of which are ever-changing. For Silko, sunrise is a story which changes every morning, and the best we can hope for as human beings is to witness as many sunrises as possible, to be refreshed each time it rises anew, to acknowledge that each time we
experience yet another, we have succeeded in grasping the next small step toward our survival.

By incorporating such moments in her stories and allowing for the interplay of various possible interpretations, Silko uses language as an effective means of creating hope for that survival. Language, Garcia argues, is bound to the landscape, to the very things which change and influence Silko's worldview. In discussing the sunrise motif at the beginning and end of *Ceremony*, Garcia claims that "the encircling form of the novel is accentuated by the reflexive formality that binds language to landscape" (Garcia 45). Sunrise becomes ceremony, becomes an occasion for offering, becomes both the initiation and justification for the story which exists between one morning and another. That story, which occupies that space in time — a space Garcia calls "symbolic" space, referring to the work of Angel Medina in *Reflection, Time, and the Novel* (Garcia 39) — has no real beginning or end; it too continues, even as its meaning ever changes.

In this way, Silko suggests, culture is maintained over time owing to the forces of memory and storytelling. Language becomes a resource to be used for sustenance like water, food, and fire. In her essay "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination," she writes, "Survival in any landscape comes down to making the best use of all available resources" (in *On Nature* 90). Storytelling serves as an effective means of mapping those resources and of demonstrating how they might best be put to use. In passing these tales down from generation to generation, a group or community works to secure its future prosperity and to keep themselves intact despite possible adversity.
Implicit in nearly every tribal tale is an overarching respect for the environment, seen time and again in a book such as *Storyteller*. Ceremony and ritual further emphasize this respect and enact it within the environment, as we see throughout *Ceremony*. All of these elements combine to bestow a sense of belonging to a particular place, a trait which Silko claims "nearly always plays a central role in the Pueblo oral narratives" (Silko in *On Nature* 88).

Stories which come from the land therefore seek to place us once again within that land, and from that process landscape is created. The dynamic relationship which follows functions with a built-in environmental ethic, one in which humans are as much stewards of the earth as the earth is a steward of humans. Myths and legends illustrate that two-way existence, showing in the Laguna tradition, for example, how the animals helped the humans to emerge into the world by using their skills to widen the too-small passageway from one world to the next. This interdependence of human and natural experience found a place in the cultural makeup of the tribe, which featured clans designated by animal names in honor and appreciation of the help the humans had received in their emergence. Silko extracts from this a premise common to many Native American traditions:

Life . . . became viable when the human beings were able to imagine themselves as sisters and brothers to the badger, antelope, clay, yucca, and sun. Not until they could find a viable relationship to the terrain, the landscape they found themselves in, could they emerge. Only at the moment the requisite balance between human and other was realized could the Pueblo people become a culture, a distinct group whose population and survival remained stable despite the vicissitudes of climate and terrain. (Silko in *On Nature* 92)
"Culture," as Silko defines it above, relies upon the art of storytelling to reinforce not only creation and emergence stories, but the vital philosophies and ideologies underpinning those stories. Only in this way can the tribes survive, and from this, they receive the added benefit of a communal culture which further ensures that survival for the future.

The need for storytelling has not vanished with the disintegration of the oral tradition, nor has that fading form been thoroughly replaced by the written word. The move from oral to written has been something more of a shift from one resource to another in a time of change, a move from one vital foodstuff to another. The ability to make such a change determines the fate of the people to maintain their culture, to survive despite adversity. As Silko has shown in *Ceremony*, such an ability is not exclusive to Native American tribes. We live in a period wherein the major environmental changes will affect us all regardless of our inherited traditions. To read a novel such as Silko's only within the context of an American Indian canon is to limit its urgent call for change, to somehow perpetuate the notion that the effectiveness of such solutions, "primitive" and "savage" in their origins, remains as marginal as the literature itself. It is also, in some ways, to ignore the nature of the problem. The margins extend beyond the scope of mere human interest and come to include all of the natural world, for that is the world in which literature truly functions as a powerful force. Silko herself tells of how all things in nature are in motion, and thus we too must learn to adapt however we can:

> Survival depend[s] upon harmony and cooperation not only among human beings, but among all things — the animate and
the less animate, since rocks and mountains were known to move, to travel occasionally. (Silko in On Nature 86)
Chapter IV

Gerald Vizenor:
Tricked by the Tale

If Leslie Silko's *Ceremony* can be heralded as the much-anticipated break from a standardized Euramerican approach to Native American literature, Gerald Vizenor's work takes ultimate advantage of the liberties thereby afforded. His trickster characters have no reverence for borders and boundaries and, like the more metaphysical characters of the Latin surrealists Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar, they are as likely to collapse in on themselves and transform into other beings as they are to project themselves out onto the world in traditional narrative fashion. In this way, Vizenor's storylines run in many different directions at once and offer an opportunity for dialogic expression within the individual character as well as the text. The resulting works are often reflexive and contain elements of autobiography and/or self-conscious criticism. They are descriptive in the sense that they deal with contemporary situations and contexts from an individual (not culture-based) perspective, and they are expressive in that the overarching sensibility at work is one of playfulness and humor. In all senses, the trickster Vizenor himself looks upon every word as though it might in an instant be whisked and stricken from the page before the reader. There is no sense of
permanence, only a slight sense of authority and/or ownership, and overall a deep sense of respect for and belief in the stories and traditions which so often influence his writing.

"There is a bit of Coyote in all people," writes critic Linda Danielson as she comments on Leslie Silko's story "Yellow Woman," "for storytellers are tricksters like Coyote as well as agents like Yellow Woman, or creator-deities, and [Silva] certainly contains all three possibilities" (Danielson 25-26). Like Silva, Vizenor also contains all three possibilities, in addition to several that he, in his role as eminent trickster, invents for himself. As storyteller, the part-Ojibwe Vizenor is author of a number of books, poems, and essays, many of which incorporate elements related to the traditions of his tribal background. The extent to which Vizenor incorporates both tribal and personal experience into his invented stories shows him to be a crafty yet capable agent within the world of fiction as well. That world is as complex as any other created or perceived, replete with both random wonder and patterned predictability. Often, his own sense of surprise in that fabricated reality shows him acting as both reader and writer in the text, at once speaking to a group and sitting in amongst the audience members. Collapsing such a perceived duality, holding the mirror up to the mirror itself, becomes one of his most common trickster strategies and cues the reader of a Vizenor tale in on a pattern of imagery sustained throughout the broad spectrum of his work.

In the critical sense, Vizenor seeks to liberate both language and experience in his textual deconstruction of the "real" world, as we will soon
see in his most recent novel *Dead Voices*. As Andrew Wiget explains when discussing Vizenor's work:

Postmodern criticism — more properly, poststructuralist criticism — is Vizenor's weapon of choice because, in his view, it rescues the free play of the signifier from the deadly colonialist moral thematizing of social science, his wicked witch of the West. (Wiget 477)

Indeed, for Vizenor, the ethnohistorical/anthropological intentions of previous supposed "Native American texts" serve as a ploy for the continuation of the colonialist ideology, a world view which simultaneously put forth the myth of the "vanishing Native American" and did what it could to actualize the myth. Such a self-fulfilling prophecy found acceptance in print, as we have seen in both Mourning Dove and Zitkala-Sa, whose acknowledgement of the danger of tribal extinction served to validate the idea, if only somewhat. Vizenor explains in *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* (subsequently coded as NC), that early Native American writers often resorted to the "tragic" mode in their storytelling, when they should have instead followed the "invitation" of trickster figures in their own traditions and written in the more hopeful "comic" mode which allowed for "imaginative liberation."

Such a move would have kept the Indian writers up to date with their contemporaries. As Vizenor goes on to state with atypical succinctness in the consideration of his place in the current literary epoch: "The trickster is postmodern" (NC 9).

Vizenor functions as storyteller, story, listener, and critic all at once in his writing, and shifts between roles until the distinguishing lines between
them have all but blurred, opening up possibility and forestalling the highly fictionalized fate foretold by countless social scientists of the 1800's and early 1900's. As Wolfgang Hochbruck states in his summary analysis of Vizenor's work:

> To accept literary antecedents as the ruling standard would have meant stagnation and virtual exclusion from experiment; to accept the stereotypical labels distributed by romantic critics would have meant an existence as invented Indians after all. (Hochbruck 278)

Louis Owens expands on this notion, stating that those "predetermined values represent stasis and cultural suicide" (Owens 238). Vizenor battles against such a (mis)representation of tribal culture and suggests that true liberation comes from the exploration of new forms within the Native American storytelling tradition, which in turn allow Indians to rebuild cultures which continue to cling to the preconceived inventions of the Western culture-creators, the academy.

Like a true trickster, Vizenor selects satire and irony as two of his strongest assets and invades the very heart of his perceived opponent, placing himself within the academy and learning all he can of the current critical trends and tendencies. He practices a form of cultural subversion, working behind enemy lines and using the weapons of the opposition (for example, postmodernist theory) to un-authorize hitherto told and believed stories about the "noble yet dying breeds". To further the irony, he employs these

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28 The notion of using criticism as a weapon is mentioned repeatedly in critics of Vizenor's work; I have come across the metaphor in Hochbruck, Owens, and Ruoff in describing the author's literary strategies.
same devices on his own current work. The result is a rich combination of metafiction and metacriticism.

One can find traces of Vizenor’s autobiographical writing (such as the third-person "autocritical" piece “Crows Written on the Poplars”) imbedded in a fictional novel such as *Dead Voices*, then further find traces of that novel in his criticism (or vice versa). His words work like tricksters themselves at times, crossing through book covers and changing context without warning, and in so doing, often changing meaning. When we read of Vizenor’s shooting of a squirrel in “Crows Written on the Poplars,” for example, we know that he speaks both autocritically and autobiographically, and that the story serves to prove a point: "The squirrels in his autobiographies are mythic redemptions; he remembers their death and absolves an instance of his own separation in the world" (Vizenor in *I Tell You Now* 106). In *Dead Voices*, however, the shooting occurs during the transformation of the protagonist Bagese into a squirrel herself, thus heightening the tension and level of understanding implicit in the tale. The story, like Silko’s tale of the witchery contest, is re-told, and in that re-telling, alternative interpretations emerge.

In both occurrences of Vizenor’s story, the author adopts an outsider’s viewpoint — by having Bagese serve as spectator/story-listener and by having himself represented in the third person as character/story-object in his autobiographical piece. Vizenor often appears as full or partial characters within his novels as well, and as such puts into practice his theory that in order for anyone to truly achieve some kind of understanding, he or she must first "reimagine" himself or herself (Vizenor 168) or else risk
continuing on as part of someone else's fiction. Since he himself believes the anthropological history of the American Indian to be a fiction of the most pernicious sort (that which claims to be fact), conforming to that role would amount to victimization, a role few tricksters wish to play.

Dodging any direct claims to authorship and retelling stories in various contexts and versions serve as important elements of his operation as a trickster figure. In casting himself as character, Vizenor removes himself from the dominant role of author and becomes, instead, subject. This role-switching continues throughout his self-conscious criticism; in *Narrative Chance*, for example, one senses that the fiction which interests Vizenor the most is his own, and that he often seeks to illuminate and elucidate it for the readership, which in the end also includes Vizenor. His obsessive definition and redefinition of the term "trickster" in the introduction to *Narrative Chance* becomes for him a means of demonstrating his various roles without claiming that any of them should have validity over the others. They are, as he suggests they should be, constantly shifting and never static, ready to change in response to other changes in their contextual environment.

For Vizenor, that environment has changed significantly over the past years for the Native American Indian, and the response has not been enough to fully free tribal peoples from their continued oppression. He often refers to such modern-day oppression as "tribal agonies" in *Dead Voices*, and lays the blame for their perpetuation on the "wordies," those people of whatever race [though critics such as Lisa Mitten (mis)read Vizenor to be condemning the white race alone] for whom the written word is sacred, incontrovertible, and
an ultimate locus of truth. The narrator/author of Dead Voices, a "wordie" himself who has promised Bagese that he would never publish her stories, finds himself in a position similar to the writer Vizenor, a man whose exposure to tribal stories carries with it a deeply felt urge to (re)tell those stories, yet in written form. Unlike Bagese, who is "haunted by stones and mirrors" (*DV* 5), the narrator is haunted by words and tales, and in the end likens them to Bagese's artifacts:

Bagese, these published stories are the same as the wanaki pictures and the stones that you placed in your apartment to remember the earth, the traces of birds and animals near the lake. I am with you in the mirror, and hold a stone in my pocket, the stone you left for me on the table, to remember your stories. (*DV* 144)

Such a view of the story, once again as "material" which can therefore be owned and becomes not only art but artifact, follows close upon similar considerations by Zitkala-Sa and Mourning Dove, as well as (to a lesser extent, perhaps) Silko. Collected and compiled, the stories face a fate similar to that of the tribal tools, clothes, and ancestral remains which lay stored and stockpiled in institutions such as the Smithsonian Museum. Those places have become the present environment of at least part of the tribal past.

For many surviving contemporary Native Americans, however, the environment of the present is either the reservation or the city, worlds often removed from nature. This separation from the traditional, natural environment becomes a key repeated motif throughout a novel such as Dead Voices and informs much of Vizenor's other writing about the displaced crossblood, the person caught between worlds. Bagese, "born dead at treeline,
buried in tribal voices" (9), is just such a figure. Having moved from treeline
to a California city, she exists in the various worlds made available to her
through her participation in the wanaki game, in which a turn of the cards
has the power to project her into the form of one of several creatures. The
game, created by the Ojibwe cultural hero Stone, constitutes "his war on
loneliness and with human separations from the natural world" (DV 29).

Bagese's identity doubles each day she plays the game. In that
transference and (re)-duplication, her separation from the natural world and
loneliness in the urban setting are symbolically removed. Likewise, she
foresakes her sense of individuality in her desire to be known as "we"
throughout the stories of her transformation. Vizenor writes:

We never had any trouble remembering to use plural pronouns,
but most wordies could not understand who we were talking
about. They saw the old woman but not the bear. We are one
and the same. There's a trickster in the use of words that
includes the natural world, a world according to the we, and the
we is our metaphor in the wanaki game. (DV 39)

Elsewhere in his writing, Vizenor demonstrates a similar personal disdain for
personal pronouns, referring to himself in autobiographical pieces in the
third person. He regards carefully how the act of writing forces him to make
such distinctions, yet simultaneously offers the possibilities of eschewing the
obvious: "We are transformed now in grammars, not as animals and birds,
but as pronouns" (Vizenor, "Four Skin" 96). In his perpetual refusal to use
the authoritative "I," his hesitancy to put forth a single, authoritative
identity, his stories become an avoidance of grammatical limitation, and thus
afford the possibility of his own re-association with nature.
It is worth looking more closely at the ceremony of the wanaki cards, then, since they afford Bagese a similar opportunity in her life. As we witness her transformation at the start of each chapter, the pronouns shift from singular to plural as she herself shifts, from her isolated individual existence in the city to something more "tribal:"

The bears are with me now on this first turn of the cards. The stones are broken into bears and land in the east. We are the bears of chance, bears turned over on the mountain wind, turned over on the cards. We are bears on that slow burn at dawn, down from the wild treelines to our tribal agonies in the cities.

We are bears in the rain this morning, the picture of the bear and the bear in the mirror. We are more than a word, more than a word beast, we are remembered in stories. We return to the heart in stories, a return to nature in the pictures of the wanaki cards. We are bears on the rise in the cities this morning. The wordies held our name in isolation, even caged us on the page. We are bears not cold separations in the wilderness of dead voices. (DV 30-31)

Here, the notion of "tribe" extends beyond human boundaries and holds more similarities with the notion of "clans" often found in certain Native American traditions such as the Ojibwe. The human condition is linked to the situation of animals in the world, thus re-establishing an important connection with nature. Language, which has been used as a weapon to enforce previous separation from that natural world, here becomes the means of (re)-forging that link through Bagese, who is able to properly perceive the code of the words by allowing the stories to "return to [her] heart." She understands the signs, the pictures on the cards, and moves beyond them to become the signified as well as the signifier, to act on this union as a composite creature — in this case, the duality Bagese/bear. For her,
the voices are not dead; they are very much alive in the stories, and that life-force flows through the stories she reads until they become her story.

Commenting on his own comment that Indians "are touched into tribal being with words," Vizenor links this lifeforce with the survival instinct present in the works of Leslie Silko:

[Storytelling] is a much more complicated verbal act of survival, and words take on a much more complex and subtle level of power. I mean, we imagine ourselves, we create ourselves, we touch ourselves into being with words, words that are important to us. As children we're touched into being by learning our environment in words. (Vizenor in Coltelli 158)

In Dead Voices, Bagese relearns not only her tribal past through the stories, but her natural past and natural present as well. Her ability to envision the spirits of a number of seemingly foreign and displaced animals displays the strength of her continued link to a vastly altered environment. Sadly, the natural part of that environment crumbles away on a daily basis around her and is replaced by artificial icons, the "wet red flowers and leaves on the scarf [that] seem more real than the trumpet vines that decorated the center of the cedar tree across the barrier" (DV 33). The wordies, represented by the narrator of the story even to its enigmatic close, have detached themselves from nature and from the true names of things, insisting instead upon the false pieties of a "chemical civilization" (DV 41).

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I assume that Vizenor here is discussing storytelling, for his commentary stems from a discussion of Momaday's story of the arrowmaker in The Way to Rainy Mountain. Vizenor's exact quote is "it's a much more complicated verbal act..." and in the interview with Coltelli, it is difficult to distinguish exactly what "it" is. Whatever the exact subject of the pronoun, I have no reason to believe that Vizenor would contest my interpretation here.
In the end, Vizenor sees an essential conflict not only between tribal peoples and the settlers who colonized them, but between the natural environment and the materialist perspective which threatens it. What results is a war fought between the living voices and the dead voices, between sound and silence, between the spoken and the written word. Vizenor's subsequent distrust of writing ironically derives from his own commitment to the medium, as well as his extensive familiarity with and understanding of postmodern criticism. Postmodernism, ostensibly urban in nature and largely linked to the artificial and man-made (a category which includes language in the minds of many theorists), provides him with the tools and the vocabulary he needs to deflect the "hypotragedies" in which writers (re)tell the tribal past (NC 11). For Vizenor, such criticism becomes every bit as much a game as the wanaki cards used by Bagese in Dead Voices: "The word postmodernism is a clever condition; an invitation to narrative chance in a new language game and an overture to amend the formal interpretations and transubstantiation of tribal literatures" and later on the same page: "Native American Indian literatures are tribal discourse, more discourse. The oral and written narratives are language games, comic discourse rather than mere responses to colonialist demands or social science theories" (NC 4).

In this game, both writer and reader take active roles and thereby take equal responsibility for the continuance of play. According to Vizenor, the variety of meanings uncovered within the text stems from this playful use of language, in the "waver" between the blood (experience) and the page (the writing down of that experience):
... as the deconstructionists might argue, the meaning is in the play; it's in the trace, it's in the difference, it's in what isn't there, and it isn't in the lexical meaning of the word and it's not in the nonlexical meaning of the word. It's in between ... So a mixed-blood's neither this nor that and neither up nor down, neither wise nor stupid, but it demands an imaginative presentation ... We're trouble, and I'd rather be trouble than an image. (Vizenor in Coltelli 174)

A figure like the mixed-blood maintains a symbolic affinity the game in his or her own multi-traditional makeup and thus serves as the perfect culture-jumping trickster figure for Vizenor. Mixed-bloods inhabit the fissures explored by post-structuralist critics; their cultural composition is as threatened and unstable as any text. Crossbloods slip from the defining grasp of critics and categorists, and appear in two places at once like the crossbreed Cogewea riding in both the Ladies' and the Squaws' horse races, though it's nearly impossible to determine which is the true form and which the trace, or whether he or she (or they) might not actually have the power to be both simultaneously. As for that question, it perhaps remains true that, as Vizenor says, "mixed-bloods must hold back some secrets from the alien speakers in academies" (Vizenor in I Tell You Now 109).

For Vizenor, the mixed-blood becomes a new metaphor, "a transitive contradancer between communal tribal cultures and those material and urban pretensions that counter conservative traditions" (Vizenor in I Tell You Now 101). This move seems problematic, however, for in making the mixed-blood a metaphor, Vizenor perpetuates in language the genealogical condition which has hampered most cross-bloods in reality. Cross-bloods become second cousins once removed, distant (and thus possibly undeserving) recipients of the cultural systems passed over to them by their
two (or more) constituent heritages. While they may well dance between the
two, their feet never touch firm ground in either. They cease to inhabit the
deconstructionist's fissures and instead float above both signifier and
signified, traces made more transparent by means of a literary flick of the
wrist. In literature, in other words, identity of any kind, but particularly tribal,
has already been lost for the crossblood, and maybe for fullbloods as well:

The tribes are dead, our voices are traced, published, and buried,
our voices are dead in the eye of the missionaries. Hold back the
promises, hold me back with the bear, send me nothing but
sound, sound, sound, to be remembered.

There is no peace, and our best stories must be heard in a
trickster war, in the shadows, in a world of chance. Peace is a
tragic end, we are lost in peace. Once our stories are written there
is no war to hear, to remember our voices and the way we
carried on in stone and stories. We must go on, we must go on
and be heard over the dead voices. (DV 135)

These chilling words at the close of Dead Voices, accompanied by the
recurring refrain "we must go on," depicts a scenario of change far bleaker
than any found in the works of Silko, despite the common expressed hope for
survival. Vizenor keenly eyes the effects of the marketplace, the critics, and
the social scientists and sees in each a dead end, a tragic fate rather than a
comic surrender which might permit continuity, life beyond the happy
ending. The war, as he calls it, raged over vocality, and once the voices are
silenced, the war will be over.

For this reason, Vizenor demands the return of "sound, sound,
sound." He demands the regeneration of the traditional storyteller rather
than the playback of recorded voices, stilled stories made dead on
electromagnetic tape. Dead Voices proposes a new sort of trickster narrative,
one which establishes the urgent primacy of oral literatures despite the
written context. Thus, the trickster has the chance to become, as Vizenor
claims in *Narrative Chance*, "a comic healer and liberator in literature, the
whole figuration that ties the unconscious to social experiences." Vizenor
goes on:

> The trickster sign is communal, an erotic shimmer in oral
traditions; the narrative voices are holotropes in a discourse.
The author, narrator, characters, and audience are the signifiers
and comic holotropes in trickster narratives. (NC 188)

Vizenor relies on a great background of post-structuralist criticism and even
applies a sensuality which Roland Barthes has termed the "pleasure of the
text" to the oral performance. Such word-play leads him to his own
theoretical conclusions, which apparently seek to justify the often obscure
ramblings of his texts and validate such exploratory wanderings in a critical
(as well as literary) tradition. Consider the following passage from *Dead
Voices*:

> The choice glances of children at the window and lonesome
prisoners at the wire are never undone in dead voices. That
wide stream of dust behind a school bus was an abandoned
glance. Scarecrows, blue hearts at the corner, masks out of
trickster time, and bursts of pure radiance that once stained our
sacred shrouds, are the glances that crows remembered in their
stories. (DV 88)

Vizenor's language, full of allusion and symbolic weight, blocks any but an
educated reading and cries out for a critically-assisted interpretation. Such
passages frustrate the reader looking for meaning, despite the pleasurable
resonant sounds and images. The words exist for themselves, it seems,
postmodern examples of the free play of signifiers.
Validated by virtue of his position within the academy (he is currently a Professor at the University of California/Berkeley), Vizenor the critic turns trickster as well. From his vantage point inside the system, he twists and slips through linguistic loopholes and subverts both narrative and critical inquiry. If Vizenor sees postmodern criticism as a weapon for change, then he must realize that he who lives by the sword dies by the sword, as the saying goes, and Wiget works at length to find Vizenor's Achilles heel in his review of *Narrative Chance*:

Because it dismisses the social determination of significance in the moment of a work's production, what is commonly called poststructuralist criticism can say nothing about oral literature in performance. This needs to be stressed as a crucial deficiency because scholars and critics of oral literatures, regardless of their self-representations and despite any disclaimers, occupy and are advantaging themselves of their institutional positions as mediators of those positions. In mediating these traditions, such scholars and critics are also mediating the interests of living communities to an audience otherwise unfamiliar with them and, like it or not, they bear a responsibility for the communication they are enabling. (Wiget 479)

Here, Wiget echoes Owens in demanding a certain communal responsibility on the part of the author. Vizenor, however, in allying himself with the trickster in Native American tradition, demonstrates a disdain for such responsibility; responsibility is one of the first things a true trickster avoids, at least in the context of human society.

Wiget also seems to sense the problematic nature of what he himself is saying here, and perhaps does not push far enough to find a way of forgiving Vizenor's allegedly irresponsible behavior. If, as he suggests, scholars and critics of Native American literatures have such a responsibility, are they not
then burdened disproportionately to their non-Native counterparts, whether they "like it or not?" And does such a burden come, so to speak, with the territory? In some respects, such a demand places the burden of proof on the victim and recalls references made by Vizenor to the hypotragic mode often enlisted by Native American scholars in order to further the oppression and decline of the race, to separate people from their traditional heritages. It further ghettoizes the study of Indian literature and changes the rules of such study, incorporating a code of ethics more stringent than those often applied elsewhere. This can hardly be considered liberating, as it seeks to close doors rather than open them. The tighter the strictures, the less open space remains for the roaming trickster, and the weaker his or her power becomes.

Through Bagase in Dead Voices, Vizenor shows this additional "tribal agony" at work within tradition itself. In her garden apartment, Bagase surrounds herself with "mirrors, and a collection of stones, many stones, birds, leaves, flowers, insects, and other mysterious things spread out like a map on the floor" (DV 15). She is, as the "wordie" narrator describes her, "a natural contradiction in a cold and chemical civilization" (DV 7) and inhabits a room that is more like "a dream scene," a metaphor which questions the reality of the mystical transformations about to occur within the room. The mirrors in the apartment perplex him; there is "something sexual" about them, and he is "not surprised to learn that there seemed to be a hierarchy" involved (DV 20), implying that the negation of hierarchies often associated with deconstructionist criticism has yet to function effectively in this domain.

30 This view has been mentioned above, but for a more detailed response to this matter by Vizenor, see his interview in Coltelli, pp. 169-170.
Bagose's world is self-enclosed and in many ways self-defined, protected by curses and tricks which she uses against the "word demons" \((DV\ 16)\). Like Betonie in *Ceremony*, she has updated her own rituals and ceremonies to insure a greater chance of survival in the modern world, but she does so outside of any tribal context. Rarely do we see any trace of her direct cultural ancestors; the focus here is on the individual. The chances for tribal survival within the story seem bleak at best.

In this context, Bagose tells the narrator the stories which he later assembles in the book *Dead Voices* itself. Her stories "never ended" \((10)\), and the narrator "never doubt[s] that she had the power and the stories to bring back the dead, even dead voices at a great distance" \((19)\). Even so, she is ultimately unable to do so; her stories are told to one and only one person (the narrator) under a contract of secrecy, a contract violated with the publication of the book. For all intents and purposes, Bagose has no real audience with whom to communicate her stories; she is in some ways emblematic of figures such as Black Elk and Lame Deer who, in their desperation to record a way of life they perceived to be near an end, sought out solitary white writers to take down their tales (we do not know the complete cultural background of the narrator in the book). The narrator of *Dead Voices* thus becomes a mediator like Richard Erdoes or John Niehardt, albeit one more consciously caught up in the critical ramifications of his task.\(^{31}\) Bagose's stories become material for his own publication, and in the end he tries to claim that they "are the same as the wanaki pictures and stones

\(^{31}\) I intend the double meaning of critical here to mean both life-endangering and analytical.
that [Bagese] placed in [her] apartment to remember the earth, the traces of
birds and animals near the lake" (DV 144).

We are left to ourselves to decide whether Vizenor's final intent is
irony or contradiction, though the very title of the book leans heavily toward
irony as it labels the contents "dead" from the start. Bagese's stories meet the
same fate as her magical mirror, trucked off to the marketplace and sold to the
most interested consumer. The novel's most likely audience will be those
whose thinking mirrors Vizenor's: those readers of American Indian
literatures who desire some kind of theoretical implications within the text
and some sort of critical perspective informing the context. These readers,
often devotees of the dead voices themselves, may well be frustrated by the
pressing need for an analytical framework. Literary tradition supercedes or
rivals tribal tradition; each threatens to permeate the other in a rather risky
co-dependent relationship. As such, we once more encounter difficulties in
considering the novel to be as liberating as Vizenor intends.

A mental social experiment might lead us to doubt the book's success
in the tribal context as well. In focusing on the plight of the individual
Bagese, the novel ignores the larger problems facing many Native American
communities today. To ask the novel to address these is, admittedly, to add
yet another burden to the Native American writer and to further validate the
sort of criticism which comes at the text with a checklist of "traditional"
requirements: talking animals, reverence of the land, significant elder, etc.
But aside from these institutionalized canonical criteria, does a novel such as
Dead Voices "speak" to the Native American Indian audience? Vizenor
himself argues for the importance of audience consideration in oral Indian storytelling, claiming with others that speaker/listener interplay was essential for the creation of meaning from the "text." Without someone to hear his tale, even the trickster vanished, or at least ceased to signify: "The trickster is a sign, a communal signification that cannot be separated or understood in isolation . . . . The listeners and readers become the trickster, a sign, and semiotic being in discourse" (NC 189). Writer and audience rely on one another then for definition and identity. Without a readership, there would be no writer/trickster Vizenor; the two cannot be separated as described above.

Vizenor's own story "Four Skin" aptly demonstrates the results of such division as he relays the story of Blue Welcome, an ironically unwelcome speaker (i.e. failed storyteller) at a protest for increasing student control of the Department of American Indian studies at Berkeley. Vizenor describes the senior lecturer Blue Welcome as "her own movable satire" (Vizenor, "Four Skin" 98) and describes the sentiments of the tribal students in his own assessment of her separation process:

Sarah Blue Welcome has separated from the sacred with names and numbers, books and quantities. She took up her first name from the Old Testament, and turned to academe in place of dreams, theories over intuition, visions, personal experiences. She is ruled with words, not a sacred blue welcome, not a calm color on woodland lakes. Tribal students shun her because she has no humor or trickeries. Separated from living places she has turned her world around in words. (95)

In some ways, one senses that Sarah Blue Welcome is a fake, someone who has co-opted the Indian experience for her own benefit. Deep down, Vizenor
identifies with her, claiming that his own separation was "no different" but seeing his role more as a "mythic informer". He is skeptical of her tactics and politics, and gathers in the humor and trickeries which she herself has disowned. These are the wellsprings of his "personal power." "Secrets," he claims, "became mythic connections" (96). They also became the material for Vizenor's own subsequent writing, which likewise — in its incorporation of and cooperation with western theoretical perspectives — might be shunned by many of the students in attendance at Blue Welcome's speech.

"Written words became the mirrors of our visions and dreams," Vizenor writes on the same page, adding "we lost our shadows and popular memories in the cities." Such a statement aptly describes the tribal agonies found in Dead Voices, where Vizenor at the very least begins to question the viability of his role as a "mythic informer." He seeks to reach beyond inventions, beyond pre-fabricated notions of what is Indian, yet certain that such a notion exists and that it might be in some way distinct from the human notion. This seems in keeping with the thoughts of Louis Owens, who depicts the Native American writer searching for some "authorless 'original' literature" (Owens, Other Destinies 11). If we take "original" to mean non-manmade (as I believe Owens intends), literature (and the language which comprises it) must also be non-manmade, and obvious philosophical problems result — unless, of course, we return to the notion that language was something given to man from some other source, an idea common in the origin myths of certain tribes.
This might distinguish theorists such as Owens and Vizenor from others like Barthes and Foucault, who see authorship inextricably caught up in ideological functions. As I have stated earlier, Barthes’ insistence on the death or removal of the author seems to him the only viable way to free the reader and escape such ideological entrapment: "the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author" (Barthes in Lodge 172). Foucault likewise calls for a revolutionary retreat from any reliance on authorship in discussing literature, though with a more restrained forecast. Once such a thing had occurred, Foucault argues, "fiction and its polysemic texts will once again function according to another mode, but still with a system of constraint — one which will no longer be the author, but which will have to be determined, or, perhaps, experienced" (in Lodge 210).

This suggests an evolution of sorts in the expressive process, one which might jeopardize or at least complicate the very idea of "storytelling" itself, for in the oral tradition, stories were believed no matter how fantastic they sounded. Foucault's notion of "experience" also closely resembles Silko's ideas of modern-day storytelling and ceremony, symbolically portrayed in Tayo's acting-out of Betonie's medicine and his own vision in Ceremony. This experiential process likewise motivates Bagese and the wanaki game in Dead Voices. Despite the awareness of her stories, the narrator is unable to join in this kind of experience, having been separated from it by the words he uses to express it on the page. In becoming the author of the book, he has fulfilled what Foucault calls "the role of the dead man in the game of writing" (in Lodge 198) and so trades in the "dead voices" of the title.
By imagining himself in the role of trickster, Vizenor hopes to avoid such a fate in the writing process. His "personal power" translates into the ability to move between worlds, the dead and the living, the ideologically constrained and the mythologically freed. Vizenor believes that the mythic transcends the real or ideological, as he demonstrates in saying "verisimilitude is the appearance of realities; mythic verism is discourse, a critical concordance of narrative voices, and a narrative realism that is more than mimesis or a measure of what is believed to be natural in the world" (NC 190). Once again, however, "what is believed to be natural in the world" bespeaks a certain ideology in operation. Thus, the trickster as "a liberator and healer in a narrative, a comic sign, communal signification and a discourse with imagination" (187) still has no power outside of a particular chosen convention of storytelling. The obstinate fact that trickster figures vary a great deal from tribe to tribe in Native American traditions offers no comforting consistency which might prove that, as a sign, the trickster is universal or natural rather than man-made or ideologically contrived. Vizenor's insistence on an anthropomorphic trickster figure further complicates the notion and has us gravitating closer and closer to a centralizing human-oriented discourse, one quite vulnerable to the de-centering operations of post-structuralists such as Barthes.

Vizenor has in a sense re-created the trickster figure as a literary trope in order to arrive at a critical framework in which his own fictional works achieve validity. Unlike most tribal members, Vizenor has no fear or wariness concerning the trickster, and revels in likening himself to the figure,
assuming its powers and in so doing co-opting the sign. This places him in a tricky hierarchical assent, for the very essence of the trickster's trickery often relies on a more-than-human share of "original" power. Though a storyteller might tap into this power in the oral storytelling tradition, he or she did not claim such power as his or her own. In most instances, such power belonged to and stayed in the animal world, and as such, trickster figures were most often non-human; Mourning Dove's *Coyote Stories* provide us with examples of the most common tales regarding these creatures among various tribes. In a sense, Vizenor seeks to replace one *anthropology* with another in claiming the trickster figure for his own. The claim to trickstership becomes synonymous with authorship, and he has yet to fully avoid the problems posed by post-structuralist theorists such as Barthes and Foucault.

These claims are made even more problematic when Vizenor inserts crossbloods into the equation, claiming that they too function like symbolic tricksters as they straddle opposing traditional perspectives. Owens claims that "in Vizenor's work the mixedblood and the trickster become metaphors that seek to balance contradictions and shatter static certainties" (Owens 225). As metaphors in language (and, more specifically, in a literary context), both mixedblood and trickster function *within* a system once again, not *outside* or *beyond* a system as Vizenor hopes. Vizenor also claims that the trickster itself is a trope of sorts, though he invests it with unproven permanence: "the trickster is . . . an irreversible innovation in literature" (Vizenor, *Narrative Chance* 9). Perhaps the wording in these sections is only unfortunate, as slippery as language itself, yet it does show both grappling for some kind of
hierarchical claim, something that can rise above the pale of literary criticism\textsuperscript{32} and assert some form of authority of its own. This authority, as Vizenor utilizes it in his works, is more akin to literary license than to scientific knowledge, and as such it is more mutable, more adaptable, more likely to change with the environment. In this respect, it is not the stable center which Barthes and Foucault suspect accompanies any claim to authorship, but rather a reference marker of sorts, a constant reminder of alternative hierarchies. Seen in this regard, Vizenor's description of the trickster changes slightly and addresses the concerns of power:

A trickster doesn't seize power; he doesn't control power in tribal cultures; it's a compassionate act; he disrupts, makes people very uncomfortable, unhappy, may even threaten them, but he never maintains an army; he never has established a university; he holds credentials which others must study in order to maintain their power in the field or academe. (Vizenor in Coltelli 163, my emphasis)

The trickster demands attention; his (or her) power is one of unavoidable influence, one which asserts its position within the scheme of things even in the process of shifting about in that position. As a comic element, then, trickster authority turns on itself and remains self-conscious, self-critical, self-effacing.

By now, the parallels in Vizenor's works, both fictional and autobiographical (however difficult they may be to tell apart) should be apparent. Yet the trickster's focus does not always fix on the self. More often that not, the trickster functions to disrupt systems, then turns his or her

\textsuperscript{32} It is my hope that the reader will forgive this linguistic pun. I offer it in the spirit of Louis Owens, who in his Other Destinies claims that "Native American writers have their reservations" (19) without so much as cracking a textual smile.
attention toward deceiving those who might subscribe to such systems. In most common trickster tales, the deceit doesn't work and the trickster is taught a lesson by his animal peers and, in certain instances, by the cultural heroes of the tribes. As a character in the stories, the trickster is quite often mocked for his clumsy mischief, derided as a figure who does not fully understand his or her own place in the scheme of things. The trickster is a figure who constantly tries to break free of these imposed limitations, and constantly fails. From that failure comes the story.

In order to "break free," the trickster figure often disrupts the order of things, most ostensibly by changing shape and challenging perception. What we see may not be real; the golden retriever howling outside my window may not be a golden retriever at all, but rather Coyote, infiltrating the tight pattern of houses in the neighborhood in search of a free handout (Coyote's motivating desires are rarely noble or intellectual). Coyote brings chaos with him; it is his reward for my entertaining the very thought of his existence. As Vizenor states, a trickster like Coyote thus stands in opposition to science, which seeks to stabilize and explain:

The wild environment and tricksters are comic and communal; science is a monologue with science not the environment, and the antitheses are silence and chaos . . . The trickster animates this human adaptation [to chaos] in a comic language game and social science overcomes chaos in a monologue; the environment bears the comedies and the tragedies. (NC 13-14)

The one truth sought by science (and likewise by the uni-versity) goes against story, against the confluence of tradition. It is the monologic impulse observed in Momaday by Krupat (Krupat 177-182), the desire to seek
individuation over communality which, according to Foucault, leads to the development of authorship in human history (Foucault in Lodge, 197). It is, in essence, the desire to impose order on the chaotic world, or, to use the common application associated with the tenets of Manifest Destiny, to "tame the wilderness" and "rule over Nature."

The move to chaos, however, does not necessarily free us from ideological restrictions, as modern chaos theorists such as N. Katherine Hayles are quick to point out. In looking at the relationship between the many various systems at work in the world (including systems of language), Hayles states:

That language is interactive rather than inert implies that chaos theory is influenced by the culture within which it arose... The postmodern context catalyzed the formation of the new science by providing a cultural and technological milieu in which the component parts came together and mutually reinforced each other until they were no longer isolated events but an emergent awareness of the constructive roles that disorder, nonlinearity, and noise play in complex systems. (Hayles 5)

Hayles looks to the existence of "feedback loops" between science and literature (7) to stress the interdependence of the two in establishing a truly creative force within the universe. Some theorists claim that the existence of such loops, which are by design not necessarily linear and thereby avoid fatalistic predetermination of the sort witnessed by Vizenor in the "hypotragedies" of the social scientists, liberate mankind to exercise free will,
and in so doing "opens up" the universe to co-creative possibility (Davies 48, 50). Most of these theorists still operate within a rather fixed Western technological perspective and remain relatively unaware of trickster mentalities pre-existing in the Native American realm. In light of this, we find that the "new" theory once again may not be so "new" after all, nor may it necessitate the "technological" foundation which Hayles describes above. This observation, in fact, might only serve to better illustrate her point, and to show that chaos in and of itself can be perceived as an ideological perspective, a world view capable of evolving from more than one causal source, and in the end more open, perhaps, to the rather unscientific occurrences contained within tribal tales.

Many writers continue to locate chaos in the wilderness and associate the "wild" with "nature;" yet Vizenor finds another type of chaos in the urban and textual landscapes he so often inhabits himself. In ordering our environments to suit us, we have not removed chaos from the world, we have merely re-interpreted or re-expressed it in more "human" terms. This brings us full circle to the notion of "ordering the verbal landscape" expressed in the first chapter. Language, in the post-structuralist sense, becomes a wilderness of sorts as well, a microcosmic chaos system by dint of the free play of signifiers existing within it. From that teeming terrain, storytellers select and choose what suits them most, those elements which might lead to the highest possible chance of cultural survival. Their ordering and disordering impulses (since the two serve together as viable options) derive from and reinforce tribal notions about the world, challenging them when necessary
and adapting them in various circumstances. Thus, Owens is on target when he describes Vizenor as "a kind of Indian guide in this textual wilderness" (Owens 242), however unreliable or playful that guide may be.

In the end, we must accept Vizenor in the role of his own invention — that of compassionate trickster. As in many Indian stories, he will undoubtedly lead us astray now and then, but he does so only for our own good, to keep us from feeling too secure and sure about anything in this ever-changing world. Such feelings, while often associated with the written word on the page, fall away when one uses as his or her model the oral storytellers of the past, those for whom each (re)telling symbolized an additional act of creation and who realized that as the world shifts and changes, so do the stories they tell of it and within it. We discover who we truly are by the variety of responses we demonstrate to this shifting world, by the acceptance or rejection of something like chaos theory or post-structuralism, by the selection of those tools which we hope will ensure our survival. As Vizenor eloquently states:

I'd like to do two things in storytelling: one, I'd like to discover myself in the story as imaginative; I'd like to feel good about it, at least about the trickster ideas in stories. I'd like to imagine myself moving through certain contradictions and conflicts with good humor and maybe a lesson here and there and slipping past it without being damaged by it. (Vizenor in Coltelli 164)

For Vizenor, then, telling the story allows him to become the story, to imagine himself as trickster even as trickster games are being played on him.

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35 It is perhaps worth noting that those who have met and spoken with Vizenor stress his warmth and amiability, despite the often cool, collected, and ultimately confusing prose which characterizes his more theoretical writings, both fact and fiction.
His statement above shows an uncharacteristic and self-aware humility, someone more passive perhaps in his own environment than we might expect from his earlier claims. His acceptance of the powers of imagination, both as an active and passive force, allows the possibility that he himself has been imagined, and that his very existence depends on a communal acceptance of that possibility. The storyteller, in other words, depends upon his or her audience for identity.

The traditional trickster knows this two-way path all too well, and despite his or her cocky attitude in tribal stories realizes that his or her deceptions may be turned back upon themselves, as is often the case. At times the trickster learns from these conflicts; at others, he or she continues along in ignorance. In telling the tale, even ignorance serves a purpose, and brings about a lesson for those who listen. And so trickster-Vizenor goes on telling his own tales, hoping that there are those who will stop to listen even as his characters (and at times, he himself) can hear only the pounding silence. That silence serves as invitation to the reader/listener, invitation to participate and (re)tell the story, to reanimate tradition, and to believe once again that, as the narrator learns from Bagese in *Dead Voices*, we could bring the dead voices back to life, and that in so doing, "we could be bears in the cities, as we once were at the old treelines" (138).
Conclusion: Returning to Treeline

In considering the development of Native American literature in this brief sketch from oral to written traditions, we have seen how individual authors have approached the challenge of preserving a tribal past in the face of serious challenges from the "outside" world. In each case, survival of culture has been a foremost consideration, an underlying subtext to the stories which are told and retold in each. Likewise, the shifting notion of authorship, from the strong yet problematic claims of earlier writers like Zitkala Sa and Mourning Dove to the self-conscious and self-effacing claims of later writers like Leslie Marmon Silko and Gerald Vizenor, has done much to preserve those stories in their relative contexts. The demands of audience factored into the equation in each case, with each author hoping that the stories being told could be retold by the readers somehow, that even though the words on the page might be forever lost, the stories would survive somehow in the hearts and minds of those who had stopped to read or listen to them. Such a hope, very much a part of the oral tradition, continues on as part and parcel of tribal written tradition.

Vizenor's awareness of and dependence on this communal function of literature does in some ways, as Wiget points out, betray his own seeming subscription to postmodern theories. Even so, we must remember the
trickster figure when reading Vizenor, and realize that a small word like "seeming" carries a great deal of significance in such a statement. For Vizenor, theory does not exist for its own exclusive purposes, just as science can never be fully detached from nature without subsequent problems of interpretation. Vizenor uses theory as a tool for explaining what had hitherto been intuited but not fully articulated in tribal literatures — that the generation of contextual meaning in stories is possible, even if it is not definitive or, to use his word, a "scriptural version" (Coltelli 164). Stories are the means by which we reintroduce chaos into our ordered systems, despite the intentions of science to overcome chaos and inflict versions of Vizenor's isolating "hypotragedies" on the "comic" and "communal" world.

The trickster is the story; the story is at once the central and yet de-centring force of chaos in the world. This, according to Vizenor, is how we best make sense of the world: "You can't understand the world without telling a story. There isn't any center to the world but a story" (Coltelli 156). Without faith in the ability of stories to order the world, we might remain befuddled beings whose chances of survival in a complex environment decreased in relation to our inability to define ourselves in terms of that environment. We have seen that we are unable to survive without limiting that environment somehow, imposing a system of order where none may exist. We create systems of language to communicate — limited and imperfect, yet functional systems of language. We create methods of agriculture to ensure subsistence — limited and imperfect, yet functional systems of agriculture. Likewise, we create systems of culture and identity
which can accept the limitations and imperfections of the world and still allow us to function and continue in that world.

If the concepts are less than perfect, it is perhaps because we as human beings are likewise less than perfect, and that our stories may not comprise the original or ultimate center of the world around us but serve as only a subset of those stories, however large or small the subset may be. The fact that many tribal narratives dealt with animal characters and not human characters demonstrates an awareness of this idea, this notion that the world need not be understood solely from an anthropocentric perspective. Granted, such animal characters were often anthropomorphized themselves, functioning like or as humans yet with additional powers. This was how we came to understand and relate to those stories; it became part of the ordering process by which we were able to find meaning in the tales. Gary Snyder adds an interesting twist to such thinking when he muses that "For a bear, all the beings look like bears . . . . Each creature has its stories and oddities" (Snyder 164). In other words, by re-telling experiences in our own perceived contexts, we are able to understand them more effectively. This did not preclude the very real possibility that the "original" stories existed in some other form, some unknown and perhaps unknowable un-translation.

Tribal literature remains, in the end, very much a human construct, yet not one which necessarily posits human inspiration as the ultimate source of the story. Just as many tribes believe in cosmologies involving various worlds or levels of worlds (notions of "real" and "dream" worlds should suffice to offer but a brief example of this), the existence of something
on this particular plane did not entail its existence on another plane, at least not in the same form or shape. Our perceptions of all these worlds were limited, just as our powers within the world were limited in various ways by the Great Spirit, Animal-Creator, or Cultural Hero in the various myths and legends. Oral storytellers took account of these factors in ways which authors and writers were at least initially unwilling to do in their claims to ownership of the text. Such claims, as illustrated by Vizenor, derived from a tricked, not trickster, mentality.

As I have suggested, there is something to be learned here not only in the context of literature (Native or non-Native), but in the context of the environment as well. As Gary Snyder suggests, we are not alone in the creation of narratives in the world, which is not to say that all orders of life follow our particular model of what constitutes a narrative:

Narratives are one sort of trace that we leave in the world . . . . Other orders of beings have their own literatures. Narrative in the deer world is a track of scents that is passed on from deer to deer with an art of interpretation which is instinctive. A literature of bloodstains, a bit of piss, a whiff of estrus, a hit of rut, a scrape on a sapling, and long gone. And there might be a "narrative theory" among these other beings — they might ruminate on "intersexuality" or "decomposition criticism." (Snyder 112)

An awareness of these other stories, anthropomorphized though they may be in our (re)-tellings, leads us to remain connected to the world, to return to the treeline and not separate ourselves from it through full or orthodox belief in any given critical/analytical enterprise, despite the insights such thinking might offer us. Our own possibly strong reactions to Snyder's terminology might serve as a signal that we have indeed separated ourselves from the true
wealth of narratives at large in the world. Centuries have passed wherein writers of various traditions have sought a re-connection with that world, a direct link via language which perhaps never existed and could not be constructed out of such flimsy material. Most oral storytellers never shared such insecurities, the "skeptical questioning" which Snyder sees as part and parcel of the critical exercise (Snyder 112).

Though non-Indian (at least by blood), Snyder carries on what Vizenor theorizes, and in so doing breaks down at last a racial boundary which has hampered the full consideration of Native American stories in places like the academic institution today. Vizenor himself, like nearly all other "Native American" authors writing today, can only claim partial biological association to the Indian identity, and must construct the rest via his own chosen perspectives and affiliations. His ultimate choice (the tribal trickster perspective) signals a shift away from the Western, man-separate-from-nature ideology back toward a more nature-based ideology. Though Snyder chooses a different route (one more closely aligned with Eastern thought, with related Native American insights), he arrives at the a similarly ecocentric ideology. Such an ideology, as Silko seems to imply in Storyteller, need not be specific to discussions of race (or, for that matter, gender). Just as such an ideological perspective can be translated (however problematically) from the world of Raven and Coyote to that of People, so can it be translated from Indian to non-Indian and from crossblood to either.

In fact, our survival on this planet may depend on such a (re)telling of the tribal stories, leading us entirely away from any culture-specific analysis.
Both Silko and Vizenor incorporate very real and very non-Native elements in their stories, as the allusions to nuclear war in the story of the witchery contest demonstrates. In his move toward a term like "wordies" rather than "white people" (the two are not, as others have claimed, necessarily synonymous), Vizenor re-aligns our perceptions along a different spectrum of possibilities, one not dependent on race as a factor. We move toward establishing a different sort of community, one for which the crossblood does in many ways serve as an adequate representative.

From such a perspective, from the telling and re-telling of the many stories which influence us all as a global community, we come to a richer understanding of the world, and a greater appreciation for the many different survival methods at work for better or worse in that world. Storytelling can serve as a measure of that survival, for it shows ideologies in motion, changing and being changed by the environments in which the stories take place. Through story, we create and re-create the world just as we create and re-create ourselves. And, as Gerald Vizenor strongly advocates at the close of Dead Voices, through stories, we continue: "We must go on."


