

BALANCING DISCOURSE AND SILENCE:  
AN APPROACH TO FIRST NATIONS WOMEN'S WRITING

by

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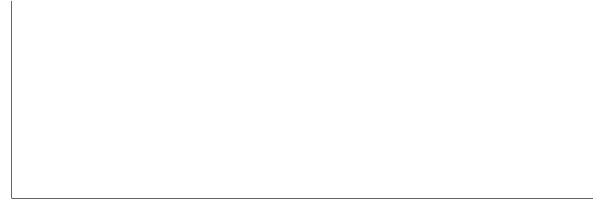
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## Abstract

This thesis considers the critical implications of a cross-cultural reading of First Nations women's writing in this time of sensitivity to the issues of appropriation and power inequities between dominant and minority cultures. A genre-based study, it is written from a deliberately split perspective: reading as both a white academic implicated in the dominant culture's production of meaning and value, and as a lesbian alienated from these same processes, i both propose and *perform* several modes of response to First Nations texts. Interspersed with a conventional commentary is a secondary, personal commentary that questions and qualifies the claims of the critical. Then, another level of response, in the form of fiction and poetry based on my own experiences growing up with my Assiniboine sister, also proposes the appropriateness, in this critical power dynamic, of a third response of simply answering story with story.

Chapter One examines the construction of individual identity and responsibility in Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, particularly as the text demands an emotionally-engaged response conventionally discouraged in critical discourse, and as a result redefines the genre of autobiography. Chapter Two considers the possibility of a communal and spiritual, as well as an individual, emotional, response to First Nations texts, examining the community of stories that comprise each of the novels *Slash*, *In Search of April Raintree*, and *Honour the Sun*. From this consideration of narrative as eliciting emotional and spiritual reading practices, Chapter Three discusses the nature of language itself as a vehicle of spiritual transformation and subversion, specifically in the poetry of Annharte and Beth Cuthand. Chapter Four, on the mixed-genre *The Book of Jessica*, shifts focus from the discursive strategies of First Nations writing, to examining the way these practices redefine time and history as newly accessible to First Nations spiritual construction. Finally, the Conclusion re-examines the reading strategies developed throughout

the thesis, noting the pitfalls they avoid, while discussing their limitations as cross-cultural tools. The ultimate effect is to propose the very beginning of the kinds of changes the academy must consider for a truly non-appropriative cross-cultural interaction.





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## Chapter One:

"I Write This for All of You":

Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*

Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd, in their introduction to the second of two special issues of *Cultural Critique* on minority discourses, emphasize basic similarities among minority discourses which are of paramount importance not only to the minorities involved, but to their shared project of dismantling the oppressive mechanisms and effects of liberal humanism. Above all, these discourses share a "privileged" position (my term) in their critique of traditional humanism, with its ironically exclusionary assertion of the supposedly "universal," and its systematic refusal to confront "all issues concerned with the relations of domination" ("Minority Discourse--What Is to Be Done?" 13). Opposing this traditional humanism with a (hypothetical) "viable humanism" that might be genuinely inclusive and non-dominating, they assert that

most of those who hold power and those whose subject positions are protected by the prevailing hegemony will be more interested in the efficacious use of power than in examining its misuse. By contrast, those who are dominated will better understand the devastating effects of misused power; they are in a better position to document and analyze . . . how relations of domination can destroy the "human" potential of its victims. Their concerns must be at the center not only of a minority discourse but also of "humanism" as such, that is, of a utopian exploration of human potentiality (14).

That all minority groups should share this perspective arises from the common source of their material and cultural oppression: "the modes of late capitalism," which rely on a material level upon the "systematic exploitation of the less privileged minority groups and the feminization of poverty, the demonization of third world peoples and homophobic hysteria." These material oppressions also rely upon a cultural oppression--upon "the need to denigrate alternative modes of rationality as . . . the 'ontological Other'" (12 [quoting Sylvia Wynter])--in which the traditional humanist plays a crucial role

as the legitimator of "the sets of discriminations which [this] economic and social domination requires"

(12). Sharing similar oppressions, then, which derive from the same oppressive system, individuals in minority cultures also share similar projects of transforming

a negative, generic subject position . . . into a positive, collective one. And therein, precisely, lies the basis of a broad minority coalition: in spite of the enormous differences between various minority cultures, which must be preserved, all of them occupy the same oppressed and 'inferior' cultural, political, economic, and material subject position in relation to the Western hegemony. . . . The minority's attempt to negate prior hegemonic negation of itself is one of its most fundamental forms of affirmation. (10)

Thus i begin my thesis about First Nations women's writing with this argument for the "common *political* basis of minority struggle" (10, their emphasis), writing myself from the position of a white lesbian who is herself intensely engaged in the effort to construct and support lesbian cultures. I propose myself as an ally, bringing to the reading of the protesting, transformative writing of First Nations women both my own understanding of "the devastating effects of misused power" (14), and my own sense of what kinds of things can be done, at least in my own community, to achieve the transformation of a "negative, generic subject position . . . into a positive, collective one" (10). I thus bring these two standpoints together in a dialogue entailing both mutual support and difference, as i examine the ways in which my readings of First Nations women's texts inform and transform my own strategies of self-construction and construction of my community, and the places where their strategies and meanings must diverge from mine--sometimes to the point that i can no longer understand or participate at all (Alarcón 86-87).

However, if i begin by defining my reading self as separate from and oppressed by the dominant culture, just as i identify First Nations writers as separate and oppressed--as "minority" writers--i must also identify myself as a *participant* in the dominant culture, insofar as i see myself, as an academic, as also perpetuating the strategies and paradigms of dominance that oppress minorities. As a "European scholar," i participate, in the words of Lee Maracle (Métis), in the "alienated notion which maintains that theory is separate from story" (*Oratory* 3; also Interview 172), and in presenting "the human condition in a language separate from human experience" (11), when, as she argues, "no thought is understood outside of humanity's interaction" (13; also Anzaldúa, "Speaking" 166-70; Bannerji 32; Spivak 2). Thus i may propose

my reading self, as a lesbian, as an ally to First Nations writing; but as an academic, i see myself as in some ways an untrustworthy ally, still inculcated with many of the practices and unthinking assumptions of the dominant culture against which Maracle and other First Nations authors either deliberately or by implication write.<sup>1</sup>

Like Maracle's argument that theory and story are ultimately inseparable, JanMohamed and Lloyd's response to this dilemma is, in a stereotypical minority strategy, to dismantle the binary opposition of the minority individual versus the intellectual: they emphasize repeatedly the importance of including the theoretical critique of the submerged ideologies of traditional humanism as *part of* the effort of minority cultures to transform the systems of dominance that humanism supports. Again like Maracle, they insist that "the separation of culture as a discrete sphere" (14)--the humanist construction of "literary forms . . . as autonomous products of a discrete aesthetic domain" (10)--is precisely one of the mechanisms of dominance against which the minority intellectual, in particular, must struggle (see also *Oratory* 11, 13; Christian 54; Rich 9). Minority critics must instead, virtually by definition, see literary forms as political and power-ful, as *part of* the systems of power which result in oppression, and of a culture replete with ideological assumptions and implications, which minority critics must expose as part of the more general project of achieving "radical transformations of the material structures of exploitation" (15). Ultimately, JanMohamed and Lloyd insist, minority struggle must entail "a mutually complementary work of theoretical critique and practical struggle" (12; also Gates, "Authority" 29-34). They continue,

To cling solely to the role of an "intellectual" as to a singular and determinate identity would be fatuous where the process of the rational division of labor has made of every modern subject a fragmented or multiple identity, functioning now as a professor, now as one among women, now as a tenant, now as a black employee, now as a lesbian feminist. The gain that can be located in this situation by a critical minority discourse lies in the recognition that these multiple identities are neither reducible nor impermeable to one another, that there is no sphere of universal and objective knowledge or of purely economic rationality, that what is worked out in one sphere can be communicated in another, that institutional boundaries will always need to be transgressed in the interests of political and cultural struggle. (15; also Dill 136-37; Fido 30; Krupat 33ff.; McKay 167).

Nevertheless, i continue to have trouble here with my project of speaking, whether as an intellectual or otherwise, from one minority position to the issues and writings of another: in both

JanMohamed and Lloyd's or Slemon and Tiffin's arguments, while the goal of this "broad minority coalition" (10)--in which "minority groups need constantly to form and to re-form ever more inclusive solidarities" (14)--is laudable and strategically plausible, the basic issue of *trust* must still be confronted. For JanMohamed and Lloyd, theoretical criticism, and as i interpret it, all the high language and protocols of rational argument and proper verification which theory implies, are considered essential to the larger project of dismantling present systems of oppression; but as Maracle argues, this purely theoretical level of discussion precisely excises the human story--entailing, among others, the issue of trust--from the discussion (also Armstrong, "Writing" 55; Monture 138).<sup>2</sup>

*I mean--and maybe i'd say this is my "minority," lesbian self speaking, as if i could really tell her apart from the academic--i hate this academic language sometimes, too, with its long words and all the rules of truth and evidence that speak about authority, and about only one way of speaking about what's true and important. I know about a lot of things that i can't talk about in that hard language of control--a lot of things aren't acceptable to talk about, and a lot of the ways i have of thinking about them aren't the right way of thinking or writing in academic circles.*

*So they may call for oppressive systems to be dismantled, but i still find JanMohamed and Lloyd's words and their theorizing of "minority discourse" exclusively academic and dauntingly theoretical. More than anything else, what i want to know is where they are in all those words. They stand apart from their words, speak so impersonally. They sound just like university professors, too--even when they say they're talking about breaking down those kind of institutional boundaries. The thing is that, if they insist on being so impersonal and distant in the way they talk about minority struggles--i mean, if this is the way they take part in their "minority coalition," i don't much feel i can trust them in this coalition.*

*And same for me, too: if i take on this kind of authority in my writing here--i'm afraid of risking writing any other way, and i'm not sure what that really is (my "lesbian" "language" has its own slang and stuff, but not particularly a whole different way of talking like a creole or something, like Carolyn Cooper in her article about the SISTREN Collective)--can i be trusted, either? Who'd feel that they, or i, really are working from a certainty of our difference, but our equality? I'm not sure i can trust my pain and struggle to someone who won't share theirs with me too--and can they trust theirs to me?*

If minority struggle must entail work on several fronts simultaneously--if minority discourse must entail speaking from several identities "that are neither reducible nor impermeable to one another"--i take JanMohamed and Lloyd's argument, and Maracle's argument, as instructions for a still "other," still more "different" writing and reading practice, and look for a different tenor of discourse than just the conventional academic or theoretical discourse, in order to speak with some trustworthiness from one minority position to another: i look to the First Nations texts themselves, then, to teach me how to read and then how to (at least begin to) speak again, in a new way.

For example, I read *Halfbreed*, the autobiography of Maria Campbell (Métis), as offering an entirely different construction of how minority discourse might effect change than through JanMohamed and Lloyd's highly theoretical discourse: a construction that relies upon enabling both the personal and the emotional as valid ways of engaging with a text, and of potentially creating this inter-minority trust (Campbell, "A Conversation" 16; also Kroeber 32; Maracle, "Writing" n.p.; Tapping 86). She begins *Halfbreed* with a very deliberate address of her audience, by which she both signals her sense of difference from her (assumed) non-Métis reader--from me--constructing herself as a hitherto unspoken minority, and yet also extends a very careful invitation to me to enter into her story, and perhaps even to participate in it to some degree. Immediately constructing her story as itself a mechanism for breaching this gap, she offers her own life story as a teaching text, instructing me how to read it as a non-Métis reader. Writing of her long-delayed return to her place of birth and to her people, she is rendering her own life, and the autobiographical telling of it, as both the completion of a circle, and yet a new (if difficult) beginning--as a *healing*:<sup>3</sup>

Going home after so long a time, I thought that I might find again the happiness and beauty I had known as a child. But as I walked down the rough dirt road, . . . I realized that I could never find that here. Like me the land had changed, my people were gone, and if I was to know peace I would have to search within myself. I am not very old, so perhaps some day, when I too am a grannie, I will write more. I write this for all of you, to tell you what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country. I want to tell you about the joys and sorrows, the oppressing poverty, the frustrations and the dreams. (2)

Campbell's healing depends upon the reconstruction of her own, individual identity and health as utterly interdependent with the health and identity of her Métis community, her search for inner peace necessitating and necessitated by her return to her people. This interdependency and trust is described above all in discursive terms, the Métis community--the nature of its trust--based on its *stories*, first in the sense that, as an oral culture, Campbell's community brings itself into very being through its stories, and learning and valuing is primarily passed on orally:

Our parents spent a great deal of time with us, and not just our parents but the other parents in our settlement. They taught us to dance and to make music on the guitars and fiddles. They played cards with us, they would take us on long walks and teach us how to use the different herbs, roots and barks. We were taught to weave baskets from the red willow, and while we did these things together we were told the stories of our people--who they were, where they came

from, and what they had done. Many were legends handed down from father to son. Many of them had a lesson but mostly they were fun stories about funny people. (18; also Campbell, Interview 54-55; Monture 136)

And then Campbell's own evocation, in *Halfbreed*, of her childhood in the community occurs almost exclusively through the medium of anecdotes--many of which were presumably the same ones told around the fire during their summer trips to pick seneca root and berries or at home when people visited in the evening.

The language Campbell chooses for telling the anecdotes--her informal, conversational style and her repeated reference to the present storytelling situation--also evokes an oral community (Grant, "Contemporary" 126). For example, she begins a series of anecdotes about local characters with an exclamation: "I grew up with some really funny, wonderful, fantastic people and they are as real to me today as they were then. How I love and miss them!" (23). Her tone seems deliberately suggestive of the oral interaction of a friend reminiscing with a friend, so that the current intimacy and community between the storyteller and her listener--the deliberate evocation of a situation of trust--is as much the topic of the telling as the specific stories of the past are (Kroeber 32).<sup>4</sup> These individual stories are couched in the larger circular structure signalled in the work's opening--a structure which the Okanagan writer, Jeannette Armstrong, identifies as characteristic of much contemporary Native writing, and as ultimately expressive of a Native spirituality--as *Halfbreed* begins with, and always circles back to, the community (Interview 19-20).<sup>5</sup>

The stories--like the autobiography itself--are thus the community's most important form of self-validation: they *are* the Métis' individual and communal life, so that the trust and self-trust upon which their interaction is based are constructed as discursive concerns, discursive practice and emotional practice here conjoined, in a way that is lacking in JanMohamed and Lloyd's or Slemon and Tiffin's discussions. Jeannette Armstrong emphasizes the central place of the notion of discursive responsibility and trust in her own Okanagan community:

*It is through words, it is through the ability to communicate to another person, to communicate to your children the thinking of your people in the past, their history, that you are a people. The words of my people are significant to me, to my understanding and to my dignity as a person,*



to my ability to differentiate and look at the world and say: 'This is what I agree with and this is what I can choose to care about and this is what I can choose to rage against.' ("Words" 25-26; her emphasis)

. . . I think about watching my mother and before her my grandmother as they speak, as they present themselves. Their words were very carefully chosen and very carefully constructed. When you speak, when you take language and put it out for someone to come up against, you not only have to assume responsibility for speaking those words, but you are responsible for the effect of those words on the person you are addressing *and* the thousands of years of tribal impact of your words on the listener[,] and [you] understand the responsibility that goes with *being* a speaker. ("Words" 27-28, her emphasis; also Cuthand, "Transmitting" 54; Maracle, "Just Get" 40)

Campbell learns a similar understanding of story and language from her Cheechum, her great grandmother, who teaches that this creation of a healthy, trusting community is dependent above all upon the health and self-responsibility of the individual participants, upon their knowledge of their people's stories and their capacity to tell their own stories responsibly and self-trustingly. When Maria comes home from school, shamed and angry at the white children's racist taunts--her self-trust and her trust in her people undermined--she turns these racist comments back on herself and her own people, calling her mother and family "no-good Halfbreeds" (50); but Cheechum intervenes. Here, and again later, after their hopes for Métis rights under the CCF government of Saskatchewan are shattered (74ff), Cheechum refuses to allow Maria to give in to the self-hatred and despair that the discourses of white racism work to instill in Maria, and she insists that in the Métis tradition of the stories of Riel and Dumont, Maria continue to fight for herself and her people (51)--that she continue to speak of them in Metis, non-racist terms. For the sake of Maria's very survival, and for the sake of her responsible interaction with her community, Cheechum urges Maria to continue to trust herself and her community and their identity--their history and stories.

By extension, *Halfbreed* itself can be read as functioning within, and itself constructing, a similar interconnection of the individual, the community and its discourses: like the Métis stories and community it inscribes, it demands a participatory reading that considers the issues of trust and responsibility that Cheechum, like Armstrong, teaches. This participation is thus asked even from me, someone who begins this reading from an entirely different, academic, convention for understanding and reading stories--a convention involving an "objective," emotionally and personally disengaged approach to texts, in which

even my own individual characteristics as a reader are not overtly recognized or discussed (as i try to do here in my italicized "insertions"), let alone the unthinking assumptions and characteristics of the academic community for whom i conduct the reading (as i try to do in my series of notes).<sup>6</sup> In *Halfbreed*, the very nature of story itself is being rewritten as inherently communal--as reliant upon trust between members of the interlocutory community--with critical results even for me, for a non-Métis participant in the community of the text, whom Campbell has invited to read her text to see "what it is like to be a Halfbreed woman in our country." The nature of this community and healing is modelled on the oral Métis community where the telling of stories, the creation of community, relies upon the equal participation of teller and listener alike: sitting together, face to face, they mutually create their community in their very acts of telling and listening. The activity of both is required (see also Maracle "Preface" 11; Wiget 89).

If, having accepted Campbell's invitation into the community of the text, i read *Halfbreed* as instructing me how to read in this "other," orally-based way, differently from my own European-conventional ways of reading, i must read the self-healing--the communalism--of Campbell's story as also a call for a healing on the part of her white oppressors. It is a call for their active participation in a healing which enters into, and depends upon, a genuine desire for intercultural community--and thus responsibility and trust--with the Métis text, stories and people. I must work with the text, allow it to *move* me, emotionally, discursively, to a new place--allow it to change me and thereby heal me, heal my stories--rather than working against it and refusing, with racist effect, its moving power, refusing to hear anything but the echo of my own convoluted, self-absorbed thoughts and structures of thought (my obedience to academic forms, my "filiative footnoting").<sup>7</sup> I must begin to develop the certainty that, as Lee Maracle puts it, "one only feels threatened by outsiders if one doubts their [own] insides," and begin to heal the doubt about my own insides that dominant culture has taught me not only as a woman and a lesbian, but even (or especially) as a partial participant in the the dominant culture's self-privileging, Other-hating practices ("Ramparts" 162 and "Writing" n.p.; also Armstrong, *The Native Creative Process* 22).<sup>8</sup>

Thus, as occurs within the oral Métis community described in the text, the further discursive acts,

for Campbell, of writing *Halfbreed* itself, and then, for me, of reading it, are made comparable to and simultaneous with the emotional act of self-healing, through the very act of participating in the story, whether as the writer or her audience: the political, communal and discursive process of cross-cultural reading by definition calls for a concomitant internal, emotional and discursive act, with the effect that if i begin my reading from a stance based loosely on identity politics--reading a "First Nations" "woman's" text "as an academic," or "as a lesbian"--the very nature of the "identity" element of the expression is being redefined and made newly important to the act of reading. Where identity was conventionally constructed as the fixed, singular and unchanging position from which the relational, communal and historical process of the political was carried out--and by which it was defined--here in the discursive context of *Halfbreed*, identity is equally defined as the (self-) relational, communal and historically specific process of the individual's ongoing, life-long inter-discursive discussion with herself. Identity is defined as the individual's continual negotiation amongst her several irreducible and yet mutually permeable selves, or her irreducible, mutually permeable *discourses* of her self--her lesbian self-discourse, her academic self-discourse, or as will be seen for Campbell, her Native, her Metis, and her woman's self-discourses--as the individual tells herself her stories *of* herself again and again, in repeatedly new historical and political contexts. Identity is in essence defined *as* ongoing autobiography, whether the actual writing of (Campbell's) autobiography, or the equally autobiographical act, as i read it here, of writing my reading of (this) autobiography. Thus in order to read cross-culturally, i must carry out an emotional movement comparable to that of Campbell herself in her writing of *Halfbreed*: i must become "other" to myself--as i see Campbell as doing over the course of *Halfbreed*. And then, redefining the very concept of identity, i must redefine myself to myself as well: tell myself here, in this very reading, this healing, a new story of my self (selves), too, as Campbell does of herself.<sup>9</sup>

*Yeah, i think in my lesbian community--my emotional community--of how deeply valuable our stories are to ourselves and each other. I think of how, like Barbara Herringer says, "to be heard in our community, our community of women, we tell our stories" (99). I think one of our most telling ways of showing trust and joy in our culture(s), lesbian to lesbian, is when we tell each other our "coming out stories": when and where and why we decided to call ourselves lesbian. It's like our identities and our stories are part of the same thing, and the story*

*ends up talking about how you find a path between different ways of thinking about your selves and end up at a (another) new identity. It's like it's a story about learning to tell a different story, and then you get to look back at yourself and say, oh yeah, when that happened, i see that now as me being a lesbian: so you get to tell yourself, and maybe other dykes, a whole new set of stories about who you are and who you were, too.*

*So i see lesbian communities and cultures as being in a period of history maybe comparable to this period of Native history, where they're publishing more First Nations stories and stuff: i feel like our histories and cultures are getting to be written down more. But even so, i still think a lot of our culture is still just spoken--it's a kind of oral culture, too--in safe gatherings of women facing women over a cheap restaurant meal, or over a kitchen table playing poker, laughing and gabbing and crying. And we tell these stories of finding ourselves: like, how we met our lovers or how we broke up, and how our families reacted to our coming out to them, or why we feel we can't come out to them . . . what different ways there are of managing to get your non-Canadian partner into the country, and so on.*

*It's women's gossip intensified into the sheer life of our community of women and women and women. They're stories of our fight against being told we're wrong and dirty, and they work for us as one of our "most fundamental forms of affirmation" (JanMohamed and Lloyd, 10). When we're arguing and laughing and disagreeing, it's like we're talking ourselves into sheer being, who we are individually and together, and we're giving trust and we're signalling responsibility, through our stories. For me, it's a lifeline.*

But Campbell's self-story makes clear that such oral self-responsibility, such participation in the healing community of the text, is difficult to achieve, in a community--people or text--made sick by systemic racism. Campbell conveys this difficulty most clearly, perhaps, in the segment celebrating the community's annual migration to pick berries, families piled helter-skelter into wagons drawn by horses trimmed with bells, the evenings turning into long story-telling sessions, the children protected and warm in their parents' and grandparents' care (34-36). But such trips also included jaunts into town to drink, and juxtaposed immediately with this celebratory passage is a description of how, upon entering town, the adults' vitality and pride are abruptly replaced with silent acquiescence to white hatred, and to its divisive effect on the community. The men walk ahead, separated from their families and each other, their heads down--and when the men return late at night to the Métis camp on the outskirts of town, their anger at the white men who have followed, intending to rape the Métis women, is turned contradictorily and perversely back on their own people. They beat their wives brutally and then fight each other, while the whites watch with amusement (36-38). The devastating effect of such self-hatred on the community is apparent particularly in the fact that, as Campbell notes, eventually the women began to drink too, as contact with whites and their racism increased through the 1940's and 1950's (38).

The result is the dissolution of Campbell's Métis community, as her immediate family is separated from the more general community, and the family, too, begins to disintegrate through death, alcoholism

and interference from Social Services. The beginning of this change is presaged in the incident of Maria's "selling" her father to the RCMP officer for the price of a mere chocolate bar. The incident speaks to the material basis of their oppression, the constant threat of extreme poverty to the life of the community, as well as serving to epitomize the insidious oppression of racism. Bribed with the chocolate bar in the hand of the white RCMP officer, Maria is persuaded to betray the secret of where her father hides the poached meat upon which the family relies for sheer survival--and the result is both the (temporary) loss of her father and the near-loss of the immediate community of the family, as his six-month absence in jail almost results in the family's starvation. In this incident, Maria is "guilty" of a betrayal of the trust of her people and thus of herself--significantly at the instigation of a white man--though of course, it is ridiculous to blame an impoverished child for yielding to such a bribe.

The event foreshadows the eventual dissolution of the family through despair and poverty, and white racist interference, as well as raising the crucial issue of Maria's individual responsibility for this despair and dissolution. While technically she does "commit" this betrayal of her community's trust, clearly she is far more a victim of her people's economic and racist oppression--just as she is again when, in a later chapter, her father finally succumbs to despair and takes to drinking, and her mother dies in childbirth, fulfilling Maria's premonitory dream of precisely this occurrence. And then, her mother is not even allowed a Roman Catholic burial, in the church she had attended for years, because of the callous rigidity of the white priest. But rather than recognizing that here, as earlier, these events result from conditions beyond her control or responsibility, the depth of Maria's internalized racism--her inability to trust her self and to know both the limits and the scope of her individual responsibility, within a community already breached by the intrusion of the whites' anti-communal action--is demonstrated in her sense that, somehow, she is responsible for the priest's cruelty, and by extension, for her family's oppression in general (78-79). Having been informed repeatedly by whites, overtly and covertly, of her worthlessness and untrustworthiness as a Metis, she has begun to believe it herself, and she is incapable of refusing the guilt thrust on her by racist experience.

The few friendships Maria develops during this period offer the possibility of breaking into the

devastating isolation of self-mistrust and dislike, the trust offered by someone else providing a potential route to her discovering her own trustworthiness, but poverty and the divisive effects of institutionalized racism never allow this healing process to get firmly under way. In the end, in her effort to keep the family together even at the expense of her own well-being, she makes a decision that she will repeat again and again in her struggle to survive as a profoundly devalued Métis woman living in a white-dominated world: she sells herself to a (white) man. This time marrying a white man, later serving (predominantly) white men as a prostitute, she gives her Métis body to these men in return for some form of the power which their white male privilege automatically lends them in society, whether the power of "respectability" in order to keep the family out of the hands of Social Services, as here--or later, simple economic power to buy her children's daily survival and her own escape into the limbo of drug and alcohol addiction. Giving her own self away, she is ironically abandoning her larger community in an effort to save the most intimate community of her immediate family, an effort which Cheechum, the spirit and voice of Métis self-value in Maria's life, significantly refuses to sanction, knowing as she does that the loss of self *is* the loss of community: Cheechum will not attend the wedding of Maria to a white man (121).

Campbell characterizes the white society into which she thus moves, so dangerously unprotected from its violences, as utterly untrustworthy--as profoundly unhealthy and irresponsible. Every attempt Maria makes to gain some kind of power and self-love is bound to fail so long as she continues to seek this empowerment by attaching herself to white male power, rather than by valuing herself, her own identity as a Métis and a woman. Every white man she encounters--and many of the white women--ultimately only have his or her own power in mind: Maria's white husband, Darrel, is an alcoholic who beats her and who calls Social Services to take her siblings away (123); and his sister is also an alcoholic whose dysfunction manifests itself in an equal violence, if less physical, as her brother's, as she cruelly bullies Maria, as well as her own husband and daughter. From the violence and poverty of life with Darrel in Vancouver, Maria escapes by becoming a prostitute, selling herself as an exotic Spanish woman for the pleasure of powerful white men. Lil, the madam, takes her cut, and Maria's money is only ever enough to buy the clothes for her trade and the drugs that make the whole experience remotely bearable--

but never enough to allow her to escape from the cycle of self-hatred and of the loss of herself in the insatiable vacuum of the structures of "whitemale" power (Baker 382). In the white, capitalist, individualist (non-) community, all relations seem to be defined only by individual competition for power (Dill 133).

Although, eventually, an unnamed businessman/politician allows Maria a way out of the cycle of Lil's place by setting her up as his own private mistress, Maria also recognizes that this solution is likewise a trap, and that none of his considerable economic and political power will ever be invested in genuinely changing the systems that have subjected her and Lil to these men's exploitation (137). Similarly, Ray may help her kick heroin, but his price is her help in smuggling drugs to sell to other addicts. Perhaps the ultimate sign of the sickness of white society is that even the supposed spiritual leaders of the community know no more about valuing Maria than anyone else: they participate actively in the system's exploitation of minority people and cultures, in that one of Maria's clients is himself a priest, who helps her out of tight spots on occasion, but who still pays her for sex. And then, when Maria turns to another priest for counsel and comfort in a moment of deepest despair, he is utterly incapable of even beginning to understand the hard reality of her situation and that of hundreds like her: he simply cannot offer spiritual or communal guidance to one so deeply de-valued in a society that only constructs value as hierarchically understood and constructed power (141). During this period, the few people who offer Maria genuine, unconditional help--who invite her into their community--are themselves disenfranchised, disempowered people: the Sings, owners of a cafe in smalltown Alberta who have to put up with daily racist abuse from their own white customers (127), or Arlene's mother--to whom Maria goes for an intended abortion--and who, having already been convicted of this crime of returning women's bodies to their own control (*my* interpretation), will never escape the cycle of crime and jail terms to which the dominant culture's anti-feminist morality (again, *my* interpretation) has relegated her (152-53).

Accompanying Maria's shift to the cruelty and depersonalization of the white world, is a stylistic shift: the narrative changes from the anecdotal, cyclical writing of the oral Métis community to a more (European-) conventional linear narrative, in which episodes are more clearly connected in a structuring

logic of cause and effect--here in a uni-directional structuring logic of self-destructive decline. Thus when Penny Petrone, in her *Native Literature in Canada*, complains of the unclear chronology of Campbell's writing of her early life (Petrone 120), apparently wanting a more clearly linear narration based upon a supposedly inherent logic of cause and effect, she is asking for an inappropriately *European* evocation of Campbell's traditional Métis community. For that community, the episodic, cyclical character of Campbell's telling functions precisely to gesture at the vital non-linear character of time and life in a communal oral culture (Lutz, Introduction, 7), and I read the shift here, into the more (European-) conventional linear narrative, as in fact a signal of Campbell's movement into sickness, into the deadening self-hatred of life in the racist, non-communal white world.

Significantly, simultaneous with the narration of this decline is Campbell's retreat, at the time, into greater and greater silence, as she cares neither to tell her own stories to the men she sells herself to, nor to hear their stories. Campbell writes the white world of the city as a world without community or trust, without stories--certainly not for those disenfranchised from the dominant culture--and the result is a structure of irresponsibility, of a lack of trust between people who do not trust themselves, who doubt "their insides," as Maracle put it. Similarly, the result is also to signal the danger of a lack of trust, as well, in the community of the text, in contrast with the earlier assumption of a responsible, trusting community, based upon responsible, participatory storytelling and listening. *Halfbreed* itself, as a text, is thus written within the dangers and shifts of our current historical and social context, in which the abuse of racially-defined power is a constant threat and reality. Inscribed in the text itself is the constant danger that at any moment Campbell--and *Halfbreed* itself--will be silenced again, the Métis story will be forced back into white-determined silence.

For me as a white reader, the effect of this threat is to raise the possibility not only that a number of intra- and inter-communal trusts have been violated within the social and historical context narrated in the work, but also that reader-writer trust is similarly in constant danger of violation. With this rendering of the white world, Campbell is constructing and confronting the untrusting, racist response which she risks in writing *Halfbreed* at all, in that, in her very writing of the text, she is risking the



response--depending largely on the white reader's intentions and actions--which does nothing to foreclose the vast distance and power imbalance which exists between Campbell's autobiographical text and the white reader: she is risking, in *my* reading, the conventional academic reading i have been critiquing throughout this (nevertheless) academic reading. *Halfbreed* is thus a text which both trusts and does not trust me as an ally--as i both trust and do not trust myself, my discourses, as a white, academic, lesbian reader. In this segment, i am constructed as potentially profoundly untrustworthy, by definition of the white cultural incapacity to understand and participate in the kind of community of trust and care which Métis society (at its healthiest)--and which *Halfbreed* itself--represent. The fact that Campbell actually tells her story of this period, here, in the form of *Halfbreed* itself--that she entrusts even these painful, difficult elements of her story to me, a white reader--stands in strong contrast to the lack of trust that characterizes her experience of white society at that time. The effect is to juxtapose the two extremes of trust and utter lack of trust, each of which might potentially inform the reader's act of engaging with this story.<sup>10</sup>

By writing into her work the possibility of such a response, Campbell not only signals her awareness of the dangerous intercultural context within which she sites her own story, but equally instructs the reader in how to negotiate, safely and healing-ly, such a dangerous process. Written into *Halfbreed's* discourses are the dominant culture's discursive structures by which, in a (European-conventional) narrative, the reader is relegated to as silent and passive a role as Campbell's own at the time, all the connections of action, logic and meaning rendered far more explicitly than in the anecdotal section, and no action or trust called for on my part: the change or healing demanded of me in the very fact of my engagement in this effort at cross-cultural reading--the redefinition of my self--is refused me, and even as the presumably privileged white reader, i am trapped in the convoluted self-distrust of the discourses of racism, forced to "experience" Campbell's own frustration with these irresponsible discourses. In incorporating into her cyclical, anecdotal work the opposite, threatening discursive situation of the linear narrative--in which trust, and in fact, any responsible emotional engagement at all, are powerfully discouraged--she constructs her own form of discourse not only as the preferable, because (emotionally) sympathetic, element of the opposition, but then also subsumes the opposition itself by

proposing her narrative as in some ways prior to, encompassing, this irresponsible version of story.

She subverts the conventional discourses of history, first reversing the usual narrative by which the non-linear and thus a-historical (and non-rational, emotional) stories of the "natives" are subsumed by the inevitable, uni-linear, progressive thrust of Western technology, culture and history, and instead siting this singular Western historical narrative within the larger historical narratives (plural) of the Metis. And then she goes on again to collapse the opposition by rehabilitating as valid and valuable the precise characteristics which have conventionally been used to dismiss non-Western thought, narrative and history: she rehabilitates as a valid basis for constructing history and then for reading it (reconstructing it again), precisely the emotional response which has conventionally been excised, as "*Other*," from Western discourses of history (Tompkins, "Me and My" 170).

Enabling an emotional, personal engagement with history, then, she also enables her own storytelling, making a space for herself and her stories in history: and in enabling the emotional, she is unlearning her own internalized racism, allowing herself to feel again where once she had numbed herself with her own self-hatred. This is the same process by which white and non-white participants are approached in unlearning racism workshops, in which they are guided through a change to a redefinition of themselves--and it is thus the same emotional, healing process which *Halfbreed* demands of the participating reader as well: in unlearning racism workshops--workshops where whites learn instead how to begin to become allies, and perhaps non-whites can begin to explore the possibility of trusting white allies--all participants are encouraged first to examine their own experiences of oppression, to tell the story of the discourses which have silenced their own internal discourses of their several selves. Through this activity, white participants can begin through analogy to understand and sympathize with the non-white person's experiences of racist oppression--so that even as a white person, i can begin to tell new, *self-affirming* stories of myself, rather than stories that affirm me through the racist denigration of "Others" (Wynter, "On Disenchanting"). Similarly, the non-white participants finally get to tell the stories of their racist injuries to whites who are genuinely involved in the effort to listen honestly and responsibly, rather than dismissively and self-denyingly. *Halfbreed* likewise demands such an emotional, personal interaction

with "story," Campbell's telling of her own story (-ies) allowing me to tell my own story (-ies) and leading me with her to a new healing--a new story--rather than just the same academic-discursive story which tells only the same academic stories over and over again to itself, risking nothing.

*I also want allies, and more than anything else, that's what makes me write this thesis. I want to figure out how to be an ally in First Nations' struggles, in person and on paper, especially how to be an ally to First Nations lesbians, of course--but i also wish for First Nations allies for my struggle too, and i read First Nations books to help me find out how to be my self in this struggle. In fact, one of the formative moments in my process of deciding that i was a lesbian, was reading A Gathering of Spirit, a collection of Native women's writing, including an emphasis on Native lesbian writers, put together by Beth Brant (Mohawk): i can't say how thrilled i was to find that book. So i've got as personal an interest in a minority coalition as other minority people (who's surprised?).*

*Reading the passage of the Métis community's walk into the white town, my guts are tight: Campbell's story recalls a story of my own, about a frightening, abusive experience of my own. But the thing is, i get to tell my story back to Campbell's courageous storytelling. I figure trust can be a kind of discursive event, where you give story for story, back and forth, risking back and forth. So maybe the best response to a story can be another story, especially where you're trying to cross cultures.<sup>11</sup> Giving story for story means you aren't getting into that kind of control and power that i sometimes feel happens in an academic, critical response to a story.*

*So i recall my story of this time when i'm walking alone down the street--i'm not even with a lover, this time--and i walk past this apartment block. Suddenly there's this man's voice screaming shit at me, "ugly fucking dyke" and an empty bottle crashes on the pavement under the window. I feel my body cringe in on itself, my gut clenches over the fear. Will he throw the next bottle right at me? Will he have goaded those two guys or that woman staring at me from the bus stop, to join in? They're sure not making any move to help me. I walk on, fast, alone, flinching even from myself. I feel like i don't even get to own my own body--it's suddenly just an object for his shit: he's telling me to hate it, hate myself, hate my lesbianness. He's telling me not to tell this (lesbian) story of my self.*

*And it makes me grieve, too, over how so few of us in my community let ourselves touch each other with love in public, we're so full of the fear and hatred of guys like that, and it separates us from each other. We're pulling away from each other because our own "internalized homophobia" makes us afraid of those stares and abuse, or worse, because we fear outright violence. That bit about the Métis men beating their wives--i know that we turn our hatred on each other, too, trying to get some kind of power over something, even each other: we learn to do it to each other, it's the only way we've been shown how to get power.*

*Betsy Warland, writing in the Telling It book, puts it that, "as we encounter difference within the feminist communities we are enraged when our disparate names are denied: we are terrified that we will be rendered invisible yet again in the very place we had held out hope of finally being seen" (75). We are silenced, we silence ourselves and each other, and we don't tell our stories to each other or straights. So the community is threatened from inside as well as out.*

*Even here every word i write is careful: i want to be sure about what i'm giving away, how much power. Though i'm loosening up more and more, i feel like i still have to choose who to give which stories to, and i always feel like i'm daring the person listening to object to me and my stories, at the same time as i'm trying to figure how much risk is really very smart. But if any trust is ever going to happen, i guess the risk has to be taken, and you have to invite your reader or listener at least partly into the community that your story's making--so they're being asked to risk, too, and respond responsibly and trustworthily. So i'm saying the need for allies--for other (and "Other") people who let us tell our stories, too--is important, maybe even necessary to our existence.*

Thus, though the community of the text itself potentially disappears in this "white" segment of *Halfbreed*, it is absolutely imperative, for any kind of healing to occur, that community be regained, and the cyclical character of the oral story be reestablished in the work. The remainder of the work does nevertheless narrate that difficult recovery--that *healing*--in Campbell's own life, and thus it orchestrates it for me, as well. This process for Campbell takes the form of her simultaneous recognition of her own self-worth and the worth of her Métis community as they are deeply interconnected through her own and her community's multiple stories. She is moved to kick heroin by her memories of the storytelling Cheechum--the central figure in Campbell's lost communal life, in her lost sense of self-trust--and thus she finally begins to slow, if not yet to reverse, her long flight from herself and her people. Accepting Cheechum's spiritual support while she goes through withdrawal (144), it is during the subsequent period of recovery that she is finally able to envisage women as friends and allies, losing her fear of other women (149) and no longer defining herself solely in inferior relation to the dominant system of white male power--a significant and necessary move in learning how to love herself not only as a woman, but also as a member of the highly woman-centred Métis community. But while Campbell is gradually learning how to value Native cultures and politics during this time--while also maintaining a critical awareness of what she does and does not care for in the urban, political Native community--she is still extremely alienated from herself, drinking heavily in an effort to quell her fear of her own past as a victim of violence, a prostitute and a drug addict.

She has not told the story of her past to David, who is the father of her third child, and with whom she is trying to carry on a relationship--despite her desire for community with him, she is still retreating into anti-communal silence--and eventually her fear that her past will catch up with her leads to her nervous breakdown and committal to a mental hospital. But in her perception that the staff of the hospital are as sick as the patients (165), she finally begins to see what she must understand in order to regain her self-respect and self-trust: that the whites who have taught her to hate herself are potentially as hateful and self-hating as Natives have been constructed to be in dominant paradigms of power--or as lovable and loving as Natives. She can no longer operate from a relatively uncritical acceptance of the

systemic power imbalance that has allowed whites to construct Natives as the sole repository--and *only* as the repository--of everything hateful and self-hating.

Through her friendship with Edith, the (First Nations) wife of Maria's sponsor at Alcoholics Anonymous, Maria can finally say that she is getting over her "mental block about Indians" (166): beginning to recognize and heal her internalized racism, she can begin to incorporate this Native story into her many stories of her self (selves). And likewise, she is finally beginning to accept her own past and to forgive herself for it, even when being honest about it results in David's leaving her: in a reversal of her earlier silence about herself in order to placate white power, being responsible for herself--*telling her own stories*, acknowledging her own history--now becomes more important than attaching herself to white, male power, than attaching herself to someone else's (supposedly more acceptable or important) stories. She can now finally return to her own community--responsibility precisely defined *as* a recognition of community, of a field of influence and vulnerability (Maracle, "Writing" n.p.), both of one's individual actions and words on others, and of others' actions and words on oneself: the same notion of discursive responsibility and community that Armstrong outlined. Returning to her community, what she must do there--for her own sake, and the sake of her community--is to *tell her stories*, particularly to Cheechum, the centre of communal identity and value. And by extension, in her desire also to change Métis-non Métis relations, and ultimately to call even for an interracial community and healing, Campbell must also write *Halfbreed*--tell her stories even to me, to the whites who have systemically refused her stories. Thus she achieves the cyclical format of her Métis narrative, the story circling back to its introductory invitation even for me, a white woman, to engage in the community of this Métis text, and back to her introductory hope that "perhaps when I too am a grannie, I will write more" (2)--her hope that a community will exist for and through further Métis stories.

And in her telling of her story to Cheechum, and to me, the story becomes a structure, finally, of forgiveness: a redress of the skewed, displaced responsibilities that characterize the daily action of racism and internalized racism, its daily erasure of community. It is in this act of forgiveness, first of her Métis community, then of herself, and perhaps finally even of the white society which has injured her, that she

learns how to heal the gaps and divisions within herself that white culture has imposed upon her--the division of her self *from* herself, the gap of individual and communal self-hatred, and likewise, even the gap of hatred for whites, since any kind of hatred is self-alienating. Ultimately, in order to heal her fragmented self, she must learn how to hold two apparently opposing truths simultaneously--and safely, now--within herself. Forgiveness *is* such a structure of doubleness: it is the act of allowing the coexistence within herself of the simple acceptance, on the one hand, of the details of her past, and of the conditions that shaped it, and on the other hand, the awareness that to continue enacting that past in the present is *not* desirable or acceptable. Thus Maria can accept the simple facts of the nature of her past relations with herself, her community, and white society, and she can accept the "logic" of dysfunctional behaviour that led to these relations, but she is also committed to a complete personal and political redefinition of these relations from now on.

As a result, the story, too--though it initiates itself as an autobiography of one individual--is a structure of forgiveness: it is double or multiple as well. Not only does it incorporate two basic kinds of narration--one associated with white discursive conventions and associated ideology, the other with Metis --as both valid and necessary elements of her singular story, but the autobiography is constructed as *communal*, as well. The autobiography is ultimately mixed-genre, perhaps, functioning as both an autobiography of an individual and simultaneously, by definition, a history of a people. It thus also becomes double, forgiving, on a generic level. Conventionally, autobiography is understood to be the self-told story of an individual's life, usually of an extraordinary individual who in some way has distinguished "him"self from the comparatively undistinguished social or communal background of "his" life (Kaplan 189). An effect of self-individuation can be seen to occur over the course of conventional autobiography, both as it tells the story of the individual's gradual self-distinguishment, and as it tells it in the individual's own distinctive voice, the "I" and the "eye" of the story thus powerfully one and the same (Godard, "Politics" 221; also Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 312; Gates, "Editor's Introduction" 11). *Halfbreed* carries out a similar narration of such a process of the individual narrator's eventual coming-into-being--and in this action, it already effects the radically subversive inscription by which a conventionally

silenced minority woman is claiming the right to speak for herself, in her own powerful voice, proposing her own story as important and interesting against all the stereotypes and prejudices to the contrary. In telling her own stories, Campbell is radically asserting herself, in Barbara Godard's terms, as the subject of her own Métis discourse, rather than the object of someone else's alien, white discourse ("Politics" 220-21).<sup>12</sup>

But *Halfbreed* not only troublingly and joyfully inserts the traditionally silenced Other into the role of the speaking self, but as i have read it, also shifts the very terms of individual and community which conventionally inform this process of self-actualization in act and word. Reversing the usual pattern in autobiography, of following the individual's process of distinguishing his or her self from his or her community, here Campbell's self-actualization takes place instead through the very process of *reclaiming* her community, re-valuing her Métis self as part of the Métis community, and writing down Métis stories. The ultimate hero of this story is thus less Campbell herself, perhaps, than it is the Métis culture and community, in its very character as an oral culture--as expressed even in the style and syntax of the work--coming into constant being through its stories and the values they convey, particularly as these are embodied in the wisdom and stories of Cheechum. And then, through this communal storytelling, it redefines the individual as also an occasion for communal storytelling.

Thus i read the movements in Campbell's life as paralleling the more general history of the Métis people: she and her community alike move from an isolated, relatively healthy communal life, through the gradual corruption and self-alienation of communal and individual integrity as a result of the action of white racist power, to the loss of the community and the individual to the harshness of white hatred, and eventually to the (as yet tentative) reestablishment of Métis communal and individual self-value. The story itself is structured along the same lines, as it begins with the richness of the multiple stories of the Métis community, moves to a place where the story and the textual community are under constant threat of silence--whether Campbell's own retreat into self-hating wordlessness, or the reader's sudden self-denying withdrawal from participating trustingly in the community of the text--and eventually to the return to Métis community and story through the very act of writing *Halfbreed* itself. Through story, the

relationship between the individual and the community is recast in Métis terms--by which the individual identity is constructed as resulting from immersion in and identification with her community and its stories, rather than as resulting only from distinguishing herself from them--with the effect that *Halfbreed* redefines the genre of autobiography as also a communal, multiple, forgiving history.<sup>13</sup>

The effect for the reader is to engage with the multiple structure of forgiveness as well, as *Halfbreed* effects the redefinition of individual identity in the multiple, forgiving terms by which Campbell comes to construct herself: the individual is constructed neither according to the liberal humanist cult of the unified, singular, fixed individual participant in history, nor according to the resulting stereotype of the "native," "Other" identity as fragmented, self-alienated, non-historical--as unknowing and unknowable. Instead, the individual is constructed as *safely, self-knowingly* multiple and communal (Kaplan 194), as the teller of her own multiple stories of her communal selves.<sup>14</sup> If healing thus comes from telling one's own multiple, even mutually-contradictory, stories to oneself and one's community, then *Halfbreed*--with several apparently opposing kinds of story and history, and associated ideologies operating within its communal circle of forgiveness--calls for me to be double or communal as well: i am asked to hold (at least) two truths at once--two different constructions of history, time, story and autobiography--as equally valuable, as Campbell herself has learned. I must adopt a position, write a discourse, of "intersubjectivity," first safely within and among my several selves, and then in relation to Campbell's text, rather than a position of (supposed) objectivity in relation to myself and the text (Godard "Politics" 196). I can begin to read beyond the boundaries set by my individual and cultural meanings only by *trusting* at least the *value* of the Other's texts and meanings in this way--rather than *demanding proof* of this value (Maracle "Ramparts" 167)--even when i do not know, and to some degree cannot know, the detailed content of them (Kaplan 194-95).

Accustomed to reading only one story over and over again, about only my own people, told only according to certain unquestioned ideologies--to reading in criticism only the academic story of story--here i am led to see at least the possibility and value of Other stories, and can thus forgive myself for my fear of that doubleness which nevertheless (forgivingly) still remains. I can begin to forgive myself, then, and my several communities, for being both victim and victimizer--myself for being female



and lesbian and white and an academic, and the academy for inscribing, in its very practices and structures, the myriad individual and communal roles of both oppressor and oppressed. Unlike the European-conventional linear structure of history or story, as it inscribes only the continual loss of the present into the past and thus allows only the static structures of nostalgia and guilt as ways of structuring our relation to the past, this cyclical, communal version of history and story inscribes the possibility of active participation in a project of recovery, recuperation--healing: a project of (re-) telling Other stories.<sup>15</sup>

My reading is thus itself made communal, my individual critical voice having been troubled into doubleness through Campbell's construction of the community and the individual as utterly interdependent. As a result, what *Halfbreed* communicates inter-culturally to me is less an understanding or a knowledge, than a process of self-education, self-healing, which might one day make me capable of understanding at least a little. With the story's movement through to forgiveness, the circle--the story, community--is both completed and *begun again* (Sangari 169). This Métis version of history and story proposes the possibility of a new return to healing ways--a return that *is* at once a *return*, a repetition, but *new* as well. And so, reading *Halfbreed* from this tentative, just beginning, position within its communal circle, i enter a critical place in which many stories can be told and heard, where i can tell *my* story, too.

our own

doubt has been our guardian  
crowds surrounding us  
watching  
tight-eyed crows  
who hawk and spit  
examine our laughter  
sample its sound  
dryly  
flesh shrinks from sharp beaks of eyes  
so we circle inwards  
into ourselves  
black specks  
on the blank sky  
just circling  
our surrounding doubt  
guarding crowds  
from tight-eyed crows  
we hawk and spit dryly  
sampling our flesh with our beaks  
so we circle inwards  
onto ourselves  
black specks in a blank  
just circling

## grandmothers

maria campbell says    her grandmothers cree  
& gaelic    are her muses    and you cant  
write    or at least she couldnt    without  
knowing them    i dont know    i never knew  
my grandmothers    hardly    how to    find  
them    now    they say thats whats    wrong  
with us white people    i wish you knew yours  
at least    adoptive sister    whitebear sister  
and    mean    while    i kind of    at least  
i wish    for kind-ness    take you    for my  
muse    i guess its    not right    cannot  
absolve myself    of the sin    of metaphor  
a muse or abuse    things not meaning    what  
they mean    the cruelty of mean-ing    but i  
write    gauche (sinister -- unclean?)    with  
my left    (abandoned, lost)    hand    to try  
to remind myself    (what, i dont know)  
what i dont know

contact narrative: first sight

what--  
what words  
can i use

josie,  
my sister,  
i wish--

for this anger  
that is mine  
though  
it is not  
my own

i thread pain  
for our sisterhood  
across the unbridgeable  
the gap of  
difference,

jet's scream  
of rage  
low level flight  
tearing of  
a world

can i dis-  
avow, dis-  
own, dis-  
pose, dis-  
curse

colour,  
cover,  
mantle,  
g/race

mohawk children  
pushed by our  
camouflaged soldiers  
with guns

this anger  
that is not  
my own

i reach  
for you  
adoptive  
sister--

when language  
fails

my adopted  
*je dis--*  
though  
i wish far more  
*tu dis*

assiniboine  
sister--  
with awkward words that  
might not be  
your own  
*sister*

contact narrative: first sight

i remember	in penned rows
in squares	of black and white
photographs and	measured
fours	with white margins
we were three	caught in
a trinity of cross	words and
frowns	tangled
blue-eyed children	in lines
until	you came
you came	and words
our tripod enclosure	slipped
sprung	into new patterns
the four corners	still encoding
of photographic space	but
remembrance	shifting
shifting	shape

my first sight	(do i remember?)
of you	we had
was	to choose
at the adoption agency	which one from
a photo showing	several
colours	mail order shopping for
brown skin, black hair	an <i>indian</i> child?

(do?) i remember  
still  
you were beautiful.

contact narrative: first sight

oh for god's sake it just seems unbelievable you know i mean there  
in the middle of all that stuff that stuff at that saskatchewan  
museum of natural history (like an oxymoron if i ever heard one  
) all these gleaming glass cases full of stuffed animals and stone  
tomahawks hide scrapers beaded mocassins yellow buckskin leggings  
eagle-feather headdresses a bow and arrows you know as if the  
props from some chief dan george movie were stuck inside these  
dust-proof cases in one wall there was a big glass case next to  
another big case with stuffed coyotes hunting rabbits and male  
ruffed grouses with those stupid green air bags on their chests to  
attract the females but this first case it had dummy *indians* wearing  
more mocassins and buckskins standing beside a tipi their glass  
bead eyes would never meet mine and then in the middle of the  
room on the shiny stone floors stuck up on this platform a big dinosaur  
skull one of those ones with the big horns shiny brown stone like  
they always are lacquered into ancient leathery death with these  
huge empty eye-holes yeah there in the middle of all that stuff  
was where

we  
first  
met

you came walking around a glass case wearing a yellow dress  
white socks and gleaming patent leather shoes everything  
shining against your brown skin you carried a toy radio which  
if you wound it up it played baa baa black sheep you know who had  
to give away its wool i guess cause it was black the social worker  
stalked along behind you in a lizard-green 1968- style dress  
sharp green shoes striking the floors hard i didnt like her i was 5  
you were 3 it was only a year after the centennial eh i cant  
remember what i was wearing this poem is about

i  
see  
you

of course (will you talk with me one day?) sometimes i think the  
alphabet itself is a museum no yellow-dressed assiniboine girls  
walking through its halls unless strictly controlled by lizard-green  
dinosaur skulls you know and the papers in my parents' hands  
that said we could have you we could have you you didnt come home  
with us that day this was like a trial run or something just to see  
if you were what we wanted not a hard choice really one live  
*indian* girl with the soft doe-eyes that *indian* girls always have in  
books compared to stone tomahawks in glass cases and that damned  
dinosaur with beady eyes

## Chapter Two

"It Is Here All Around Us":

*Slash, In Search of April Raintree, and Honour the Sun*

If the academic reading of First Nations writing requires that the non-First Nations reader undergo a change by which an emotionally-engaged reading is newly validated, the reader thus redefining herself as a changing, historically-situated, and ideologically-motivated being participating actively in an ongoing cross-cultural dynamic, this is still only the beginning of the changes i see First Nations texts as demanding of me. As i only began to suggest in the previous chapter, it seems to me equally valuable and necessary to begin to develop a spiritually-engaged reading as well, in that if i really am going to *trust* or *believe* the value of First Nations stories and meanings, without having to *know* it appropriatively, controllingly and intrusively, i must draw on a kind of spiritual, holistic practice, rather than on just a narrowly intellectual practice (Asham-Fedoruk "Fencepost" 40).<sup>1</sup> If i am going to read *Halfbreed*, and other First Nations texts, as structures of forgiveness--in which several apparently opposing stories, with their associated epistemological and ontological underpinnings, can coexist safely at once--again, a kind of *faith* is required of me, to carry me where my logical ability to reconcile such contradictions (as logic demands) cannot serve me. I read such First Nations novels as *Slash*, by Jeannette Armstrong (Okanagan), *In Search of April Raintree*, by Beatrice Culleton (Métis) and *Honour the Sun*, by Ruby Slipperjack (Ojibway) as in different ways siting their significance as stories, as novels, within spiritually-based systems of knowledge and story, drawn from the writers' traditional Okanagan, Métis or Ojibway spiritualities.

At first, as i detail through extensive reference to Sylvia Wynter, the very notion of a "First Nations woman's novel" might seem to be almost oxymoronic, given the history of the novel as deeply implicated in the history of the "native's" construction as the "Other" who could then be unabashedly

colonized and oppressed. But i read these novels as precisely the locus of a *conflict amongst* stories, amongst versions of the novel, by which they can first explicitly address the issue of de-colonizing story--de-colonizing the novel--and then propose an alternate form of novel based on First Nations structures of meaning and thought: based on a traditional First Nations *spiritual*, precisely *non*-secular sensibility. In other words, where in Chapter One i proposed "story" as a route to individual emotional healing, here i want to examine the nature of story itself as such a healing, forgiving structure, whereby, in constructing the novel as the conflict amongst stories, i am constructing it as the external, discursive analogy to the internal interdiscursive activity that i called individual identity. The novel thus functions as the locus of a discussion and construction of First Nations *communal* healing, where the autobiography focussed on individual healing; and the novel's ultimate effect of siting this conflict and healing of stories within a traditional *spiritual* system of balance and meaning functions as the communal correlative of the autobiography's validation of a system of individual *emotional* balance and meaning. In the novels, as in the forgiving structure of Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, the ultimate effect is to validate at least partly all versions of story as they interact within a larger spiritual context--while not entirely abandoning a balancing assessment of the relative value of one story over another, of the spiritually and power-fully balancing, de-colonizing story over the dispiriting and powerfully imbalanced, colonizing one (Fedorick "Fencepost" 37).

In her article, "On Disenchanting Discourse: 'Minority' Literary Criticism and Beyond," Sylvia Wynter describes how, from its very inception as a literary form, the novel has been deeply implicated in the construction of the field of racist, misogynist stereotypes and hierarchically arranged binary oppositions against which First Nations women and other minorities struggle in their lives and writings. Wynter traces the development of the novel as it occurred simultaneously with--and indeed, performed a constitutive role in--the shift in European thought from an initiating description of humanity on theological terms to one on ideological terms. She argues that the philosophical shift from an "explanatory schema of supernatural causality" to an "explanatory hypothesis of natural causality" (211) produced a literary and critical shift as well, in which "the world of historical actuality and the actions of men within



it were released from their earlier subordinated or 'deferent' role" (212), and were thus newly constructed as worthy of literary and critical attention. As a result, the novel form, with this new, secular encoding of the human, began its rise not only to its eventual position as Western culture's dominant literary *expression*, but also to its critical role as a *perpetuator* of "a new order of discourse based on varieties of an ontologized 'natural law,' and its related secularizing variants/models of human being." These variants "were to realize their purely secular summa in the [nineteenth and twentieth] centuries with the emergence of the criterion of being encoded in the figure of man and its constitutive discourse of *biological idealism*," as opposed to the "philosophical idealism" characteristic of the earlier ethos (211, her emphasis). It was with the shift to this "ontologized 'natural law,'" emphasizing "a projected 'primal nature,'" that the figure of the "native" began to emerge as the discourse's ultimate, and necessary, "negative signifier" (215, n.23), an "ideologic [which] was to be disseminated by the mode of the novel and by its founding discourse of biological idealism" (214-15).

Thus the novel as a secular genre was implicated from its inception in the codification of the native as one of a number of "ontologized Others" which in dominant--Western, white, bourgeois, male--discourse are given an ironically "*system-maintaining function*" in the system's "stable autopoiesis" (221, her emphasis), taking over the role once filled by theological explanation, in a sense.<sup>2</sup> With the new, secular encoding of the human came the loss of "*supernaturally guaranteed* descriptive statements or criterial conceptions of being" (211, her emphasis) and the need instead to find

the necessarily non-transcendental mechanism by which the first purely secular criterion of being . . . could now be *absolutized*. For only by means of such a mechanism of absolutization could the metonymic process, by which the new criterion of being about which our global order still auto-hierarchizes and auto-regulates itself, be stably attached to the euphoric reward system of 'feeling good'. (219, her emphasis, my underlining)

It is precisely through this euphoric reward system, Wynter argues, that the global order achieves its "autopoiesis," as individual obedience to its hierarchies and regulations is rewarded with the literal stimulation of the brain's pleasure centres and "the functioning of the euphoria-inducing family of substances [i.e. opiates]" (218). This system of reward relies on the system's negative signifiers--the Ontological Others--in the place of transcendently guaranteed statements, to maintain the new secular

order.

If the category of the Poor functioned as the hypher-sign within the 'natural unit' of the nation[,] at the level of the *family*, the Ontological Other slot was filled by the category of gender, of the woman, appearing at this level as one bearer-category of the lack of bourgeois rationality embodied normally in the *male* as the signifier of rationality. Here, the ontologically privileged male receives . . . the opiate reward . . . of the narcissistic advantage of a prescribed feeling of innate supremacy.

However, at the global level of the new ordering of things, the central Ontological spot of the *Poor* at the level of the nation, and of the *woman* at the level of the family, was filled by the category of the *native* as the projection not only of the lack of bourgeois-occidental rationality but also the lack of metaphysical Being. . . . Like the woman in the male/female relationship, this enabled the experiencing of euphoric supremacy at the level of race and culture . . . . (221-22, her emphasis)

Subversively collapsing the distinction in human behaviour between biological and cultural events, and thus herself undermining an ontology based on "biological idealism," Wynter identifies the fictional narrative as the primary mechanism by which this system of neurologically-based conditioning--this "behavior-inducing order of discourse" (218)--is inculcated in individuals, and perpetuated systemically: René Girard's notion of the "dynamics of desire" in narratives, Wynter says,

is none other than the . . . motivational system by means of which the desire for the signifier of potency specific to each culture or form of life, once enculturated in its systemic subjects as an opiate-inducing signifier in the context of the analogic of founding narrative schemas, functions to induce the collective set of behaviors of human subjects, behaviors which in turn bring each criterion/model of being into autopoietic living existence. . . . It is precisely by means of *rhetorical conventions* encoded in narrative orders of discourse that each system-specific signifier of potency is constituted as an opiate-inducing signifier of desire. (230, her emphasis)

If the effect of these "rhetorical motivational systems" is to encourage the desire for opiate reward in those whom the system most empowers to maintain itself, the effect for those who are made the Ontological Others of the system is precisely the opposite: the motivation of desire--"knowledge of which [Wynter emphasizes], is most lucidly provided by fictional narrative"--is replaced instead with the motivation of aversion, of self-aversion in particular. Put simply, as Maria Campbell narrates in *Halfbreed*, racist conditioning as it is perpetuated through society's discourses encourages whites to validate themselves through negative reference to people of colour, and encourages people of colour to hate themselves (at least in the first instance) by introjection of these same white-empowering standards. Thus again, through the action of narrative discourses and "their regulatory functioning in the inculcation of learned self-

aversion," even the Ontological Others of the system are induced to participate in and support the system which precisely Others them so damagingly (230).

As a result, the novel form can be seen as deeply implicated in the mechanisms by which minorities in general, and in my present discussion, First Nations women in particular, were and are so utterly enclosed within the discourses of racism and sexism--to the point where one must question the very *possibility* of a "First Nations woman's novel," when given the history of the novel, such a phrase seems utterly self-contradictory, a logical impossibility.<sup>3</sup> The only kind of effectively "First Nations novel" or minority novel that it seems possible to posit is precisely one which addresses and subverts not only the conventions of the novel, but its underlying ontologized ideology as well (also Kroeber 18). For example, Wynter reads Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* as achieving a shift in the novel form's "underlying *archia* or descriptive statement of the model of the human as a 'natural organism'" (216), and inscribing instead a model--much like her own discussion of rhetorical motivational systems--by which the human is a *rhetorical* or *discursive* organism (to simplify somewhat). This shift then liberates the protagonist--and the author, i suppose--to see through the discourses of the supposed "facts" of race and class which are used to validate white bourgeois male "supremacy," and thus to critique the system which benefits from the construction of these "facts" (216).<sup>4</sup>

The minority novel, then, in order actually to express any Other meaning than the dominant order's self-perpetuating meanings--in order to de-colonize its discourses and meanings--would seem to need to be a deeply subversive medium, questioning not only the interactions of race and class and gender, but even the very mechanisms of secular, biological idealism by which these categories have been made significant in the first place. The danger in doing anything less, in "taking the ontological 'facts' of class and of race as if they were 'brute' facts, [is that] they remain trapped in the context and the code of the hegemonic order of discourse and its system of motivation" (216). The result is

the temptation that confronts minority discourse at this juncture, the same temptation to which the differing *isms* that emerged in the Sixties and Seventies all succumbed: that is, of taking the ontological 'facts' of ethnicity (non-White and White) as well as of gender, sexuality, and culture as if these were things-in-themselves, rather than 'totemic' signifiers in an overall system of resemblances and differences. Taken as such, these terms are only meaningful within their

reinforcing systemic function as the 'specifying' negative Ontological Others of the first purely secular and therefore non-transcendentally guaranteed model of human being/identity. (216-17)

Such a subversive project might be seen to function in the First Nations women's novels i am reading, their very existence *as* First Nations women's novels (among other strategies) effecting a subversion of the conventions of the novel and its ideological/ontological underpinnings. But it is also crucial to their project that they precisely be taken on the terms which Wynter mistrusts so deeply--as mimetic representations of a reality based upon a system of "brute facts," in which racism and sexism are prominent (also Radhakrishnan 203-04). To rephrase this difficulty in terms of my own critical practice, it seems vital to approach First Nations women's texts from the same forgiving stance i proposed at the end of Chapter One, from *both* of two apparently opposing stances. From one stance, Wynter's argument recognizes the need to read signifiers of race and gender not as reflections of ontological facts, but as discursive constructs subject to constant (and necessary) reconstructive shaping, within a discursive field in which all such constructs interact only relationally with each other. From this perspective, these constructs do not attain greater or lesser proximity to expressing some exterior, "biologically"-verifiable "truth," some actual claim to "Being." Since the individual reader's very notions of her self and her resulting reading practices are inevitably involved in, rather than objectively separated from, this behaviour-inducing order of discourse, these discursive constructs must be examined constantly for their role as conveyors of "rhetorical motivational systems": i must do the work of unlearning racism.

And yet, this critical outlook would deny the insistence by many First Nations writers that they are writing real, *true* stories (whether fictional or not), about First Nations colonized reality and its relation with traditional communal values and truths: they are finally speaking the truths of white oppression, and claiming their own Native right simply to Be. To begin at this juncture in critical history to deconstruct the possibility of Being and identity as such--just when First Nations and other minority groups and individuals are finally decolonizing and de-conditioning themselves and their stories, finally devising ways to be heard and thus to define themselves newly to themselves and to more general society--is to instigate yet another move of refusal and deferral by which minorities are once again prevented from

creating equal space for themselves in mainstream society, or from transforming that society so that "minority" and "mainstream" become nonsensical differentiations (Chester and Dudoward n.p.; Christian 54; Hartsock 196; but see also Radhakrishnan).<sup>5</sup> In the end, of course, as in my reading of *Halfbreed*, my reading here aims at subverting the enclosure of such a binary opposition, and at finding the third possibility, of the forgiving narrative structure which nevertheless allows this opposition simply to remain, both options equally irreducible and yet mutually permeable (JanMohamed and Lloyd, "Minority Discourse--What Is To Be Done" 15), within a larger narrative structure based, in this case, on traditional First Nations narratives of spirituality.

*What i ask myself over and over, is how can i read spiritually? What's my own spirituality like, here in the community of my text, or in my lesbian community? I'm not sure whether my stories can really connect my own emotional healing with a communal, spiritual kind of healing. I'm not sure how they join in a community of stories. I mean, if i'm talking about how necessary and possible it is to allow a forgiving multiplicity of stories, isn't it another kind of oppression to say there has to be this over-arching "spiritual story"? It starts to sound like what i hate most about Christian "spirituality" (though i guess the way i think of spirituality, it doesn't end up being spiritual), that everyone has to fall in line, unforgivingly.*

*But the connection i think i get is that, for me, healing and spirituality, especially here, where i think they have to be brought into reading across these cultures, really is about this idea of multiplicity. For me, to read spiritually is to get into the whole spread of forgiving, healing stories that are possible, instead of trying to say this one is better than that one, and that one's even better, because it's closer to some other truth that isn't really in the stories themselves.*

*I don't want to say that there shouldn't be some kind of way of saying, no, this isn't a good story, in the sense of good as not erasing other people's stories. I mean, i don't think every last story is unquestionably and inherently equal to every other story. If they're violent and degrading, they should be criticized. Which is to say that, part of this multiplicity includes the possibility of conflict amongst stories, too: the idea of forgiveness depends on the assumption of conflict. So forgiveness works as the way all these stories can coexist, and can even enter into conflict. But it also means that spiritual stories--or reading spiritually--they somehow have to contribute to a healing balance between stories, even as they're also contradictive and conflictive. So it ends up being a kind of constructive conflict rather than just each story asserting only themselves as powerful and right: you have to incorporate into the very structure of the stories the possibility and necessity of other stories. The stories have to rely on their own self-validation, and not on validation through oppressing Other stories--and then, their mutual power has to be constantly thought about and re-balanced even within the context of each individual story, let alone between them.<sup>6</sup>*

*So this balancing multiplicity is a source of healing, and it works for me as the most important way of reading across cultures.<sup>7</sup> But i think it's equally important to be committed to accepting that there are going to be gaps in understanding, and gaps in what you should be allowed to know about the other culture you're trying to listen to. So reading cross-culturally is to read spiritually, in one sense, but it's also to accept uncertainty and "unknowability" as a premise of the effort. I think that's how you value difference--different stories, different spiritualities--by realizing that each individual and community (me included) still has to own their own ways, tell their own stories for themselves, while not claiming others' stories or spirits. They can't claim more than their own balanced power of utterance, understanding and being, and they have to keep trying out those balances within their separate contexts.*

Elaine A. Jahner says about cross-cultural criticism and writing, that it's "a process of trying to perform at the limits of language and culture, where it is less a matter of answering questions than it is one of performing the questions themselves" (156). So i'm trying to say that to read spiritually is both to take on a deeply, carefully discursive task, but it's also to take on equally intense, careful negotiation of what is beyond (at least my) power to talk about: it's a journey into riotous, exuberant expression and concerted silence at once.

Thus i read all three of the First Nations novels under examination here as inscribing a vital, structuring dynamic *within* their narrative structures of this conflict between differing reading and writing stances, between differing "rhetorical motivational systems," as the first person narrators, as character and story-teller alike, struggle with the process of de-colonizing not only their individual psyche, but the communal story--the novel--as well (Armstrong Interview 16). In particular, all of the protagonist-narrators, experiencing a sense of disconnection from community--actual and textual--must then (narrate their) search for a community, a novel. I read the narration of *Honour the Sun*, for example, as primarily concerned with recounting the daily familial details of a relatively traditional Ojibway life, but the story gradually tends towards the dissolution of that life--that community, source of identity--as Owl's older siblings move away and her mother, and the people in the community in general, devote more and more time to drinking. Owl's writing of her own stories of her communal Ojibway life then serves as the recuperative action itself: the stories function as her search for and reclaiming of her identity in a newly written community. Similarly, i read April's search for herself, in *In Search of April Raintree*, as utterly bound up in her search for some way to come to terms with her Métis identity, and in particular, to come to terms with her immediate (communal) family history. She has, voluntarily and involuntarily, tried several other familial arrangements--with the (white) DeRosiers (sic), in her marriage to (white) Bob--but she still has not found a way to integrate her Métis history with her own desire for a safe life in this white-dominated world; and indeed, the story suggests to me that the search for one's self, one's identity in connection with a community, is simply *not* a safe process, particularly for a non-white individual in contemporary Canadian society.

In *Slash* as well, the narrative's main structuring principle is the conflict between constructions of community, as the conflict stages Slash's own difficult effort to negotiate a livable way through various

constructions of Native identity and meaning. Over the course of the narrative, Slash shifts repeatedly between an effort to define himself in the traditional terms he learned as a child--growing up in his Okanagan community, speaking Okanagan and learning Okanagan ways from his father and other relatives--and an effort to define himself in terms of the larger political situation he finds himself in as a Native person living in a white-dominated society. As he moves back and forth between these two opposing options--as he *narrates* his movement back and forth--the effect is also to construct two different, opposing kinds of story, and thus to produce the two different (above-mentioned) paradigms for my reading. The first option, the traditional way, offers the young Tommy (not yet re-named the militant Native activist, Slash) an entire material and spiritual culture--language, economy, land, history, spirituality, and so on--but the more contact he has with white racism and culture, the more his own culture seems inadequate to him, "every single thing that meant something good to me . . . continuously being battered from all sides" (212). The traditional Okanagan community does not seem to him sufficiently strong or resilient either to protect him from the power imbalances of white-First Nations interaction, or to offer him the strength to shrug off the consequences of this imbalance.

Attending a white-dominated school, Tommy experiences the racist attack on his own community in *material* terms--precisely the terms on which the extreme materialism of white capitalist society would assimilate and destroy First Nations cultures (Currie 141-42). His sense of inadequacy--his learned self-aversion, in Wynter's terms--is thus particularly connected with a sense that white culture offers so many more material goods, material *power*, than his own. One of the first things he notices about the white kids at school is their "shiny bikes and brand new clothes and shoes," which make him hate his own "looks and . . . clothes"; and of course, one of the most prevalent stereotypes of Natives, which Tommy first hears from the white kids at school, is that Natives are thieves: they threaten white materialist values, a belief which of course says more about *white* obsessions than about Native behaviour (23-24). Internalizing the materialist orientation of the dominant white culture, then, just as April does in *In Search of April Raintree*, Tommy comes to construct his *own* culture in material terms, as well--or precisely in terms of a comparative material *lack*--and he loses sight of the many other, non-material strengths and capacities his

own culture validates (Fee "Upsetting" 171).

The effect of this racism for Tommy--and even more so for his friend Jimmy, who is defined, and defines himself, almost solely in terms of his desire for the material accoutrements of white (material) power (Currie 142)--is ultimately his taking on a more general orientation towards the world at large which replicates the superficiality of the white materialist bias. This bias, by which what *is*, what is visible and materially-verifiable, is reality--a bias, in my reading, based upon biological idealism, and its protocols of proof and verification--becomes the basis of *his* construction of reality, as well, of his sense of himself and his place in the world (Currie 142). It is this inscription of an insistence on material reality--on an understanding of race and class and gender as "things-in-themselves" (Wynter 217)--which comes to function as the basis of one of the two conflicting storylines i identify in *Slash*: the basis of one of Slash's own stories of himself, and the basis of one of my strategies for reading. In this storyline, language, or story, functions to reflect what *is*--to reflect colonized reality, and not yet to de-colonize it: reading as a white reader, thinking in terms of European-originated forms of written literature, i identify this line of narration, and thus my reading strategy, with a generally *realist* convention of fiction, and with an essentialist definition of identity and meaning (Fuss xi-xii).

This basic construction of the nature of language and story also seems to me to inform one dimension of Ruby Slipperjack's *Honour the Sun* which is occupied primarily with evoking the daily, physical details of a relatively traditional Ojibway life: Owl recounts incidents in her life with her mother and siblings, on a northern Ontario lake, from her tenth to her sixteenth year. But in this novel, this order of narration provides a strength and effectiveness for First Nations storytelling, despite the simultaneous difficulties of the discourse. The effect is similar to that of the anecdotal sections of *Halfbreed*, inscribing these stories and details as valuable and important--particularly as they evoke an entire oral culture and history--in subversive contrast with the usual dominant discursive erasure of these concerns from history and story (Tapping 93-94). As in *Halfbreed*, to call up the oral storytelling situation through the use of an anecdotal structure is to allow the construction of two potential communities: the reconstruction of the oral Ojibway community, and the construction of the community of the text--of the text *as* communal and



inclusive, rather than as exclusive of the "Ontological Others"--in which i am thus invited to participate responsibly. That this understanding of story is what motivates the novel is perhaps most clearly indicated in the way that, as in *Halfbreed*, the notion of the cessation of storytelling is used as a sign of the dissolution of community--actual or textual--through colonial action: as Owl's mother comes to drink more and more, her sickness, and the resulting stress on the community of her immediate family, is indicated particularly in her ceasing to tell stories to her family. Like Campbell, Owl then comes to her own healing in part through the action of taking up that storytelling herself instead, in the form of the first-person narration of *Honour the Sun*.

The community of the oral storytelling situation is similarly evoked in *Slash*, where the daily, material details of Okanagan life are recounted--though to a far lesser extent over the whole of the novel than in *Honour the Sun*. This evocation is enhanced by the general rhetorical style of *Slash*, the use of colloquial phrases and sayings, of repetitions and near-refrains, of non-standard grammar, and so on. Joy Asham Fedorick (Cree) also comments on First Nations writers' use of a "textured" kind of English:

Our stories reflect life as it really is, and are not "formula" oriented. There is no beginning, there is an always was, and with no end there is an always will be . . . The spiritual nature of the concept of the Continuum is addressed through style and with language that is relationship-oriented rather than thing-oriented. English, with its noun predominance does not allow, within rigid hierarchical style criterion, for relationships to be explored, relationships that help us to understand our place and value in the Big Picture. Native writers, tend, as Native people do, to use verbs and adjectives freely. This textured way with English provides concept and depth and warmth and fuzzy wuzzies. Helps us feel good, and just plain feel. And out of the subliminal influence of this style the spiritual circle is strengthened. ("Fencepost" 33, her emphasis; also Harjo 62-63)

In *Slash* this kind of textured effect may appear in such passages as the one in which he describes the vision he has while in jail:

I looked up and faraway I could see the new snow on the tops of the mountain from the barred windows above me. The sun had set in a blaze making the snow look orange-pink with dark-blue tinges. I could almost feel the soft cushioned brush of new snow against my shoes and feel the sharp wet bite of the fir and pine smells in the crisp air. Tracking deer in the snow would be easy. Tonight, I thought, I will go home to them mountains.

I knew it was near to Winter Dance time at home. . . . I closed my eyes as the last light dissolved and the early winter night drew her curtain over my window. In my mind I heard the songs and smelled the fire smoke in the big room where the dances were held.

I heard deer hoof rattles shaking louder and louder and there seemed to be a soft roaring in my ears almost as though lots of people danced around me with their feet stamping, their eyes

closed and their bodies sweating. The song vibrated through every fibre of my body like a light touch of wings, and the hard ball inside my chest seemed to melt and spread like warm mist across my chest and moved outward through my body. (67-68)

The description moves several times from the initial view out the jail window--from a strictly observational mode--to a more participatory description of the world as a place of material experience, of physical sensation and action. As the sight moves him to another, Native place, the language shifts to an emphasis on the *interaction* and *relation* of his body and senses with the surroundings. And then the song--its words--move him to yet another level, where the words become almost a part of his body, easing his pain and equally, in the paragraphs that follow the quoted passage, his body reiterates the song, as he chants his pain and celebration out through the halls of the jail. Material reality, as viewed out the window, elides with interactive sensation that is both remembered and newly experienced at once, and then slides as well into the words of a healing ceremony--with the effect that the latter two descriptions of First Nations reality are equally valorized, as "*real*", with the observed, materially-verifiable "reality" of the view out his window. Thus the realist line of narration also works to establish the narrator as a healer of his or her own community, a transformer (in my application of Wynter's theories) of once-aversive rhetorical motivational systems, into ones that reward the "Ontological Other" of the First Nations narrator and his or her storytelling community, for *their* self-constructions (visions), *their* discourses constructing and maintaining *their* order of thought and culture (ceremonies).

In addition, the realist narrative in *Slash* evokes not only the material "reality" of all aspects of the traditional Okanagan community, but also the daily, physical reality of the First Nations individual's experience *away from* his or her community, in the white world of the city. This aspect of the realist, materially-based line of narration allows the much-needed evocation of the devastating impact of racism on the daily lives of First Nations people, so that the "*truth*" of the effects of centuries of racism is finally being told. Such an effect is particularly achieved in the most graphic, affecting passages of the novels, where in *Slash*, for example, Slash describes his repeated loss of his sense of purpose and self to the immediate panacea of drugs and alcohol, especially in the last, most despairing passage of such description before he finally finds an entirely new way to be himself (195-98):

The end of [this last period of despair] stands out clear . . . . It was spring again and I was sick as a dog. I woke up down by the wharves. I had been lying there listening to the water crashing and I felt the sun, warm on my face. I looked up when I heard a friend of mine from back home say, "Here, have a drink." I sat up and reached for it. I looked around and nobody was there, but I heard laughter echo and echo in my ears. There were some driftwood piles and big boulders scattered around. I looked again and some guys were sitting there. They all dripped slime, oozing and grey. There was a stench all over everything that smelled like dead bodies. The waves were oily looking and seemed to do things water doesn't do. It formed into shapes that dripped slime and oozed green and black sludge. (197)

Though Slash is having a similar experience as in the passage describing his jail song--he is having a vision, or in this case, more like a hallucination--here the language does not itself become a route to a holistic reconnection with the world. Unlike the previous passage, here more of the description is solely of what Slash *sees*, his other sensations only leading him back into the horror of what he is seeing--his hallucination--rather than to a valorisation of several layers of First Nations "reality." Even as the hallucination is "false," clearly the result of the DT's, the effect is both to evoke graphically the reality of the absolute desolation and hopelessness of addiction and life on the street in a society that offers First Nations people few other real choices, and thus to highlight the very real results of endemic racism in the lives of First Nations people. A similar effect is achieved in *In Search of April Raintree*, where April describes her treatment at the hands of her white foster family, the DeRosiers, or where she recounts, graphically and unrelentingly, being raped by a gang of white men (139-45). Similarly, such frightening, affecting passages also interrupt the otherwise more generally tranquil tone of *Honour the Sun*--such passages as those recounting the family's terror at the violent attacks of drunken men on their house (33-36; 81; 99), or those describing Owl's mother's drinking (171-74; 179-81); or the passage, too, where Owl only barely escapes being molested by the white male teacher (125-26).

These passages can be read as metaphors for the history of white abuse of First Nations people: for example--taking up a metaphor developed by the colonizers themselves--whites have set themselves up as the responsible "parents" or "teachers" of this "lost race" of "children," but in these novels the colonizers are proven to be hopelessly non-nurturing and abusive as parents and teachers. Or, in another metaphor, European colonization of the First Nations and their lands is shown to be comparable to actual rape, and April's process of recovery from her racist treatment and her resulting internalized racism is

analogous to her process of recovery from this extreme physical violation.<sup>8</sup> But these stories can also be read, and in some respects i think they *need* to be read, on the most literal level, as also speaking of *real*, daily experiences for First Nations people, since, as Lee Maracle notes, "[r]acism is for us, not an ideology in the abstract, but a very real and practical part of our lives" (*I Am Woman* 2). To treat these stories any less realistically results in the kind of injury that Patricia Monture (Nation unknown) recalls of her own experience of hearing a group of predominantly white people treat a racist incident as a purely theoretical issue: for the white theorist or critic to forget that such incidents are *real* can be an extremely brutalizing experience for a First Nations person for whom such incidents *are a part of their lives* (Monture 138).<sup>9</sup>

As in *Halfbreed*, the effect of this realist narration and reading strategies for me, as a white reader, is that while i am being invited to some degree into the community of the text through the narrator's creation of an *inclusive* rhetorical community, i am also being forced into a (very negative, critical) encounter with my own self, my own white community, and thereby into an experience precisely of *disidentification* from my unexamined white self, an experience of a desire to *refuse* my community's history and (critical) discourses of brutality. Reading from the emotionally-engaged stance enabled in Chapter One, i must confront the fact that, for example, in "real life" too, the utterly demoralizing effect of the racist system in which (voluntarily or not) i live, "really *does*" result in a comparatively large number of First Nations people who turn to drugs and alcohol in a continuance of the abuses they have already suffered and internalized; or the fact that Native children, abducted from their own families by the white institution of Social Services, "really *are*" often abused, culturally, emotionally, physically, and/or sexually, in white foster homes (my stories show that in my own family [Scottish/Welsh/English], my sister Josie [Assiniboine] did not entirely escape such injuries); or that First Nations women "really *do*" suffer such horrifying manifestations of the racism and misogyny of dominant white culture as the rape of April Raintree, or Betty Osborne; and so on.

But i wonder whether--and i can only wonder whether--it is not more to the point for the writers of these texts that the effect even of this realist reading of the three novels is also to create a textual community for *First Nations* readers, in which the silence is ended: in which these experiences are finally

recounted, white abuses of the First Nations named--racism understood as "a *material* given in the lives of Native peoples . . . as a direct consequence of European colonialism" (Currie 139)--and First Nations (material) "reality" thus finally verified (Armstrong, Interview 15; Fee, "Upsetting" 172). Thus it is crucial that these novels also be taken in such realistic terms--that, in Gayatri Spivak's terms, the writers and their readers adopt this strategic essentialism (11)--since, whatever my well-intentioned actions as a reader, to turn the novels only into critical or theoretical issues is an appropriation: as Patricia Monture makes clear of her experience, "I was not ready to have my pain appropriated. I am pretty possessive about my pain. It is my pain. I worked hard for it. Some days it is all I have. Some days it is the only thing I can feel. Do not try to take that away from me too" (138; also Campbell, Interview 57). The need for such Native communal validation, replacing extra-communal (white) aversion or appropriation, is also inscribed in Armstrong's novel, for example, where Slash finds it frustrating that he is unable to communicate his "street-reality" even just to his parents back home, and is grateful to find an alternative community, in which these things are implicitly understood, with Mardi and other young people like her (also Cuthand, Interview 34-35).

*If to be spiritual is to take part in a carefully balanced, constantly balancing system of difference and sameness--balancing stories just like i do inside of myself in being my self or selves--then i see my participation in my lesbian community as a way of being spiritual, and the stories we tell in my community are stories of the spiritual:*

*My lover and i have precious tickets to the lesbian event of the year here in Vancouver, we're standing in line with our housemate and hundreds of other women, waiting to see the first Vancouver screening of "Forbidden Love." It's a National Film Board Studio "D" documentary on real, old-time lesbians of butch-femme days before the Second Wave of feminism and Stonewall and the Gay Rights movement. We're all excited: this is one of the few times we get to see ourselves shown with dignity and love up there on the screen; this is our history for once being taken seriously. The doors open and we crowd in, find seats, greet friends. The energy's incredible, all this women's excitement about a truly self-affirming event.*

*Finally, the lights dim and we settle into our seats. We try to be patient with the short film that's showing first: hell, we've waited years for a film like this, we can wait another fifteen minutes. But suddenly, something's wrong. On the screen is a close-up of a woman's torso, her chin just visible: she's being pushed at by a man's hand, her face jerked from side to side. His hand twists her body. It's a feminist film about violence against women (how many of these have i seen?). In another setting, i might have endured it, jaw tight, waiting for the woman to free herself from the man--she has to, right? Waiting for the filmmaker to tell about her own injury and then her healing: she must be going to tell that story. But this time i can't take it: we're too wide open, we've let our guard down, and we've had no chance to brace ourselves for this assault.*

*After a long moment of deep, shocked silence, from all over the theatre we begin clapping and stamping, "Shut it off," "Turn it off." I can't believe that the film just rolls on, images of chains and hammers intercut with*

*that man's hand beating the woman. Across the theatre, a woman screams, runs sobbing up the aisle--she must be flashing back to abuse she's suffered, to the man's hand that beat her own body--and more and more women leave, the stamping and shouting rising. We haven't all suffered that actual violence ourselves, but this community is still deeply conversant with the effects of violence in our lives. We all know about the long, painful processes of healing our friends and lovers have to do to recover from it. The process for both individual women and for our community together isn't steady and it slides back, steps forward--but still, we will not have that kind of violence in our community, and we try to protect the safety of those who are healing.*

As a result, in this realist reading of these First Nations novels, i see several discursive and actual communities being constructed which are more and less available to me, several *de*-colonizing "rhetorical motivational systems," in Wynter's phrasing, set into motion that were not at work before: in particular, these rhetorical motivational systems may perhaps be seen as reversing the usual order of reward and aversion as constructed by dominant discourses, so that now it is me as a white academic reader who is stung with self-aversive rhetoric, my sense of reality shifted and made strange to me; and it is the First Nations reader who is finally validated, her sense of reality confirmed. And then, a new order of discourse is proposed for me--and is presumably reinscribed for the First Nations reader--by which the entire system of setting up Ontological Others as the source of the "nontranscendental guarantee" for current criteria of being is no longer necessary, and individuals and communities are able, in a sense, to "guarantee" themselves. Thus even in this realist reading, i see these novels as constructing new versions of both First Nations and white communities: in the same fashion that *Halfbreed* did, these novels constitute places of communal healing for First Nations readers, and more incidentally, for non-First Nations readers as well, though in different ways for each group.

Already, however, it is clear that i am finding it impossible to construct this realist mode of narration as an actual, simple reflection of a materially-, biologically-constructed reality; i am already also constructing it as a rhetorical convention, as i find that the First Nations identification of (oral) story with (oral) community collapses the distinction between a material reality and discourse, or reality and story. The "reality" of the community constitutes, and is constituted as, an (oral) discursive construction. The result is that, from my white-centred position, i read these novels as taking on the white-conventional

version of both story and reality as materially-verifiable, as reflective of the philosophy of European biological idealism. But in their very act (at least as i propose it) of addressing and appropriating European-originated conventions of story, the novels accomplish the ontological shift Wynter read *Invisible Man* as performing: they re-identify--perhaps only incidentally to their presumed primary concern with *First Nations* stories--both the white ontology of biological idealism and its particular rhetorical configuration in the novel form itself, as modes of *rhetoric* rather than representations of a materially-verifiable *reality*. As Wynter notes of *Invisible Man*, and as is also true, i think, of these First Nations novels, for the narrator and/or the reader to take the realist line of narration as simply a reflection of an ontological reality--without also making this shift to engaging with the narratives' larger discursive implications within the field of discourses of power which constitute white-black or white-First Nations interactions--would be to reinscribe the novel's actions solely within the initial paralysis which Tommy/Slash found in his encounter with white materially-based orders of discourse.

At first mistaking this white, racist line of explanation and narration as the only one available to him, Tommy/Slash can only see that what *is* in the world constructed from this materially-based criterion of being, is precisely the *fact* of race: the unexamined, unquestioned "brute fact" of racial inequality and abuse, particularly as expressed in terms of a materially-based power. The danger in writing or reading from this strictly realist version of story--the danger in Tommy's first encounter with the interrelated, self-aversive discourses of materialism (as the character of Tommy) and realism (as the narrator)--is that these discourses alone provide no particular mechanism with which to critique the present system of power. This narrow line of narration provides no paradigm by which to explain why, at the same time as Tommy, and the older Slash, too, has adopted this European-originated, materially-based, "criterion of being" as the basis of an understanding of the world--as the basis of reality--the fact still remains for him that it is *not* his reality, however much he has been conditioned by dominant society to desire it (Currie 141). As Tommy/Slash gradually learns, the "fact" is that access to this system of material validity and power is systemically *refused* to him: it is *not* his reality, and never will be, by definition of his non-white, Okanagan identity.

Thus, in terms of the first-person narrator's *narrative strategy*, the realist discourse may accomplish the valuable work of allowing the narrator a way to speak of present colonized reality--using discourses which are already, in themselves, "colonized," as Wynter has shown--but alone it offers no way to move beyond this present instant of colonization. Similarly, in terms of my *reading strategy*, to read *Slash* as inscribed only within the (white-originated) realist convention does not allow the novel to carry out its search, through Slash's narration, for a workable definition of community nor of Slash's own identity as an Okanagan: it suggests no mechanism for the *de*-colonization Slash seeks as both a character and a narrator (223). As a result, my using as a reading tool the European-originated realist convention, as it is inextricably identified with the European-originated form of the novel, still constitutes an inscription here of these novels as colonized discourses--and does not allow *me* the movement, either, beyond a colonizing reading to a de-colonizing one. As Wynter notes, it is not enough simply to substitute one set of identifications for another, within the overall convention of the realist representation of reality; in order actually to transform lived experience, in discourse, in the world, even the mechanisms by which reality has been constructed, and this construction hegemonically maintained, must be changed (also Fee "Upsetting" 170).

Thus Slash gradually realizes that white material culture and meaning are explicitly and necessarily constructed so as to exclude him--the dominant white discourses of reality are explicitly exclusionary (Fee "Upsetting" 168)--and through contact with Mardi's activism and politics, he begins to come to a new understanding of his place and identity as a First Nations man, an understanding based upon a *political*, rather than material, understanding of the world and of community as power-driven. Reality--validity, identity--in this political world, in this second line of narration and reading, is based not on what (supposedly) simply, inherently *is*, in some "natural," existential sense, but on how things have been *constructed* to be by different individuals and groups of humans, particularly as these constructions are an expression of a deeper set of power relations, motivated by any variety of desires for power.

Grasping at this new power of explanation for his colonized experience, Tommy, the traditional Okanagan, becomes Slash, the militant Native activist--whose activism, based as it is upon the awareness



of power relations in contemporary post-industrial society, takes the form especially of an extreme sensitivity to the power of *symbols* and *symbolic actions* (Godard, "Politics" 202). Much of Slash's energy as an activist involves his participating, for example, in such symbolic actions as the "Trail of Broken Treaties Caravan," converging on Washington (95ff); a protest rally over land claims, held at the Parliament Buildings in Victoria (142-43); or a cross-Canada caravan to air grievances over reserve conditions (151ff). The primary concern of these actions is to effect "real" change by eliciting shifts in policy from governmental bodies, but this change is to be achieved through the specific strategy of attracting media attention: through *discursive* action (Currie 143-44). He even rewrites *himself* in a very literal sense, changing his name, at Mardi's suggestion, as part of his effort to take control of the discourses which name and define him. The Native power Slash seeks, by which he can redefine his own understanding and identity, is thus discursive power above all, the power to control the discourses surrounding Native people and issues (Godard, "Politics" 201); and language, or story, is constructed not as an unproblematic reflection of a given reality, but as the manipulation of discursive constructs, of power-ful wishes. The entirety of the novel can be read in these terms: the realist line of narration in these First Nations novels, and this "mediated" line, feed back and forth, one into the other, the realist mode of narration--the First Nations narrator's manipulation of white materialist descriptions of reality--functioning as one such effort to control discourses about First Nations people and concerns (Fee, "Upsetting" 173).

The strength of this version of story, in both *Slash* and *In Search of April Raintree*, is the power it lends the First Nations manipulators of the media to write their own versions of history and power, and to deconstruct the once-authoritative white discourses of First Nations history and contemporary culture, which contrast so tellingly with the First Nations versions. A significant portion of *In Search of April Raintree*, for example, is occupied with Cheryl's efforts to recoup Métis history for Métis people, after a century of its degradation in the white-dominated educational system. Indeed, the entire novel could be construed as a discussion of the mediation and re-mediation of the discourses surrounding Métis people and history, Natives and nativeness, as the novel juxtaposes letters with journals, with oratories, with the

high rhetoric of the judicial process (Iwama 2-3). And all of these specific genres and discourses are couched within the governing discourse of April's own narration of *her* story: of her search for her parents, and as the title emphasizes, for herself, through this search for community, for story. Similarly, *Slash* can also be read not only as an extended account of a particular period of First Nations/American Indian history, but also, in a sense, an account of the kind of discourses surrounding and constituting that period as well, as Slash refers again and again to events he heard about through the white media and through the "moccasin telegraph," or as he incorporates into his narrative lengthy passages of oral conversations and speeches he has heard.<sup>10</sup> As Jeannette Armstrong has noted, one of the explicit motivations for writing *Slash* was her desire to educate Native readers and students about a particular period of First Nations history, as told from a *Native* perspective (Interview 14).

The primary effect of this playing out of interactions and conflicts within a field of discourses is to set up the contrast between dominant white discourses and answering First Nations discourses, so that in *In Search of April Raintree*, for example, the European-conventional history of Louis Riel as the insane leader of a bunch of misguided half-savages, is answered with Cheryl's essays on Riel and the Métis, and by implication, with the novel's own construction of the history of these particular Métis women themselves. Similarly, the DeRosiers' baldly false constructions of April and Cheryl to the people at Social Services, according to the usual racist stereotypes of First Nations people, is answered with April's essay about what life is really like with the DeRosiers--and with the novel itself. And again, the incomplete, unsatisfactory information which Social Services supplies to April about her parents, is answered with the journal Cheryl kept about her search for and interaction with their father, and yet again, with the discourse of the novel itself. The whole of *Slash*, as well, can also be read as an answer to the unsatisfactory *white* media versions of Native activism in the 1960s and 70s. Thus these novels function, in both their realist and their "mediated" readings, as vehicles enabling the rewriting of history and identity--First Nations communal history and individual identity--as the precise process by which April and Slash can come to rewrite themselves, this time in their own self-affirming voices, rather than the aversive voices of Social Services or the DeRosiers or the white media: by which they can come to tell their

own stories.

But like the realist line of narration, this "mediated" line, though it does at least provide a basis for critiquing the white materialist, realist discourses and their very "real" effects, still does not accomplish the speaking or writing of anOther, fully un-colonized meaning. Both lines of discourse, as i read them, involve the assimilation of white constructions of reality and meaning--a kind of "internalized textualism" comparable in action and effect to internalized racism--and thus both narrative lines constantly risk the re-contamination of First Nations versions of these narrations with the white-originated ideologies that underlie them: First Nations versions run the constant danger of being turned back into a-versions.<sup>11</sup> Slash comes to see that in this mediated line of narration--this effort to define himself and his community by constructing an image of himself as a militant Indian, and constructing his community as the constantly shifting group of itinerant activists with whom he loosely drifts--he and his community still end up as paralysed and powerless as they were in the strictly materialist construction of First Nations community and identity that he has worked so hard to subvert; his story is as restricted as in the strict realist line of narration which serves a limited purpose, but which he also knows does not fully speak his reality.

No matter how great his understanding of the power of the media, or his capacity to manipulate his own image--as he dons militant Native uniform of blue jeans, army fatigue jacket, reflective sunglasses and long hair (152)--the final image of Natives and Native concerns, as they appear in the almost exclusively white-run media, is never "true" to Slash's view. He is disappointed at the white press coverage of the Caravan to Ottawa, for example, which "made you lose any belief of truth in newspapers. Some of the wildest statements were being printed about the caravan. Most of it was designed to sensationalize what was going on" (152). Despite the sudden new access to the media which this upsurge of Native activism grants, the militant pose which many First Nations activists adopt is not only nonproductive for Natives, contributing little to the establishment of First Nations (discursive) communities, but is actually supportive of the white system and of the exclusion of Natives from white discursive communities (see also Fee "Upsetting" 168). Indeed, the question must be asked whether the whites actually enjoy a discursive community at all, in their media-dominated society, as whites in the

novel are almost never encountered as individual, thinking, feeling people, and, in a reversal of the usual portrayal of *Natives* as unindividuated hordes, are presented as the faceless, mediated conglomerates of the Press, the Police, the Bureaucracy, or the Government (my capitalization), utterly irresponsible and depersonalized, utterly colonised by their own media.

Slash's disappointment over the inaccuracy of the press results in a conflict between his effort at creating his own "mediated" construction of himself and his other learned sense of reality as unmediated, as based in the material and the verifiable, to which the media versions of *Natives* are not true. The trouble is finally that neither construction can serve more than the opening movements of Slash's efforts to unlearn colonisation--both constructions find their origins in *white* culture and politics--and yet he cannot seem to find an alternative, genuinely Okanagan, route to such reshaping of his identity and community. Slash realizes, for example, that the confrontational poses characterizing so many of the *Natives'* political actions, poses fed by undirected anger and frustration, only replicate white confrontational patterns of behaviour. Like his strategy of adopting white narrative structures, based on materialist or rhetorical ontologies, to initiate his story, this "Indian power through confrontation kind of attitude" serves an important, but ultimately limited, purpose for First Nations survivors of colonization, that of developing in them "a certain kind of awareness and self-confidence." But as Slash comes to see, "I was past that. I knew I had to develop further, towards something that would carry me beyond the point of sheer anger and frustration" (182-83).

I always felt there was something missing, like there was something wrong about the way that things were approached. It seemed like anything we built on anger and hatred was just as bad as what was being done to us. (160)

Both lines of narration, then, the "realist" one and the "mediated" one, still result in stories of a colonized people, stories colonized by white versions of story. At the moment of Slash's deepest drunken despair--the passage i mentioned earlier as graphically evoking the *material* realities of First Nations colonization--his sense of the *unreality* of his experience is suggested precisely through comparison with *media* images, as "summer, fall and winter passed like flashes across a screen" (197). That is, the distinction between the (white-originated) material realist stance, and the (white-originated) constructed, mediated stance, is a false

one, the action of colonization by definition having a mediating effect--a self-alienating, self-aversive effect--on the colonized individual and community, so that "reality" and the "media" alike are colonizing, aversive strategies of thought, and the narratives arising from them equally colonized and colonizing.

This hard lesson prevents Cheryl in *In Search of April Raintree*--despite her certainty of her Métis value, and her courage in asserting it in her letters and essays--from truly coming to *affirm* herself over the aversive conditioning of white-dominated discourses. She can write counterdiscourses to the abusive dominant discourses, understanding this media game, but the dominant culture's answer is to force her *back* to grappling with the brute "reality" of daily experience: she cannot reconcile her inscribed sense of Métis pride and value with the undeniable "fact" of her parents' debilitating alcoholism and the consequent breakup of their family. Her own brute "reality," understood in the materially-verifiable terms which white education has taught her, contrasts unacceptably with the white discourses of what that reality should look like--Social Services' version of what her relationship should be with the white families she and April have been sent to, for example, as opposed to their actual experience of this relationship. As a result, she finds comfort in the explanatory power offered her in the alternate construction of "reality" as *constructed* and *multiple*, rather than as immutably material and singular.

But when she tries, then, to take on some of that power to construct a "reality" acceptable to her--to translate "mere" discourse into "actual" experience, as she has been conditioned to want to do--she runs back into the immovable "brute facts" of the status quo. And then again, she cannot view these supposed "brute facts," with which she began, except through the critical, ideologically-loaded (and thus constructed) gaze inculcated in her by white racist conventions: the (false) opposition between "reality," and discursive constructions of it, wraps back around on her again, and then again, and she--like Slash--is thus bounced back and forth between one construction of "reality" and the other, in an unending repetition of despair. In terms of current critical debate, then, neither the essentialist nor the constructivist definition of identity, meaning and power--neither the material realist nor the "mediated" versions of Slash's or Cheryl's stories--offer a workable way to transform identity or experience, story or community, into something Other than same old (colonized) story (Currie 144). Caught within the confines of an apparently unbreachable (and

white-invented) binary opposition, as Mardi comments to Slash, "they only give us two choices. Assimilate or get lost" (70). Or, according to my reading, it may be as much, assimilate *and* get lost, at once, back and forth repeatedly (see also Fee "Upsetting" 169; Godard "Politics" 216).

And then as a reader, i too am trapped in a constant vacillation between these two different understandings of the story, two different reading practices. Both of these readings do offer the possibility of real, effective and affective communication, whether to a white reader or (i assume) a First Nations one: each provides new understandings, from the underbelly, as it were, of the colonial system and its ongoing power relations. But their interaction may reproduce the colonizer's strategy of merely shuffling the colonized individual--First Nations *and* white: colonized, as Slash notes, on *both* sides of the unforgiving power gradient (222)--endlessly back and forth between opposing sides of the false binaries which define them in this colonized place. Reader and narrator alike are trapped between options which only return to--never having departed from--white-colonized versions of community and story.<sup>12</sup>

The point of constructing the novels in this way may simply *be* to inscribe the effort, all the same, to negotiate a workable, livable path between the enclosures of always overdetermined discourses: the point may be as much in Slash's, April's or Owl's act of telling the story of the conflict between stories--or for me as a reader, in the act of reading the story, struggling with conflicting stories--as in the resolution of conflict or its translation into a third alternative. As Godard argues, the important thing for Slash is as much the *struggle* to find an Okanagan way as the *discovery* of it: in such struggle, he does at least continue a life of resistance to the systems and discourses of the conquerors, and his identity and community, though facing endless, unresolvable contestation, are at least troubling assertions of the need for, and the possibility of, grappling with one's own internalization of the dominant culture's colonizing power relations. Perhaps it is enough to realize that, as Slash says to Jimmy, "We are all affected by colonization. Realizing the problem and consciously avoiding the mistakes is all we can do. . . . even the white man does not escape that common problem" (222).

However, i read the novels as actually proposing a much more concrete, power-ful answer to the dominant culture's self-enclosing binary oppositions. The process of the struggle, as i have just

constructed it, *is* validated in itself, in that it is necessary in current colonized conditions to go through such a struggle with colonization, with white forms of story, before a *de*-colonized, First Nations story can be told: as Slash notes, the anger and the confrontational poses he and many of his contemporaries adopt do allow the opening movements of a growing awareness and self-confidence (183). But a *third*, First Nations, decolonized alternative, outside the enclosures of white-discursive binary oppositions, *is* actually proposed in *Slash*, and a third story told: it is not simply deferred to some never-achieved time and place posited as existing beyond the binary constructions against which Mardi speaks, for example (70), but is actually evoked to some extent, even in this written, English-language text. Indeed, all three novels, in different ways, and in varying degrees, propose this third possibility--excessive to the enclosing binaries of dominant, secular construction. For Slash, this third alternative is in fact the traditional ways he has been avoiding for so long--but traditional understood *in traditional ways*, rather than as viewed in white materialist and discursive ways: the third alternative is the traditional *spiritually-based* construction of reality or discourse, community or story.

This third construction, interwoven with the realist and the mediated versions of story, is the story of Slash's constant return to his community's land, people, and ceremonies for healing and renewal: he and other Natives have visions and dreams (68-69, 79, 231, 233); he experiences instances of a sudden awareness of Uncle Joe's voice and wisdom (68, 154); he returns repeatedly to the Okanagan land as the source of all other aspects of Okanagan identity, power, and healing (147, 167, 179-80, 206, 233, 247). As well, the repetitions and near-refrains characteristic of the style throughout the novel, suggest the oral storytelling situation--and the communities it speaks into being, both within the novel and between the text and the reader--as based ultimately in the spiritual (also Kroeber 32). The broad structure of the novel has its roots in Okanagan spiritual traditions, as the novel's four parts reflect the Four Directions (Armstrong, Interview 20). Armstrong also makes clear that her choice of a male character was in some ways instrumental to conveying the power and value of traditional spiritual ways: Slash first embraces the macho male power of aggressive A.I.M.-style activism--which Armstrong suggests is particularly appealing to those Natives who have been subject to the harshest and most aggressive of abuses

(Interview 19)--but rejects it again as he is transformed through the "female power" which has traditionally been highly valued in many First Nations cultures and which continues to provide the underlying strength for ongoing struggle (Interview 18). The fact that as a man, he is so transformed by this power and these traditional values, only reinforces the degree of their strength and value.<sup>13</sup>

The effect of these elements of the novel is to produce a third discourse which both takes in and speaks beyond the other two storylines, as all aspects of the narrative are ultimately written from this spiritual base--just as Jeannette Armstrong herself prepared herself "in the Indian way" to write *Slash*, fasting "for the guidance to write it" (Interview 20). The narration of singular, material reality is validated as an important, but ultimately only partial, element of contemporary First Nations experience and meaning; and equally, the narration of a discursive, constructed reality, while validated as a way to deconstruct the abusive systems of white power and to move towards constructing a different order of non-hierarchical power, is also understood only as an element of a larger spiritual source of value and power--and language (see my Chapter Three). "Brute" reality and human discourse alike are made to speak of and from the spiritual, in the same way that the materialist Tommy and the mediated *Slash* has always, all along, had his "real," Okanagan name--which, significantly, is never written here in this English-language, novel-format text (231, 233).<sup>14</sup>

*Finally--goddess, how can the projectionist be so slow to take the hint--the screen goes dark, then the soundtrack cuts out. The lights come up. Women trickle back into the theatre, discussion rises and falls. You can feel the anger running through the crowd. The programmer for the Film Festival comes to the front of the theatre, apologizes for her mistake--she's straight, i think, she wouldn't know; she's straight, i think, she should have educated herself about her lesbian audience. I hold my lover's hand tight.*

*The lights fall again, everyone's tense--but we came here to celebrate, so we're determined to enjoy ourselves. The film is wonderful, these grey-haired women beautiful, recounting with pride and humour stories of how they survived the daily dangers of lesbian existence, how they found each other as lovers and friends, back in the days when they could be arrested just for dancing together. This is incredible, this is great, it's just incredible--this history, this community. I think as a community we've spoken ourselves into spiritual, healing being against the violence. These are our communal, spiritual grandmothers, who led the way, who've told their stories, who've spun further stories for us to tell: this is where we come from, this is us. We give a standing ovation at the end as the film's directors, and many of the women interviewed in the film, file up to the front. They stand there like living proof that we can do this. There's much to be grateful for, and i give thanks.*

*But the stories aren't just about the continuity and sameness of our struggle to live through the generations. The stories also talk about our difference from each other and from people outside our communities. So we come together in our difference from the straight world and in our desire to heal from violence--those are familiar stories.*



*But we still also tell other stories about how to be different even inside stories of our shared community: in the film, Amanda White, who is Haida, tells her coming out story, but it doesn't talk about sexuality so much as her ongoing struggle with racism in both lesbian and non-lesbian communities (also Hall 323). And there are other stories like that, about racism or the S/M-vanilla controversy, and other stuff. But i think it means our communities have a real spiritual life, telling many stories, as we try to safely validate difference and sameness equally, validate the struggle that this entails, and try to find a balance that is our community (Minnie Bruce Pratt 50).<sup>15</sup>*

Within this context, all elements and stories of material and discursive reality/-ies become valuable, no longer arranged according to the hierarchical binary oppositions of colonized and colonizing white paradigms, and the truly decolonized stance is instead proposed. As one Elder notes in a passage where the rhythms and repetitions of structure evoke the Native tradition and genre of the oratory:

"The culture that belongs to us is handed down to us in the sacred medicine ways of our people. Our strength lies there because it is our medicine ways that feeds the spirit of our people so that they will be healthy. That is not lost. It is here all around us in the mountains and in the wild places. It is the sound of the drum and the sound of the singing of the birds. We got to go back to them things to feed our spirit." (191)

Natural, material, discursive and ceremonial worlds and practices are all incorporated into the medicine cultures that *Slash* and *Slash* repeatedly return to, and are all vitally important, none subordinated to the others, balance maintained above all.

*Honour the Sun*, while also a novel that works its way among several versions of story--as evocations of the material realities of Ojibway life, couched in an anecdotal format suggestive of the oral storytelling situation, are written down in the form of Owl's diary--is likewise written within such a spiritual framework. The title itself refers to Owl's mother's admonition to "'Honour the Sun for shining on your face and pray it will acknowledge you and bless you each morning . . .,'" and it is to this originating, originary sense of rightness and spiritual connection with the world that Owl turns as her family and communal life become more and more troubled (182).<sup>16</sup> In this connection with the life and peace of the natural world, she finds a way to overcome her sense of fear and anger at her difficult circumstances, and she can reshape her responses to the dysfunction that has surrounded and shaped her, from equally dysfunctional responses to healing ones, from colonised to decolonizing ones. The peace of her prose rhythms, evoking of nature's long cycle, speaks to the strength of her (self-) discovery:

It's hard to break a habit, a reflex, an unthinking response but eventually I no longer

retaliate in kind to Brian's tricks. During a loud drinking party, I listen to the spring rain falling softly against the window pane. During the loud arguments of belligerent drunks, I strain to hear the wind in the trees outside the cabin and shut everyone out. More and more, I spend time sitting by the woodpile, listening to the silence. The ice melts on the lake, the grass turns green, the leaves come out, the flowers bloom. I look over the land and feel peaceful and happy. (184-85)

Owl's solution, by the end of the novel, to her loss of individual and communal security under the effects of colonization, is to return to her mother's admonition as the beginning-point and end-point of her own story. This sense of the spiritual basis of all life and endeavour allows her access to some other source of power and strength outside of the familial and colonizing ones that have failed her, and it thus functions as the basis of her assumption of the storyteller's role after her mother's abdication of this place as the centre of the family.

In contrast with both *Slash* and *Honour the Sun*, *In Search of April Raintree* sites itself far less comprehensively within a traditional, spiritually-based framework, and does not explicitly offer the return to such a view as a solution for April's dissociation from her Métis origins. But still, spirituality has an important place in the novel, as in the scene of April's recognition by the Elder, White Thunderbird Woman. As April struggles to overcome her self-hatred as a victim of both rape and racism, her sense that the woman has seen "something in me that was special, something that was deserving of her respect" (175), contributes to her healing process, and to her eventual capacity to accept her connection with "MY PEOPLE, OUR PEOPLE" (228). And despite the novel's relative reticence on the issue of Métis spiritual belief, the implication in this return--the implication in the novel's circular structure, replicating as it does the circular structure used in many First Nations cultures as the basic structure of order and thought--is that April's acceptance of her People involves an acceptance of the spiritually-based ceremonies and meaning that inform their lives (Lutz, in his interview with Beatrice Culleton, 99).

In *Slash* in particular, the notion of responsibility and self-responsibility, community and story, all attain value from this final and originary spiritual source: as Slash notes,

I learned that being an Indian person, I could never be a person only to myself. I was part of all the rest of the people. I was responsible to that. Everything I did affected that. What I was affected everyone around me, both then and far into the future, through me and my descendants. They would carry whatever I left them. I was important as one person but more important as a

part of everything else. . . . I understood then that the great laws are carried and kept in each of us. And that the diseases in our society came because those great laws remained for only a very few people. . . . paper laws weren't needed if what you have in your head is right. (202-03)

Speaking again in the short sentences and repeated, sometimes almost incantatory, phrases characteristic of his oral culture and reminiscent of the oratorical way in which his Elder spoke only a few pages earlier, Slash discovers this sense of responsibility to the "Great Laws." He explicitly rejects the white discursive preoccupation with writing laws down, placing his holistic, communal, Okanagan sense of responsibility and balance against the imbalanced, discursive authority which, as Slash, he first embraced and then rejected. Slash has finally found his community--as Owl has written hers into being, and April has finally accepted hers--and he has found a concomittant sense of individual identity and purpose, which he has searched for with such difficulty. Thus the entirety of the novel, to have any meaning beyond the destructive vagaries of the several white constructions of story which it incorporates--to inscribe the Okanagan story which it is telling--must by definition be written within this informing spiritual, communal framework. And indeed, while the novel is framed as an ostensible autobiography--singular narrative of one individual's life--it has all along actually incorporated large sections of other people's words and speeches: like Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, it effects (at least for me, reading from my place of familiarity with European generic categories) the transformation of autobiography into a communal history, and of the novel of the search for individual identity into the multiple orations of many individuals, many versions of identity. It transforms the white ideologies of autobiography, history and novel alike, into expressions of traditional Okanagan culture and spirituality. The novel itself becomes an element of the Okanagan culture, a mediation of Okanagan spirituality which is, at the same time, *not* a mediation at all, but *is* itself an element of the medicine ways.

However, even if *Slash* is written within these ways, as both the narrative and its rhetorical character suggest, the details of Okanagan spiritual knowledge are not written down in the novel, just as Slash's Okanagan name is never recorded. It is characteristic of the last section of the novel, entitled "We Are A People," that Slash hears and speaks Okanagan far more often than in the previous sections--Pracwa, for example, tells him "in Indian" the "whole history of the Okanagan people as he knew it" (208)--

and yet no word of Okanagan is written, or transliterated, rather, in the novel (barring Pra-cwa's name [?]). The Okanagan language and culture--and their spiritual bases--are written as beyond, untouched by, and prior to, English, so that while the English language and novel format of the colonizers is adopted for Okanagan purposes, the real meaning of the novel is still implied, at the same time, as remaining elsewhere, in the core of the Okanagan language. The implication of Slash's realization, for example, that it is "the practice of things that separate[s] us from other peoples," that "that's what culture is," is precisely that this Okanagan culture, based utterly in Okanagan spirituality, cannot be enclosed within a single artifact such as the novel itself: "we couldn't preserve [our language] by having a linguist come and record it to be put away so it wouldn't be lost. We could only preserve it by using it . . ." (211). While the novel leads the reader to a kind of identification with the traditional ways, this gap is nevertheless explicitly written into the novel, so that i must be aware of both identification and difference at once. In the novel itself, simultaneous with Slash's return to his traditional ways, his narration also begins to emphasize increasingly the differences, as much as the similarities, amongst different First Nations, the shaping of each individual First Nations culture being rooted in the specific words and language, stories and land, of each Nation. As Slash notes to Jimmy, discussing the involvement of the First Nations in the Canadian constitutional process of the late 1970s and early 1980s:

"Maybe the reason [First Nations negotiators] can't all come together in their approach is because there isn't any strength to any one position. Everyone is looking for one compromise solution. For some, there is no compromise, for others there are degrees of compromise but limits, too. I don't see why they have to all agree on any one position. We are talking about different nations here, not just one large conglomerate group called Indians, the way the government would prefer it and is trying to force on us. We can each deal separately according to each nation's preference. . . . we can all support each other on whatever position each of us takes. It doesn't mean each has to take the same position. The government weakens us by making us fight each other to take one position, as each one wants their position to win out. Each position is important and each has the right to try for it. We should all back each other up." (234-35)

Even in interaction with the non-First Nations, it is important for the Nations to understand and live their differences as Nations and as individuals (Fee "Upsetting" 175), and the novel itself is thus set up as a model for the kind of balanced, accepting stance that characterizes the careful thought of the medicine ways, in which, while the value of other ways--the value of the realist line of narration and of the mediated line--are written into the novel, these other ways, other stories, are also carefully bracketed

within the forgiving, balancing structure of the spiritual story that governs the novel.

Thus these First Nations novels can be seen to effect the kind of change Wynter observes in Ellison's rewriting of the novel form, in *Invisible Man*, from a colonizing medium into a tool of subversion --through the shifting of the medium's informing ontology of "biological idealism" to one, perhaps, of "rhetorical or discursive idealism," and the consequent deconstruction of dominant society's rhetorical motivational systems: dominant society's stories. But all of these First Nations novels, particularly *Slash*, go beyond this shift, at once reclaiming both biological and discursive idealism as modes of First Nations thought and story, and yet also proposing a third "spiritual idealism" (?), by which this plurality of ontologies is validated, a plurality of rhetorical motivational systems proposed as the basis of a strong, communally responsible individual: one who is capable of negotiating a workable, constructive way through a field of potentially conflicting "rhetorical motivational systems," and who can ultimately write a community of his or her own.

For me to *read* spiritually in response, then, is to read communally, in a sense--to read and re-read, integrating new stories into each reading, as this time i read from the perspective of one field of stories that come from both myself (-selves) and my communities, and next time i read from a different discursive, narrative, historical configuration. Reading is thus a process of layering reading upon reading, balancing response with response and story with story, each of which is "neither "reducible nor impermeable to one another" (JanMohamed and Lloyd, "Minority Discourse--What Is To Be Done?" 15). In so doing, i participate in the spirituality of the text, hearing several stories of my own and of others, healing myself again in the community of the text and discovering in my healing the room to allow others to engage with their healing process, to tell their stories, too.

## Grandmother Story

In the photo, we're all frowning at the camera, a slight wind tugging at our clothes. Grandma's arm is stopped in the air those twenty years ago, trying to still the breeze in her hair. The wind blows today, too, sea wind shaking at the leaves on the pear tree, petals falling from its branches. The white flowers of the morning glory turn their heads away. My lover and i watch out the kitchen window, then i turn and grasp her hand, point again at the photo, begin my story.

I tell her that i remember the wind blowing through the house that day, stealthy prairie wind creeping beneath ill-fitted doors and around sagging panes of glass. Always, it was breezing over furniture and the weeks-old ashes in the fireplace, whispering through the legs of the carved elephants on the bookcase, singing around the brass bowl. Behind the dining room table, the painted hanging of the Japanese warrior would shudder; the draft would shake at the warhorse caught endlessly rearing on its hind legs, slice along the samurai sword raised forever in suspended anger. The warrior's red painted tassels would seem to swing in the wind, frivolous answer to the rage frozen on his face. On the adjacent wall, the breeze would catch up dark leaves in the shadows of the Japanese garden, throw them to the intricate tapestry ground; ripples would stir on the embroidered lake, ducks bobbing. And around the corner, on the landing halfway up the red carpeted stairs, the eight Chinese Immortals nodded at each other as i watched, four on one wall singing to the four across the landing, carefully sewn heads bent in concentration against the rotting red silk. I tell my lover that i remember i stood watching, caught for a moment in the hanging's rhythmic sway. My lover nods as she listens, her eyes imagining with me.

I think i glanced around to see that Mum wasn't there to observe--reached out for the briefest, lightest stroke on the cool silk; i held the surface to momentary stillness against the wall. The breeze lifted my hand again, rippled once more over the fabric. Then suddenly the wind rose, rushing past my ears,

rustling the scratchy Sunday dress i was wearing. The front door had opened—even now, sitting in this kitchen a thousand miles away, watching the sea wind and the pear tree, my body would recognize all the rhythms and movements of that house—and i heard distant voices, rising up the stairway from the front hall. But perhaps i imagine this remembering, make up my mind to remember, make it up.

I imagine that i heard Dad's familiar voice first. "Here, Mom, let me take your coat. Dad? Yours, too? Just go on in, and i'll get your bags from the car." I sat down on the landing, shifted against that dress.

I heard footsteps from above me, i think, and my adoptive sister, Annie, her dress as white and stiff as mine, walked quietly out of the gloom of the hall, her darker face and limbs appearing only after the gleam of the dress. We looked silently at each other, listening to the voices below.

"Ronald, go help Walter with the bags." I do remember that voice clearly, rough old woman's voice.

"Yes, Walter, I'll help." And the old man's voice, slow and a bit shaky.

"No, Mom, it's alright. You two go on in and rest. You had a long flight."

"Ah ... good!" Now Mum's voice was echoing down the hall from the kitchen. The sounds of quick, sharp kisses. "Was it a good flight?"

I suppose the voices would have drifted further away, i make them drift away, telling my lover. "This is the living room ... yes, have a seat." The living room doors were clicking shut on the hallway; the breeze settled momentarily. They'd arrived, these strangers whose tapestries had hung on the walls all my life, overlooked my games; tapestries heavy with memories, layered dust. The warrior painting i found particularly compelling, i recall; i can still picture his angry face and the stillness of the trees behind him as he swung the sword, everything waiting in shocked silence, waiting for the stroke to fall. Sometimes i played that i was the warrior, imagining my enemies as i waved the sword, feeling my face as angry as his.

"But where are the children?" The old woman's voice rose sharply up the stairway, despite the closed doors. "I want to see the children." Certain of her wishes, repeating them.

The living room doors would have snicked open again, and i remember the draft swinging again at the tapestry, the four singers rippling. Mum was calling, "Carol? Will? Where are you people? Come here. Where's Annie? Come meet your grandparents." Annie slipped past me, her feet thudding fast down the stairs.

I myself rose slowly from the step, scratched at the dress, then tried belatedly to smooth it down. I hadn't had it on even an hour and already it was hopelessly wrinkled, the sleeves deeply creased where i'd pushed them up my arms. I remember watching my shoes step one and then the other down the stairs, shiny black against the red carpet, and i imagined them large tropical beetles, maybe, lumbering over the red dirt i'd read they had in China. The breeze whistled again as i reached the bottom of the stairs. I remember looking up through the glass living room doors to see the silhouetted figures of Annie and Will rippling across the room, stopping in front of the two strangers on the couch. Voices rising and falling in polite tones, reverberating oddly now in my ears as i try to recall for my lover. The patterns have changed so much now, my own voice so different, the tones shifted in my telling. I have reached across the table to touch my lover's hand again, her arm stretching out to meet me.

The old woman was heavy, her head of thick white hair hunched over bent shoulders. Her face was creased, rolls of skin pulling down from her sharp nose, from glasses that were reflecting the window's light. On her dress, its sleeves scrunched up over her forearms, she had pinned a small red carnation; she clutched a large purse in knotted hands. Beside her, Grandpa was small and tidy, his shoulders sagging in on his chest. He was shorter than Dad, though not so thin, and i imagine that their relationship would have been spoken clearly in their shared baldness, their similar noses, the long jaw. Grandpa's head turned, glasses reflecting, then clearing to show faded blue eyes, watching me quietly. He turned back to Dad and said something inaudible in the general din of voices.

I reached for the door handle and turned it. I remember the draft cool on my ankles, and i sidled into the noisy room, glancing from the floor to Grandpa, then to Grandma.

"And this must be Carol, is it? Come here, let me see you." The old woman reached one hand out, pale flesh hanging loosely beneath her arm, her purse still firm in the other hand. There were rings



on several fingers of the reaching hand, i recall. She held me still for a moment's examination, greying eyes staring from the glasses, then pulled me in for a sharp peck on the cheek. "Go kiss your grandfather."

I shifted over and hesitated. I'd rarely kissed anyone in my life. I leaned in slowly, pushed my lips briefly against the old man's cheek, feeling the slight stubble. As i began to pull away, Grandpa grasped my shoulders in a brief hug, kissing me firmly. His glasses bumped against my cheek, cool metal frames.

I think maybe Mum spoke then from her chair across the room, something about long flights and resting before dinner, but Grandma said, "No, we brought gifts. Walter, get the small travel bag, will you. We brought you gifts from Tennessee."

Dad returned a moment later with an airplane bag, and she opened it with a crisp zip, peering in. She lifted out several small cardboard boxes, rings gleaming on her hand. "This one is Will's, W for Will, I labelled them, and here's Annie's. Carol." I took the box, the kind jewelry comes in. Inside was a large gold-metal pin, a flower with four red enamel petals, spreading metal leaves.

I picked the pin up with an awkward hand, catching the cotton wool it was resting on, which fell to the floor. Will was holding up a bolo tie, strings swaying, and Annie had another pin, similar to mine, but not the same. She was showing it to Grandpa, small brown hands reaching towards him, and he was leaning over to look. Dad had a bolo tie as well; reading from the card, he said the stone was genuine agate from the Smoky Mountains of Tennessee, and Mum was smiling graciously over a pendant of pink stone, also from the Smokies. "It's lovely. Thankyou very much."

There must have been some kind of polite conversation--there would have been. The weather in Tennessee, here in Saskatchewan, whether the farmers had had enough rain this spring. Dad was gesturing towards the backyard with his thumb. "You'll have to come see the flowers while you're here. They're doing well." I watched Grandma, the way the light gleamed off her glasses as she turned her head to speak again. I remember the pin cold in my hand. I shifted it a bit and the pin stuck sharply into my finger. I jerked back, sucked at the little bead of blood that was welling up. Even now, i remember

which finger it was, and i point it out to my lover, just above the ring on the middle finger.

"Don't suck on your finger, Carol." Grandma's head had turned at my jerk. "It's unsanitary, didn't your mother teach you? Go wash your hand." I turned momentarily to Mum, who was watching silently.

\* \* \*

Through the intricate twist of the morning glory vine, a single red poppy grows, the wind harsh on its petals as we watch. White pear petals rain down. I look up to catch my lover's eye, continue telling my remembrance.

The next morning, i was lingering against the kitchen wall while Mum hurried to finish the dishes. Water was rushing down the pipes from the bathroom upstairs, footsteps sounding back and forth, then Dad's voice telling Annie not to ... something. Then across the room from me, the door to the front hall began to open, the handle squeaking as it always did. A cool wash of air sifted through the kitchen. In the corner of my eye, the hanging of the warrior stirred in its place over the dining room table.

"Ah, Mother." Mum calling Dad's mother that--"Mother". Her voice was suddenly strange, i remember thinking. "We're almost ready to go, I've just got to go upstairs a minute."

"Walter says the kids are all ready." Grandma's voice seemed rougher this morning.

"Oh, good." Mum smiled thinly. "Carol, why don't you show your grandmother the flowers out back? I won't be more than a minute or two."

I would have slid reluctantly away from the wall, i imagine, waited for Grandma to lead the way past the dining room to the back door. But i clearly recall Grandma stopping at the sight of the embroidered garden on the dining room wall. "Oh, heavens. You've hung that up. We bought that in Hiroshima, when we stopped in Japan on our first trip out to China. It was still 1925, we hadn't even been married a year, your grandfather and me. But we had to wait so long to reach our mission in China, your father has told you about that, hasn't he?" But she stayed looking at the tapestry, didn't look at me.

I doubt she was really talking to me. "We'd only had a few days in Japan before the ship had gone on south, but we could have stayed a lot longer, as it turned out. I wish we had, it was beautiful, and of course, now Hiroshima ...."

She leaned in close to the tapestry, which was doubtless darkened with years of hanging there above the table. She reached out to touch its surface briefly. Her eyes were intent. "Those ducks, though. Only added for the sake of Western tourists, you know. They wouldn't be part of a traditional Japanese design. There, you can see where I took one out, but it left a shadow on the water, so I left the others in. If only ...."

Turning, she caught sight of the warrior on the adjoining wall. Stood simply staring, saying nothing. I remember waiting, twisting my fingers. The old woman's heavy back was turned to me, expanse of flowered dress, the white head hunched over the bent back. Her shoulders formed a parallel line with the shoulders of the frowning warrior, i think, or perhaps i've made that up. Everything was still and silent for a moment, it seemed. Then slowly, her weight shifted from one leg to the other, skewing the lines, and Grandma turned again. "Don't fidget, Carol." She lifted her head towards the living room. "Here's your grandfather." Grandpa was coming slowly in from the living room, Annie beside him. I can see him even now, as i sit across the table from my lover, her listening face.

Then i suppose that Mum would have stepped in from the kitchen. "Alright, we're ready, now. Oh good, Father, you're here. Someone call Will to go."

I don't particularly remember much of the car trip, crammed in the back seat with Mum and Annie and Will, heading south to Qu'Appelle, as i now realize it was from later trips there. But i do remember waking up from a sleep, my legs sticking painfully to the plastic seat cover and hearing Grandma's raised voice, getting quite vehement. The wind rushing past the closed windows, the fields flowing by outside, i recall her declaiming about America's duty to protect the world from Communism, or something of the sort. It's such unlikely rhetoric to my ears now, but i still feel a small flutter of alarm as i recall the agitation in her voice. I wondered what she could be so excited about, watching the breeze gently push at the green heads of wheat, ripple through fields of oats.

"It was so terrible in China, you know," her voice still raised against the wind. "All the work we'd done there, and we'd been there through the war with Japan, and then the Second World War, and it was all for nothing. In the end, the Communists, they just plain outlawed Christianity, and we had to flee with almost nothing."

Watching her over the back of the seat, i saw her jaw tighten beneath the skin on her cheek. Her hand reached up to pull at her earring, then clenched mid-air on its downward stroke. Strong hands like my own now, touching my lover's as i speak.

"And those poor people." Grandma half turned in her seat, addressing the whole car. "They were so grateful to us. They were almost like family, Ronald had attended at their births and deaths, and I played the organ at the church. I taught them *Christian* hymns, my girls' choir sang so beautifully. Now it's all gone. How can those hippie people protest the war in Vietnam? Those terrible Communists!"

Her face was sharp and angry, emotion rippling over it like the breeze on the warrior hanging. The blue-green haze of flax in bloom eased past the window, a gravel road angled down to meet ours, then the flax started again. The breeze shifted awkwardly over the blue flowers. Dad's hands were tight on the steering wheel.

"Yes, but we still hear from some of our people, don't we, Myrtle?" Grandpa spoke beside her, leaning over to look past her at Dad. "We got a letter only just before we left Tennessee, from a young man she'd taught the piano. Well, he's not so young now, of course ..." Grandpa sat back. "That was after you'd left, after we sent you boys to school back in America."

Then we were turning off, the road banking down to join another highway. The car stopped at the junction, rested still for a moment. Only the breeze was audible outside. A few minutes later we were entering a town, and Mum was trying to direct Dad from the back seat, trying to remember where the Hansen-Ross Pottery was, the Indian craft store, and Grandma was exclaiming about the caraghana hedges, the Manitoba maples.

Grit rattled against the car door, stung my leg as i stepped down. Annie's legs followed mine, deep brown against the lighter gravel, our matching black shoes already dusty. The store was dim and

cool after the sun, fluorescent light falling harshly on beaded moccasins, little birch bark canoes and teepees, woven baskets. The Native woman at the counter greeted Mum politely, i remember, smiled broadly at Annie, full grin of recognition.

"Hey, lookit this!" I grabbed up a canoe of the right size, waved it at Annie. "I could use it for my G.I. Joe!"

I looked at the price tag--more than i had--put it down with disappointment. I remember looking at various times at these little canoes, in craft stores and museum gift shops, with the same idea in mind--but eventually i stopped wanting one. Annie and i wandered on, picking up rattles and trying them out, comparing bead designs on belts. I remember Annie's fingers running thoughtfully over a red flower beaded onto the toe of a moccasin. Will called for us to come see the wolfskin hanging on the back wall, but as we squeezed past Grandma's bulk, she grabbed me sharply by the arm.

"You kids, you stay with your parents. You can't just run around like little savages."

The sun had paled to a flat glare as Annie and i left the store, high cloud a haze in the sky. The adults still busy with Grandma's purchases at the counter, Will was already outside, aiming rocks at a crow that was pecking at the gravel on the road. A car rushed past, the crow fleeing. Annie picked a dandelion by the roadside, the breeze rising for a moment, dust drifting ahead of it. Then it fell still again, and Grandma was stepping out the door, the others following.

Grandma seemed cheered by her purchases, her hand firm on the brown bag.

"Should we go to the Pottery, now?" Mum turned to Dad. "Maybe we should wait and have our picnic in the Provincial Park."

"Yes, let's have a picnic. But I want a picture!" Grandma reached for Grandpa's camera. "Right here, where you can see the store sign."

I remember the dust weighting my frown as Grandma lined us up facing the glare. My teeth felt tight with grit.

"Here, Annie," Grandma was reaching into the bag. "Here, leave the flower, hold this instead." She pulled a letter opener from the bag, sheathed in leather with a red beaded design on it. "It's for your

uncle. And Walter, you stand next to Ronald."

She stepped back, peered through the camera.

"No, Walter, here you take the picture. You don't mind." She bustled forward again.

Dad looked through the viewfinder, paused, peered at the camera itself. "You press this?" Large hands on the small box.

"Yes, of course. It's hot here, just take the picture."

Dad bent his head through the stillness. The breeze stirred in the pause. Beside me, Grandma's arm lifted to smooth her hair, but the shutter was already cracking shut, releasing us to life.

"You should have waited, Walter! My arm was up. Do it again."

But we had already lost our places. I looked down at the dandelion limp on the gravel.

"Do it at the Park, Mom, it's much prettier there anyway."

\* \* \*

I stop my story for a minute and stare at the pear tree out the window. Then lean close to my lover, reach again for her hand. Touching her fingers, stroking the back of her hand, i examine the elegant contours of her knuckles and try hard to remember. Some of the next incident is so incredibly clear to me, and yet i can't remember what actually happened in the end.

One evening, not long before Grandma and Grandpa were due to leave, i recall sitting on the living room floor near Dad's feet, half listening to my parents and grandparents talking, wishing i could turn the T.V. on instead. I was watching my fingers move in and out of the last ray of sun streaming in the west window, and i remember Grandma sitting in the big easy chair across the room. She was probably feeling tired, i suppose, or at least, i remember that she looked kind of deflated, slumped against the arm of the chair.

As i listened, the conversation turned to China again, and Grandpa suddenly recalled a kite he had given Dad when they were all still in China together, on Dad's fifth birthday.

"Yes, of course. I still have that kite, you know." Dad was smiling over his mug of tea.

"Yeah, it's in that big carved chest you have in the attic, isn't it, Walter?" Mum waved her hand in the direction of the attic, pleased at the recollection.

"Oh, that teak chest! I'd forgotten you had the chest!" Grandma was suddenly animated, leaning forward in her chair. She was twisting one of the rings on her hand. "I want to see it again. Where is it?"

"It's late, Mom. Let's wait until tomorrow."

"No, I want to see it while we're still thinking of it. Ronald, you can help Walter, can't you? Is it really so hard to get?"

The veins stood out on Dad's forehead as he and Grandpa wrestled the chest into the living room. The room was growing dark by then, night coming on; it was quiet outside, the wind settling to night-time stillness.

I remember vividly Grandma's excitement. She got down on her knees beside the box, running her hands over its carved sides. "It's still lovely, isn't it? I remember the craftsman who made this chest for us, in Nodoa, do you remember, Ronald? He was such a cheerful fellow, always smiling, and his daughter was in my choir."

She looked up as Mum switched on a lamp, the light shining yellow through her hair, as if it were blonde, not white. "We had this chest and another one made, just before we sent you boys back to the States, when the war with Japan was starting. Something to pack your clothes in. I wonder if your brother still has his, too? You two were so small, standing by the ship's railing. You waved and waved at us."

She had opened the chest, pushing the heavy lid up, her bowed shoulders straining. Inside, rich fabrics glowed in the lamplight. Grandma lifted their edges, ran her hands over the silk. Dad knelt down beside her then, reaching beneath the fabric, and pulled out a flat object wrapped in plastic. Lifting the plastic aside, he gently revealed a small, delicate kite, fragile with age. The fine paper, once red, was faded to pink, stretched over bamboo slats curved into the shape of a butterfly. Two yellow streamers,

creased and bent from years of storage, hung uncertainly from the tail end. Grandpa ran a finger along the bamboo. "It's survived surprisingly well, don't you think, considering how humid the air always was in China."

From my position on the floor, i could see how thin the paper was, translucent in the lamplight. For a moment, as Dad turned the kite in his hands, the paper sparked to its original vivid colours, the lamp glowing through it, before he turned it again, back to faded opacity.

"I remember flying it. It was beautiful against the sky. Oh, what's that you have, Mom?"

Grandma had lifted an old shoebox from the chest, inside which were some odd little paper objects, pastel oranges, pinks and yellows, cut and glued into the rough shapes of plates, cups, baskets and bowls. "I had no idea you'd kept these, Walter. They were funeral objects, you know, buried with the dead so they'd have something to eat in the next world. As missionaries, we tried to discourage the practice, of course."

"Strange custom."

Grandma held the objects a few seconds more, then suddenly dropped them back in their box. Shifting awkwardly on her knees, she shoved against the chest rim, staggering up. "I'm tired. I'll look at it tomorrow."

All of that i remember so very clearly, but it's the next part i simply can't remember. I know that i woke early the next morning, as i always did as a kid, often several hours before anyone else. The sun was well up already, the start of another brilliant summer day on the prairie, and i dressed quickly, Annie breathing quietly in the bed. An early morning breeze had started up, the trees rustling, birds calling. I hurried to the stairway. My bare feet silent on the red carpet, i passed the tapestries of the Eight Immortals, wavering gently on the landing, padded on down the steps.

But before i even reached the bottom of the stairs, i was aware that someone had preceded me. The living room doors were slightly open, though my parents always closed them before going to bed, to stop the draught--and i could hear someone crying. It was a shocking noise, not loud, but still frightening.



Creeping down the last few stairs, i peered through the glass doors. Grandma was kneeling in her bathrobe by the teak chest, its lid pushed open again. She held the little funeral goods in her hands, pastel paper. Tears were dripping slowly from her glasses, her head bent from heavy shoulders.

I stood paralysed. I had never seen an adult crying before, and i stood watching for some time. All of this i remember without difficulty. But i cannot recall, simply can't remember, what i did next.

I think i remember stepping up to the glass doors, pushing one open so i could slip through. Grandma was turned side on to me, and in her crisis, still hadn't seen or heard me. I remember stepping up behind her, lifting my hand, watching it move a slow curve through the air--sturdy hand, knuckles prominent, just as they are now, holding my lover's hand, speaking my love to her--and putting it on Grandma's shoulder. She would have started, bumping against the chest, then gathered herself to get up, but then she simply fell back on her knees, continued crying--accepting my hand. The little pieces of paper had gotten wet here and there, tears dripping slowly into her hands. I stood there a moment longer, then i remember a sudden gust of wind rose outside, trees rustling, and a draught whistled under the front door. The papers lifted from her hand, scattered over the floor like butterflies taking flight.

*I remember that.*

And yet, perhaps that isn't what i remember at all, and only wished i did. *Willed* it so. Or maybe dreamed it.

Because i also have a very clear memory of standing stunned at the bottom of the stairs, as before, unable to move, just watching the shocking spectacle of this old woman in tears. At moments like that, the base of my spine would tingle, sheer alarm shivering through me. In this remembrance, i stood unmoving for a long time, as in the first memory, my grandmother bent over the papers in her hand. But then, just as i was shifting weight from one foot to the other, preparing to take the last few steps past the living room to the front door and out, i saw her hand clench shut, strong hand closing on pastel colours, crushing the papers. I remember i stepped fast, two, three steps, silent bare feet, and fled out the front door into a morning suddenly gone still and humid, the air thick on my skin.

### Chapter Three:

#### "Running Down Up Escalator":

#### *Voices in the Waterfall and Being On the Moon*

So far, i have moved from a discussion of story as a structure and practice of healing, to a discussion of the *nature* of narrative that it should work as such a healing mechanism; i want now to examine the nature of language itself, as it interacts with such healing, spiritual effect in the discursive structures, specifically, of the poetry of Beth Cuthand (Cree) and Annharte (Anishinabe). In Chapter Two i defined my cross-cultural, spiritual reading practice as an inherently multiple and relational structure and process, involving my active, balancing engagement, individually, communally and textually, in a process of multiple and ongoing relation in a vast field of differences and similarities in which i am myself an element and a participant. That is, i precisely construct the spiritual in terms very similar to those used in contemporary Western theory to define *language* and the relation of the individual to language, and--as i make a deliberate shift from emphasizing the differences between Euro-Canadian and First Nations cultural and literary expressions to considering possible equivalencies--in terms which are in fact very similar to those used by Native theorists such as Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo/Sioux) to describe the relation between language and creation. But in the very move to connect creation and language, several other simultaneous moves occur, by which, first, the issue of silence, as much as of discourse, becomes crucial to the discussion of language and spirituality--particularly as the discussion informs my reading of Beth Cuthand's poetry--and then too, by which the issue of the subversive as well as the creative potential of language must also be addressed *as* a possible element of the spiritual--particularly as i read Annharte's poetry.

In several of her essays on American Indian literature in *The Sacred Hoop*, Allen emphasizes that

much literature by Natives, especially by Native women, is based upon an all-informing construction of language, life and reality as inherently relational in nature. This initiating construct finds its origins in traditional tribal understandings of creation as a balanced, harmonious and sacred whole. Humans, as co-creators, participate in this unity equally with all other, co-creative elements of the universe, particularly through "the sacred power of utterance" by which the tribes "seek to shape and mold, to direct and determine, the forces that surround and govern human life and the related lives of all things." Thus the specific purpose of language in tribal cultures is to enable humans to participate in and to help to bring into continual being, the "relationships among all beings of the universe [, which] must be fulfilled" (56; also Cardinal and Armstrong 18, 89; Olsen-Dunn). Language itself, then, is both replete with the spirit of creation and itself an active element in the ongoing processes of creation: language and creation are intimately interconnected in structure and effect.<sup>1</sup>

Allen argues that as a result of this understanding of language, traditional Native American literature is based upon an informing linguistic and perceptual organization which, like my own effort to develop a spiritual reading practice, emphasizes the multiplex *relationships* among events and experiences--in contrast with the conventional European habit, only recently questioned in Western academia, of organizing language and perception less on the basis of a general relatedness than specifically on the basis of differences, binary oppositions, hierarchies. Thus while Western literary convention has assumed a basic story structure relying on difference--on conflict, crisis, and resolution--as a route to significance, significance in traditional tribal literature is determined instead by the literature's "relation to creative empowerment, its reflection of tribal understanding, and its relation to the unitary nature of reality" (59).<sup>2</sup>

According to Allen, the effect of this traditional tribal understanding of the role of language in creation is that, for many Native women poets in particular, while they grapple continually with the conflict, loss and suffering of contemporary colonized reality, their final conclusion is not to inscribe an acquiescence to the despair of final displacement, (self-)alienation and self-division (68). Instead, drawing on this understanding of language as a creative, spiritual structure and practice, they repeatedly affirm the integration and relatedness of contemporary experience with traditional tribal ways, constructing

metaphors that ideally will "harmonize the contradictions [of contemporary Native life] and balance them so that . . . each perspective is meaningful and that in their joining, psychic unity rather than fragmentation occurs" (161). Allen thus sees this act of transformation, of the re-establishment and reaffirmation of relation with the sacred--"the oldest tribal, ceremonial theme"--as *the* basic structure and action of contemporary Native women's poetry (162).

It is from this perspective--of language as utterly embedded in, and itself expressive of, an essentially spiritual relation, and thus of poetry as a repeatedly transformative practice--that i think the poetry of several First Nations women can be read. I read Beth Cuthand's collection of poetry, *Voices in the Waterfall*, as perhaps itself a kind of ceremony, enacting and achieving, over the spread of the poems as they interact with each other, this reestablishment of the connection of the individual and the community with the sacred. The manner in which the poems share imagery, the mention of an image in one poem resonating with the detailing of the image's significance in another poem, places their movement within the realm of tribal constructions of language, ceremonial time. The collection is inscribed in--and itself inscribes--a relational, non-linear understanding of language and of the world in which language plays such an integral, balancing, connecting role: such a sacred, ceremonial role. In this way, given the *performative* role of language, as it not only retells a transformative experience, but (i think) actually *re-accomplishes* the transformation in the moment or the process of the poetry itself (Wiget 108), Cuthand's poems can be read as informed by, and themselves inscriptive of, the orality of tribal culture, in which, as noted in Chapter One, utterance is representational and performative--creative--at once.<sup>3</sup> And then, as a reader of this poetry--though i cannot possibly participate in its transformations in the way that a Cree, or other First Nations, reader might--i too am being constructed as a spiritual being, intelligent participant in creation and in the text, led again to try to read spiritually.

*But i don't figure it's my place to read the ceremony of this poetry as if i had the right to participate as someone deeply immersed in the culture would. I mean, for example, i haven't cleansed myself in preparation for this or any other ceremony, the way that the poet writes herself as doing. In fact i only have a general sense of what the cleansing really is, how it is done, what it's supposed to achieve. The idea of cleansing and other spiritual practices aren't ways that i've gotten to inhabited myself (or been inhabited by them), so i can hardly creatively shape them in my turn-- not in any responsible, truly participatory way. Paula Gunn Allen emphasizes that in The*

Sacred Hoop, where she makes a distinction between the Native sense of how symbols operate in ceremony and in the world, and the European sense of these things:

*The greater and lesser symbols incorporated into the ceremonies take their meaning from the context of the ceremony--its purpose and its meaning. Attempts to understand ceremonial literature without knowledge of this purpose often have ludicrous results. The symbols cannot be understood in terms of another culture, whether it be that of Maya or of England, because those other cultures have different imperatives and have grown on different soil, under a different sky within the nexus of different spirits, and within a different traditional context. (73-74)*

So i figure that my role as a reader isn't to claim the ceremony as my own: i can't say that, having read the poem, i have undergone the ceremony too, or even that i understand it. By very definition, the sacred is not available for the taking--for colonization or appropriation (Chrystos, Letter).<sup>4</sup>

As a result, my effort to connect spirituality and language has to involve the issue of the non-linguistic as well, as least in my twilight, cross-cultural project: i have to think about silence as in some cases the most appropriate response to First Nations poetry. Of course, to fall silent--if i mean silent in the way it's usually constructed in Western culture, as something negative, as the absence, or the refusal, of a response--can be to abandon hope. It can be a giving in to political and discursive oppositions and oppressions (Gunew and Spivak 139; Hoy n.p.; Kertzer 29). But i also think that even so, this thesis is underwritten in every word with this possibility of silence, this time not just as the refusal of a response, but also as a respectful response in cross-cultural circumstances. There's some things i just can't and shouldn't comment on.<sup>5</sup>

So i want to read Cuthand's poetry from this place of a potential balance between silence and discourse, where both are at least potentially, equally valuing responses. Both can be equally valid ways of participating in the ongoing creation of the universe and the poem alike. I'm reminded of the notions of responsibility and community-making that i discussed in my reading of Halfbreed. Isabelle Knockwood (Micmac) connects language as a spiritual event with the idea of responsibility when she tells of a custom in her tradition, where you shouldn't "walk in front of people who are talking." She says it's an adage stemming back "to the old belief that everyone is a spirit and a conversation between people is a spiritual experience because they are also exchanging their most valuable possession, their word" (14).

So i define these concerns as discursive, but i want to expand their definitions to include the non-linguistic, and non-human, community as well. As i see it, part of participation in the sacred, means that i owe responsibility and care to the community of all creation: human and non-human, animate and inanimate. I'm making another move of translation, again, talking about First Nations spirituality through analogy to something i do "understand." This time i'm making my reading of First Nations poetry an environmental event as well. In environmental thinking, the choice to participate actively and the choice precisely not to participate, not to interfere--the choice of a verbal response and the equally respectful response of silence--are equally important, and necessary, ways of interacting with the natural world--of being ourselves in the natural world.<sup>6</sup>

As a result, i also see the issue of the appropriation of voice in a new light--the request by some First Nations writers that non-First Nations should stop writing on behalf of First Nations people who are perfectly capable of telling their own stories. Some non-First Nations writers keep saying, it's censorship! They feel silenced in a negative sense. But i wonder whether we aren't being given a chance to explore silence as a positive, self-responsible choice, too. It's a chance to learn to value it, too. And we're also being given a chance to rethink our own stories, figure out new ways of expressing ourselves in relationship to this sudden new awareness of silence as both a negative and a positive experience. So we're being pushed to tell new, healing stories of ourselves, which i think come from a deep sense of both the value and the terror of silence, instead of just retelling the same old injuring ones. (See Brant, Statement; Fee "Why"; Godard, "Listening" 134-44; Keeshig-Tobias, Interview 79-81, and "The Magic"; Maracle, "Native Myths"; Moses, Statement; Philip, "The Disappearing Debate," and Statement; St. Peter).<sup>7</sup>

From this multiplex of awarenesses, i read "Horse Dance to Emerald Mountain" as the central

poem of Cuthand's collection, in relation to which the other poems derive a larger ceremonial significance. In "Horse Dance," the poet details, and (as i "intuitively" guess it) herself undergoes, her personal quest for reconnection with the land and its spirits--with the land as understood on a physical level, but especially on a spiritual level. I read the poem--aware of the limitations of my place as a white reader--as both the retelling of a ceremony, and for Cuthand, and perhaps for others close to her in community, as the actual performance of it. The ceremony begins, in Part I, with an image of the poet ritually cleansed in preparation for the journey--as both "an ancient grey stone/ burned to ash/ in the heat of the sweat" and as "a raw green stone;/ dusty unpolished/ piece of earth" (21). In the double image of the stone, the poet's past and future are made to co-exist in her in the present: she is both old and burned grey, and yet already an unpolished version of the "clear green stone" she will become by the end of the ceremony (30), and the image itself becomes a symbol for the larger transformation that the poem inscribes and performs.

Similarly, her assertion, "I am/ as clean/ as complete/ as I am," reads to me as both an acknowledgement that she can only be as cleansed as she is able in her present old, burned state before the ceremony, and yet also a statement that a capacity for completion and renewal--reconnection with the sacred--exists in her already (21). The statement, with its circular structure, beginning and ending with "I am," repeats the circular structure inscribed in the double image of the stone--image of transformation and return at once, difference and similarity--as it is at both the beginning and the end of the ceremony. The beginning and end of the poem are thus seen simultaneously in a single view, and i am immediately (perhaps always already) in the realm of transformation, of ceremonial time, where past, present and future co-exist simultaneously, the beginning of the ceremony already containing its completion. The statement's repetition of the phrases beginning with "as" also establishes a process of connection-making as the substance of the poem's larger cyclical structure, so that not only does ceremonial time incorporate all time, but each ceremonial moment is likewise established as a moment and process of relation-making. The poet is only as clean as she is at present, but her language signals that she is already engaged in a deeply relational action, where both transformation and a cyclical return to old ways are equally evoked. And yet, at the same time as the poem is thus presented as a unit, its beginning and end conjoined in the

sacred, its division into numbered parts also serves to highlight the stages and movement of the ceremony: such a simultaneous change and yet return only occurs after a struggle undergone with difficulty, the process as important as the end it is to achieve.

I read Part II, then, following the initial cleansing ritual, as setting up the spiritual parameters of the ceremony and of the action it is intended to accomplish, introducing the symbol of the galloping horse--a kind of guiding spirit, i *guess*--which the seeker/poet is riding across the brown plain.<sup>8</sup> The blue mountain range is visible in the distance, in which stands the object of her quest, the Emerald Mountain. The rhythm and repetitions of the "galloping, galloping"--the process of the ceremony--become the rhythm and cyclical process of the eternal: they become

heart beats  
 drum beats  
 hooves beat  
 drum beats earth beats  
 heart beats  
 heart beats  
 in time in time  
 toward the Emerald Mountain (22)

The rhythm of the story that the ceremony tells--the movement of the horse/spirit which the seeker is riding--is repeated in, and itself repeats, the rhythms and repetitions of the drums of the dance/ceremony that tell the story, the rhythms of the body, and the rhythms of the earth itself. The ceremony and the individual vision/poem are seen, by the very definition of language as a spiritual practice, as functioning on all these levels: the spiritual and the physical, the individual and the communal, and in connection with all creation. At this point, i read the primary emotion (as i work largely on this intuitive, analogical level) as that of the poet's awareness of the danger of the journey she has undertaken. She asks herself, "Do I fear the truth?" and finds no comfort in "The sun [that] shines/ without consent/ upon the clean brown plain" (22), exposing all. By virtue of her participation in creation, as well as her place in her community, she is a person of power, as i guess it--"eagle child/ horse dancer/ bear stone woman/ child of peace"--and yet at present the only answer to her question, "who am I/ who am I," seems to be "Fear" (23). Dark descends on the Emerald Mountain, its "green upon green upon green" (22)--like the stone she

will become--darkening "to black/ black upon black" (23)--the stone she has been, and wishes no longer to be.<sup>9</sup>

*Again, i want to emphasize that i am guessing at all of these layers of significance, of the horse and the mountain, and the repetitions of colours and phrases; i'm not certain what they precisely symbolize to Cuthand or to others from her community. I might read to try to value the transformations of the poem, but i think even so that the poem doesn't perform these transformations for me. Several levels of reading and participation exist, i think, but i'm just limited to this one-- and i have to look elsewhere for my own rituals.*

*My question is, how do i write these spiritual, environmental silences that inhabit the central sensation of my own spiritual reading? Especially when i'm writing the spiritual, at least in Western, English-language discourse, as maybe impossible to write? I think i can write the spiritual in the same way as i read these poems: i can work through the indirection of analogy and translation. I end up evoking the spiritual as an emotional or environmental experience, not representing it. So i write the spiritual through interaction with my text and its readers--in another cross-cultural action, as it were, or at least cross-person--and not just in the object of the text itself. I write it by triggering in my reader still other (internal) stories, in the same way as i feel First Nations writing triggers the interactive play of my many stories--my internal and internalized, academic, societal and individual narratives. Not only that, though. I also have to stay aware of silence at the same time, as both an act of censorship and an act of valuing, against which and at the behest of which, these stories are spoken. My stories have to speak quietly of story and silence at once.*

*My partner and i are on one of the Islands, among other things to visit another lesbian couple, in a deal we've worked out: in exchange for advice on how to edit and market Diana's two novel manuscripts, Diana will share with us her expertise as a horse trainer and ex-jockey, to give us some background information for a project of our own. It's an exchange of story for story, in essence, and i'm excited at the prospect. As we pull up to the farmhouse, Diana greets us carrying a small terrier, in her arms, who growls companionably and suffers my touch. Somehow this place isn't what i expected: the relative newness of this house, this tiny, very un-farm-like dog. And i don't actually see any horses.*

*In the kitchen, amongst several cats of varying ages and colours, Diana's lover Helen sits stiffly at the table, surrounded by bottles of pills and vitamins. Helen apologizes for not getting up to greet us, explaining that she has had a hysterectomy only ten days earlier. She is now mobile, but she is still weak and in pain.*

*We sit down for tea, the little dog sitting on my lap while i scratch her ears. I expect to get right down to business, talking about Diana's manuscripts, but Helen continues to explain that she was already starting menopause when she had begun to explore the sacred power and value of her womb--she gestures slowly down at herself with slender fingers, her pale eyes intense in her lined face. And then she was found to have cancerous cells in her uterus, and would have to have it removed. I glance down at the dog's sharp face: she leans her head against my hand, so i scratch her ears some more. My face feels a little hot at Helen's pronouncement about the sacredness of her womb: i know what she's talking about, it's a sensibility and power i've wished i could believe in too, but even though such conversations are common enough in the lesbian community, it feels a strangely intimate conversation to be having with someone i've only just met. Outside the kitchen window, a bare tree is just showing buds; the land is yellow and grey as we await spring rains.*

*Helen's an odd woman, i think: it's not so much the conversation, but this woman's manner in conducting it. Her intensity and the way she dominates the room and the conversation, feel at odds with the quiet strength that should be being evoked by her actual words.*

*I slow my thoughts a moment, wonder what's really happening here: maybe i'm hearing the intensity and self-immersion of a woman still grieving for a deep loss. If the depth of her emotion takes me by surprise, i respect her efforts to deal with it.*

*After a pause, the conversation turns to the trip Jana and i are planning down to the American Southwest, and Diana and Helen respond enthusiastically, talking about their own trip to Nevada and New Mexico--but the conversation comes immediately back to Helen's topic of Goddess religion.*

*"At first," Helen says, "I was really blown away by the vastness of the place. I felt like i could just get*



lost in all that space. But then i started to really feel the sacredness of that land --" again she gestures, her hand sweeping down at her body, her heart--"the real sacredness of that red soil. It's a woman's place, New Mexico. So sacred." She nods seriously, holding my eyes with hers.

"Yeah," i say, "That's kind of what i expect, too." I think how odd it is to feel this way, that i have to go somewhere else to feel what is everywhere, what is here. But it's an odd conversation, and Helen seems to be so intent on her own line of thought, i don't care to interfere.

As we sit there for an hour, then another, the conversation never strays from this topic of women's spirituality, Helen approaching it again and again, first from one tack and then another. She's so fervent, i start to feel what i've never felt about anyone else i've ever met who's engaged in this Goddess-religion: it feels almost as if she's trying to convert me, when that seems so unlike the way this kind of spiritualism works.

Is Helen really trying to convince me and Jana--when i think from our responses to her, it's clear we're already convinced--or is it herself she's really trying to convince? Is the intensity of her gaze really conviction, or is it almost fear?

Again and again, my perceptions are jarred during this conversation, my usual sense of social occasion shifted out of place before this woman's single-mindedness, the incongruity of her domineering manner with the seemingly inclusive kind of spirituality she's talking about. Despite this apparent celebration of a shared spirit, i feel very unspiritual at this moment, so tense from the effort of figuring out how to respond that my jaw cracks loudly in my head when i stretch to try to find a more comfortable place. The dog jumps from my lap, stretches herself out on the floor.

At one point Helen describes herself as "in recovery from patriarchy," as she tells of her increasing awareness, as a physician herself, of the shortcomings of Western medical practices, of how dis-spiriting Western medicine is, how it relies on such an immovable hierarchy of the authority of the doctor over the patient. She says she's trying to figure out how to live a truly non-patriarchal life, infused with women's spirituality--but "patriarchy," she says: "that's my addiction."

I sit back with a sigh, look down at the dog on the floor. That's what it is: she feels like a woman trying to unravel her participation in a system of power that, though it has given her a lot, she now sees as wrong--but she's doing this unravelling only on the faith that she will find other ways to re-empower herself in a newly balanced way: it's a leap into the unknown, and she must wonder every day what she can possibly have to gain from this exercise, trying to reknit what she has willingly unravelled. I feel very un-spirited, but here i am witnesses this deep transformation as it takes place right in front of me.

The following two parts of "Horse Dance" repeat the structuring notions of birth and death, of the green stone and the black one, of loss and the transformation of loss into reaffirmation. Part III emphasizes the poet's connection with the earth and with the creative, as she recounts a creation story in which the sea is the origin of life--in which "Father Sky rained/ and Earth waited/ pregnant, powerful/ under the waters/ for Creation's birth." The waters of the earth and of the womb are connected as heartbeats and earthbeats were in Part II, the individual body and all creation inextricably connected, sharing in the sacred. "I was there," the poet asserts,

at my birth  
hearing the sea  
thundering  
on the shores  
of the womb [. . .].  
Mother Earth

brought me forth [. . .]  
 pushing me  
 from her womb

and I  
 bloody  
 crying out  
 for life. (24)

In this place where language itself is spiritually transformative, the poet's physical birth, as both an individual at her own birth, and as a member of creation partaking in the beginning of all creation, coincides with her birth as the poet, as the maker of and participant in the ceremony, the journeyer "crying out/ for life."

Once she has recounted--or reconnected with, recreated--her several births, the poet then turns in Part IV to the question of death, returning to her present position searching "for my Emerald Mountain/ black upon black now/ cold/ in the midst of death." She is "Gone/ from the warmth of the womb/ Gone/ from the tit of the earth" (24-25), and even her spiritual guide, the horse, abandons her, so that she must continue alone. She sees only black "In the darkness of the night," but at this darkest moment, light is already returning: "I see black/ lighten,/ colour,/ leave for a new day" (25). The "morning voices" reconnect her with the immediacy of the present--"enjoy this freedom now," they instruct her (25)--while also telling her that "the horse leaves you to remember" (26), leaves her to reconnect with the past as a route ultimately to achieving her quest.

But she must remember in a Native way of knowing, not a white way: in contrast with the history of creation which she has re-called in Part III, here she must beware other versions of history and meaning. "Be aware of your comprehension/ of matters made in/ another land," she is told, and recall instead (as again i *guess* it) how death and life are intimately connected: she must recall how at her grandmother Bess's death, described in words which recall the Mother Earth's action of birthing the world, the poet (Beth) too "lay supine,/ gasping for breath/ dying/ as my namesake." In her grandmother's death, life was immanent--Beth herself was her grandmother's continuance and the grandmother's death was "a merciful death/ of the seed/ of the seed/ of me." Beth's own (psychic?)

death, in contrast, was "a different death/ of a way of life/ become irrelevant" (26), and it is this second death, of the history of colonization, of history as loss and destruction--as opposed to the death that is an intimate and itself creative part of creation, of history *as* creation (Cardinal 80)--which the horse and the morning spirits are instructing her to overcome and leave behind with the morning. At present, though, "My name died with her/ I am/ a nameless one/ Journeying to find" (26).

Having thus encountered life and death--the death of creation renewing itself, and the absolute death of "a way of life/ become irrelevant"--her guiding spirit, the horse, returns in Part V to take up the journey again, "head tossing [. . .] impatient for the dance" (26-27). The "galloping galloping" resumes--the "drum beat, heart beat, earth beat" (27). Reaching the dark blue mountains, she has reached the trial of the ceremony, as the mountains "rise before us now/ steep/ treacherous/ testing the dance." Similarly, the sun is "unmercifully hot," and the Eagle (who again may have specific symbolic meaning) also screams a challenge, as the Emerald Mountain itself calls her to "leave the horse/ walk on alone" (27). Standing on the brink of decision--whether to brave the test or to retreat to safety--she recalls the waiting horse and the warm brownness of both the plain across which she has galloped with such ease, and of her mother's breast, "safe." But she also recalls that her mother only ever galloped across the plain, always only "becoming becoming/ galloping galloping/ [. . .] never here/ but always coming here." The poet's own heart "speaks/ telling me/ the nameless one/ to walk on/ to climb the steep face/ of the Emerald Mountain" (28), telling her that she must do more than seek endlessly like her mother, never risking achieving this arrival, and she must also chance this danger, test the dance of ceremony and life.

As a result of this decision, she can grapple with her fear, asking herself in Part VI, "what truth is concealed/ in the rumbling mist?" as she pushes up the mountain where "there is no comfort/ no safety/ no promises/ in this path/ I choose to walk." But then in a movement both simple and profound, her spirit--"a salient river/ sinuous, fluid/ touching green upon green," just as the the Emerald Mountain is green, as creation is green--"reaches out" across the gap of risk, and the ceremony nears its completion. The eagle and the mountain itself, once challenging her, now acknowledge her, as she sees herself transformed into an eagle, and the river of her spirit/blood running like "the rumbling, coursing blood/

of the mountain." She and the eagle are dancers in the same ceremony of connection with creation, with the multiple beats of dance and life, with her ancestors:

dancing dancing  
surrounded by the ancient ones  
and the hooves of horses  
beating sounds of the mountain  
in time with my wings  
smooth emerald  
carved by crystal light. (29)

With this transformation she returns in Part VII to the image of her place in creation as that of a stone--this time neither the ancient grey stone, worn down in the effort to cleanse herself, nor the "raw green stone" of her unfulfilled self--but here "a clear green stone/ gleaming polished," and reconnected with "the Earth." She ends the poem by answering her earlier question "who am I?" with a series of declarations. She is the stone, but she is also "a clear blue pool/ washed by a waterfall/ dusted in mist:" as i read it, she is the receiver and the receptacle of knowledge, the pool beneath the waterfall of an earlier poem, in which an elder tells her (i think) that sacred knowledge

can come slowly  
piece by piece  
over the years  
... partly revealed  
in the markings of a feather  
then on to a misty  
half remembered dream  
leading to  
voices in a waterfall  
barely heard  
just barely heard. ("This Knowledge" 17)

Similarly, she is also herself the mist in which the knowledge is concealed, both in "Horse Dance," and in the above passage from "This Knowledge." And then, in the closing affirmation of "Horse Dance," she is also "the Emerald Mountain/ selfless/ unfettered/ free" (30): a part of creation herself, she is, and always has been, the object and achievement of her own quest, just as the poem itself, its process and language, is the object and achievement of the very quest it inscribes.

*Helen chops the air with her hand and i jump. "This is it, right here," she says, flicking a finger down to stab at the table. "It's right here when we have conversations with women like this, that we're really making it happen now, in our lives. It's right here in this house, right now." She points to the living room, where a young*

*Siamese cat stretches and yawns on the back of the couch. Yeah, however odd this feels, so unlike the silent, private serenity that i associate with my sudden moments of spiritual confidence, she's right: it is happening right here, right now.*

*"Look!" Diana jumps up, pointing out the window. "He's seen a mouse or something!"*

*I catch my breath back into my lungs: just outside the window, a hawk has broken stroke mid-air, wings bent over the yellow twists of grass in the field. It seems to stall completely for a second, just hanging there, then it strokes again, wings grasping at the air, flies on. A horse calls from somewhere behind the house.*

*The conversation turns to the horses and Helen tells us of her and Diana's efforts to train race-horses in a different, more humane and sensitive way, with far more of an eye to the horses' happiness and well-being, than is usually the case at the tracks--but even so, they finally gave the business up as too abusive of the horses.*

*Helen brushes vigorously at her chin. "Have you ever placed a bet at the tracks? That's the thing, you know, you can be as kind and compassionate as you want, but you just see what happens when you go and put five dollars down on a horse. All of a sudden, you own a part of that horse. And . . . it just makes you crazy." One of the horses out back, named Jen--Helen waves back of the house--was slated to win a \$10,000 stakes race, when she was attacked in the barn the night before the race, her shoulder and legs hacked open by someone's hand.*

*But the last straw--and suddenly, i recognize from Helen's growing excitement again, that we're hearing the story of her actual conversion, the very beginning of this process that compells her so--came when, during a race, another horse they'd trained up from a foal broke her leg coming out of the gates and had to be destroyed. "Right in front of me. I just cried," Helen says. "I'd just had enough. I finally realized there was no way you could make it different, no matter what you did. The system itself was just wrong. So i said, that's it. That's it, i said, and we never raced another horse again." Her mouth snaps shut with the finality of this decision; she seems to contemplate again the enormity of the change this implied.*

*Jana, Diana and i go outside to look at the horses--Helen is too weak to walk so much yet. It is overcast, a slight sharpness to the breeze, but the farmyard is a place of peace, and we move slowly from yard to yard, meeting each of the horses as they hang their heads over the fence for a scratch: Ella and Billy, Nat, Bessie, and Queen Ida, who is a granddaughter of Secretariat, and in the far corral, a trio of grandmother, mother and daughter: Meg, Jen--her shoulder scarred but healed--and Chrissy, who's a charmingly brattish three-year-old, insisting on nibbling on our shoes, chewing at our coats.*

*Now Diana really begins to talk: in the kitchen she was largely silent as Helen talked, but this is her place, amongst these horses, and she tells us stories about them, about how she came to be a jockey, about her race-horse training days.*

*I am silent, listening to the stories, stroking Queen Ida's lovely neck and cheeks as she nibbles tentatively at my jacket. The little dog plays with a piece of rope, then tries to herd the chickens into a stall. The silent shadow of a rat slips from one hay pallet to another, and a stray chicken scratches in the corner. We feed the horses, brush them down, an easy sauntering back and forth between conversation and silence.*

*I think of Queen Ida's soft cheeks, the grassy smell of her breath. She lowers her head to scratch it up and down against me, and several of her hairs cling to my shirt. I stand absolutely still for a moment, grateful for her touch.*

From the central vision of "Horse Dance," then--its placement in the middle of the collection--i read the poems of *Voices in the Waterfall*, back and ahead, as speaking from this knowledge, this certainty of the poet's place and voice and language. The movement over the collection replicates the ceremonial movement of "Horse Dance" itself, moving through cleansing to the recollection of traditional ways, to individual and collective rebirth and its implications for the future, and finally to the reaffirmation of the individual's place in renewed community and creation. "Horse Dance" not only draws connection upon

connection amongst language, the land, the individual and her community, within the nexus of the spiritual action of the ceremony it tells and performs, but it is also placed within a still larger field of connection and interaction, the very spirit of its relational, transformational movement rejecting closure. In the interconnection of the poems in the collection, one ceremony, one transformation, is made contingent with still others, the field of relation and difference--the spirit--inscribed in, and itself inscribing, a continual, interconnected process of flux and reconnection.

So i read the first poems of the collection as dealing with the dangers of false visions and visionaries, functioning as a preparatory cleansing of the individual poet and the community by naming and rejecting imbalanced ways of participating in the world. The opening poem, "In the Firelight," places the poet, with wry humour, in the mundanities of everyday material and emotional worries, as she laments both her poverty and her loneliness, while still managing to recognize rather dryly that her situation gives her "more":

more freedom to go places  
 more walls to paint  
 more walks to shovel  
 more time to read  
 more time to write  
 more time to sit alone in the firelight  
 wondering if I will ever be held  
 (is the cat in? did i lock the door?) (9)

But having addressed her immediate desires and constructed life, in a sense, as a condition of dissatisfaction when taken on the imbalanced, self-enclosed terms of the purely material or the purely personal, the next poem, "Married Man," answers this first one, working perhaps as the poet's incantation against false, imbalanced answers to her desires--in this case against the company of a married man who will always be drawn away from her by his "sandy brown wife wondering/ why you're late;/your children asking where's daddy,/ and those cows bawling for their feed" (11).

But though the ceremony thus begins by acknowledging the strength of material and emotional strains in everyday life, and then by refusing facile answers to these strains, i (hesitantly) read the following two poems, "Shake 'n Bake" and "Zen Indian," as warning against and exorcising the attractions

of facile and superficial forms of *spiritual* life, as well, as embodied in the claims of two false medicine men. The ceremony then shifts from this initial cleansing renunciation of such imbalanced ways of being--ways that cut off the continued relational movement of the sacred, that force closure on language--to the re-calling of the old ways. The three poems leading up to the central ceremony of "Horse Dance" draw up the wisdom of the elders--the connection-making, relational wisdom of the community and of history--in preparation for the poet's individual ceremony. In "This Knowledge," the true nature of a balanced, spiritually-responsible quest for belonging and knowledge is recounted: (again, reading only in the broadest, crudest terms) the patience and lack of ego required for such a search--knowing oneself in humble relation to other significances--and the rejection of the imbalances of current colonized, technologized ways of being, as the clock's mechanical ticking is "silenced / drowned/ by the sound/ of our beating hearts," and western chronological history is overwritten once more by the other history and life of creation itself.

I read the following two poems as then grounding this kind of knowledge in Cuthand's specifically Cree heritage, the knowledge of the elder in "His Bundle" embodied *in* the bundle, "full/ of living Earth," spanning and reconnecting old and current times. It is "replete/ with healing songs and wise stones/ teaching new ways of seeing old things" (18): it is itself the elder's vehicle for connection and reconnection with creation, a source of the strength and knowledge to live old ways in current times, to accomplish such transformation and continuity. And by extension, perhaps the poem itself is proposed as the poet's bundle as well, performing for her a similar function as for the elder: as a vehicle for knowledge and thought, for the task Paula Gunn Allen ascribes to many Native women writers, of maintaining a continuity between old ways and contemporary colonized experience. Then, in "He Told Me," the elder's bundle becomes the bundle Louis Riel's father gave him--the bundle which it was his duty to fulfill in his effort to protect the Cree and the Métis against colonial incursion--but which in that historical moment, in the face of the extreme imbalances of colonizing power, it was ultimately too much for him to bear. It is this balanced, relational knowledge, i *guess*, this kind of sacred bundle, which the poet herself takes up and renews in the ceremony of "Horse Dance"--as she renews the spiritual continuity

that was threatened with the Canadian conquest of the Cree and the Métis.

Then, in the poems following this central vision, the emphasis shifts from examining false visions and recalling true ones--reconstructing the continuity of those visions--to hoping for, and the poems themselves inscribing, the continuance of that vision and knowledge in the following generations of Cuthand's community. The poet becomes the nexus of time and language--herself, like the poems themselves, a place and agent of the spirit--a place where the past reconnects actively and creatively with the future, as she instructs "Little Johnny and Funny Bear," in "He," and "Sunrise and Cloudwoman," in "She," in their proper places in a balanced creation--and then instructs them in "He and She Are Dancers," in their roles in relation to each other as well, as ceremonial people, participants in creation (31-36). In "Dancing with Rex," the poet herself is the "she" to Rex's "he," in a celebration of the sheer sensuality of the dance and of life--life in which (*i think*) the spirit of the trickster, here a Coyote figure, plays an elemental role. As i read at least the emotional timbre of the poem, it celebrates the uncertainty and riskiness of life, of the dance, and of the ceremony--and as a result, the precarious joy of these actions--as Rex's "canine teeth / glint in the light of lightning/ and his heart beats audibly in time to the drums" (37). As the trickster and the poet perform the dance together, "Rex laughs so long and loud/ that the old ladies shake their heads/ and even the young men/ laugh nervously" (38).

After such a celebration, first of the rightful place of "he" and "she" in creation, and then of the exhilaration and risk of life even in such balance, "Four Songs for the Fifth Generation," works to unite a discussion of all the generations of Natives addressed so far--all the generations who have been endangered by colonization--as a voice from one generation speaks, then the voice of another, and so on, the poem thus itself speaking a community of voices, inscribing and constituting an oral history of continuity in the face of loss. The first voice recalls the days of the buffalo and laments their passing as a result of white invasion, lamenting as well the resulting passage of a way of life and spirit, while the second song recalls the suffering of First Nations and whites alike during the Depression, evoking the Natives' capacity for generosity and survival as compared to the white man who hanged himself. The suggestion of this second song is perhaps that it is precisely this capacity to give even in times of lack that



allows the Native person to survive where the white man is (spiritually) defeated. The song of the third generation recalls that even at the time of Native enfranchisement, at long last, as voting citizens of Canada, First Nations people still faced relentless racism, and if they learned to fight back, their struggle for survival also relied upon, and continues to rely upon, an anger that will not easily be healed. The fourth song laments the continuance of that sense of displacement and anger in the upcoming generation, and in *their* children as well.

But though the songs primarily grieve for lost ways and continued suffering, they are framed, at the beginning and end of the poem, and in the breaks between songs, by the refrain of a ceremony--by a practice that demonstrates the continued power of the old ways even now: "*Drums, chants and rattles/ pounded earth and/ heartbeats/ heartbeats*" (39). They sing pain into healing, inscribing transformation as reconnection with the healing spirit; and whatever the suffering and loss of each successive generation, the ceremony continues all the same, surrounding and shaping Native lives, reconnecting the earth and the heart as they were connected in the central vision of the collection, as they were reconnected in Rex's trickster heartbeat.

Finally, in the poem that closes the ceremony of the collection, "She Ties Her Bandana," the poet reasserts and performs her own place in connection not only with creation as understood spiritually--as she has already done in "Horse Dance"--but also with the recent individual and communal history and experience inscribed in the preceding poems, an experience which can now be spoken of from the safety of her reconnection with the creative values of life. Recalling many of the bad times in her life, and the deaths and troubles of others around her, the poem is again spoken in a variety of voices, as if what seem to be her own individual stories are also those of her people in general. It thus creates again this connection- and history-making as an oral, communal event, recreating the community in the very telling of its stories. Despite an attempted suicide, the poet continues to live, drawing strength even from her very capacity to grieve. She speaks of this paradoxical and often very painful process of life in terms which recall the paradigms of birth and death that framed her quest in "Horse Dance":

So she lives

holding on to life; a new born baby  
 feeding it, caring for it  
 tenaciously like a mother bear.

Like all the widows before her  
 she grieves in order to live,  
 to live a life so full of life  
 that grief will not kill it. (49)

The bandana she ties around her head signals her place as a First Nations poet, finally: she is the person who daily lives and endlessly recreates the ceremony, and who looks to the future for the ceremony's completion and return, just as the thunder clouds--and the thundering buffalo of an earlier poem, and the way of life and spirit the rain and buffalo supported--are seen as returning:

She must remember the thunderers  
 They are awakening  
 They are coming  
 seeking the ones like her  
 who tie bandanas around their heads  
 and pray for strength  
 to birth the healing rain  
 so the people will live. (49)

With this hope, and this statement of the central place of ceremony/poetry in First Nations lives and spirits--after the collection's action of cleansing, re-calling, and then affirming the place of the ceremony in present and future lives--she ends the ceremony and the collection with the traditional thanksgiving: "Hey yah ho/ megwitche" (49).

The ceremony of her collection thus effects a transformation of the poet's individual and communal pain into a reaffirmation of the sacred, creative basis of life, First Nations life in particular. The poems themselves are proposed as the vehicle for this transformation, language understood above all as a sacred, *effective* medium, negotiating in its very action the relationship between humans and creation. The effect is to transform the poetry itself into an explicitly communal and ceremonial medium, speaking back and forth with First Nations ceremonial traditions and discourses, and reconfiguring the brutal secular history of colonization in spiritual, creative terms: the poetry itself functions as an element of these tradition-based, sacred ways.

In contrast, though i read the poetry of Annharte as partaking in a similar transformative project as Beth Cuthand's poetry, i also see it as interacting with the notion of transformation in more complex and ambiguous ways--in ways that draw on and evoke the subversive potential of language as much as its creative potential. While Cuthand constructs a poetry that moves repeatedly, through the negotiation of language and silence, to a relatively unambiguous affirmation of the sacred, Annharte constructs a poetry that is both far more provisional in its approach to the sacred, and yet, in its very structures and syntax, replete with a multitude of transformative possibilities that speak the spiritual in their very action. Phrase after phrase, word upon word, each speak to a multiplicity of lines of thought and meaning at once, one meaning transformed into another and then into another, so that transformation works as *the* action, structurally and thematically, of the poetry--and yet each meaning also simply remains itself, unchanged: each meaning is irreducible to and yet mutually permeable with each other meaning, so that transformation occurs, the sacred is evoked and discussed, and yet the mundane still subversively and satirically remains the mundane, transformation and the refusal of transformation--the sacred and the threatened loss of the sacred--both constant and simultaneous occurrences. The satiric voice and effect is possibly her most *power*-ful tactic for negotiating these apparent oppositions, inserting into the sacred and the transformative a sense of resistance and chance (Vizenor "Trickster Discourse" 189): it works to destabilize both concepts, of the mundane and the sacred alike, and as a result allows the contemplation and evocation more of the action of their *relation* to each other--their inter-transformational, and thus *spiritual* possibilities--more than their static differences from each other.<sup>10</sup>

Through the satiric play of the poems, then, the division of the sacred from the non-sacred is thus discussed as far more than a simple opposition, as Annharte's poem "Penumbra," for example, suggests in its use of a moment of change or reversal--transformation--characteristic of many of her poems. Written from the safety of a Caribbean beach, her discussion of the complicities of white society and the white legal system in Betty Osborne's torture and killing in Le Pas, Manitoba, suddenly turns into the speaker's gently self-satirical recognition that her present situation in the Caribbean is itself a reversal of her usual position as a victim of white intruders on her Native soil: here on this beach, she is also herself a

privileged intruder. The movement of the poem, up to this moment of change, has relied upon the establishment of a series of connections amongst the details of the poet's present place on the beach, her sense of identification with Betty's victimization back in Manitoba, and the historical conquest of the Carib Indians. The image of the shade of her hat, covering her from the intrusive glare of "the bright sun [that] makes me want to run and jump," works as a metaphor for her own sense of exposure and resulting desire for protection as a dark-skinned woman in a white-dominated society, the image reinforced in a second image of light and dark, of "the contrast of each pinky penis" of "those who mashed my face"--Betty's rapist murderers--with her own and Betty's "dark skin."

But speaking in the persona of both Betty Osborne and the woman on the beach--an interesting refusal to separate one woman from the other, collapsing European-conventional individualistic separations--the image of the shading hat also suggests that the speaker is resisting white efforts to enforce her silence and concealment: she wants to run and jump with elation, perhaps, as much as in self-protection, even though "I had been told if I were smart, I'd stay hidden." And then, just as her desire to run and jump may be read as an impulse both to flee and to celebrate, silence and concealment may also be read as having a double purpose. It is precisely through the seventeen-year-long silence of the murdered Betty that the nature of the murder itself and of the endemic racism that underwrites it, is finally fully exposed: "they understand I stayed away to make sure/ I'm not the only witness to their sorry act." Thus by definition in white-dominated society, Native "shade"--the very fact of Native dark skin--works to expose white racism, reversing the conventional code by which white is the norm, and darkness is exposed as exceptional, abnormal. Concealment is transformed into exposure; the dark skin that is the target of white racists is turned into a means of targeting the racism instead, through the accusation of the skin's very darkness; and silence itself is made articulate. Accordingly, the initial image of the small spot of shade surrounded by the glaring sunlight, is reversed as well, as the speaker notes that "The reserve is a huge donut around the town/ No place to go unless you're Indian like me": Le Pas is a small spot of whiteness surrounded by Native darkness.

While the poem's effect so far is a very serious one--raising critical issues not only of racist, sexist

violence at its most sickeningly brutal but also of the complicity of the more general racist society in tacitly approving such violence--at the same time, the poem already begins to work with darkly satiric effect as it enters into transformation, my language of conventionally fixed oppositions set up against a linguistic action of constant and repeated shifts of meaning and event. Even my confusion over who exactly is supposed to be speaking at any one moment in the poem, the woman on the beach or Betty Osborne herself, has the effect of making fun of my (white) hangup with nailing things and people and voices down in definitive difference from each other, while Annharte herself, speaking communal and individual pain alike, collapses these (for me) once-conventional oppositions, speaking several voices at once. The effect is radically subversive, disrupting the white use, here, of the institution of individualism as a colonizing tool: if in one white-culture stereotype, the only good Indian is a dead Indian, Annharte seems to be responding with communal defiance, that you can murder one Indian or another, but it won't silence First Nations voices, and even the dead will speak.

Thus the oppositions stand, of silence and voice, darkness and light, and yet--if i had the courage also to make a leap from the safety of such oppositions into a place where the separation and opposition of the spiritual and the mundane was no longer fixed, and where Cuthand's Trickster, or Annharte's satire, informed the interaction of the oppositions, and my interaction with both--they also speak to other transformations, to other active life. The effect of this satiric movement is similar to that of the movement of analogy-making which i have repeatedly proposed as a reading strategy: it constructs me as double, as well, at first in a negative sense, but also, eventually, in a positive sense again. That is, the satiric effect of the poem forces me outside of myself again, seeing myself with Other eyes, and setting me back in the place of self-alienation and self-hatred that i was in at the beginning of Chapter One. This is in some ways the deepest confrontation so far with my limitations as a non-First Nations reader: the awareness that, despite my earnest good intentions, despite my capacity through analogy to live at least into the politics--if not the spirit--of First Nations writing, my own racist self-betrayal lurks deeper still.<sup>11</sup>

But again, i also defined this doubling, multiplying effect as the beginning of forgiving, spiritual self-awareness, and so if the anger in the poem throws me back into my own fear--the basic fear that feeds

racism, that i'll have done to me what my ancestors did in coming here; that i'll have this angry strangeness thrust unwillingly upon me, as the poem itself scripts by transforming white racism into Native triumph--then i am also immediately being called upon to face that fear and find a way to value myself, and thus the poem again. Made linguistically self-aware through the poem's satiric dismantling of the conventional oppositions of dark and light, silence and speech, i am led back into the analogy-making process of unlearning the oppositions of white and Native, human and non-human that have inscribed racist thought in my very language. Satire and analogy, silence and story alike thus function to cross the enclosures that have been fearfully "naturalized" in Western practice, and to open up the play of language again to new connections, new ("racial") relations, new spiritual interaction with myself and my own communities.

From the initial reversal of light and dark--and of my relentlessly *sincere* effort at self-perception with a more self-satirizing one--the poem's transformations continue to multiply. Throughout the poem, even as the "I" of the poem identifies with the victimization of both the Caribs on this island and the First Nations back in Canada, a simultaneous suggestion is being made, through the use of phrases of potentially double, contradictory meaning, that she might also be identified with a dominant, dominating culture as well. For example, noting the "turtles [that] crawl past me to dig their nests," she comments that "tortuga oil is outlawed and so am I." Initially, i read her comment as saying that as a Native--whether as the woman on the beach, or as Betty Osborne herself--she is outlawed by the whites' racist, anti-Native legal system, rendered by definition on the wrong side of the law. By extension, i might guess that perhaps the garnering of tortuga oil was a traditional Carib practice, now outlawed, just as the Caribs were "outlawed," murdered and dissipated--just as the "Canadian" First Nations were. This turtle island, like the "Turtle Island" that is the name for North America in some First Nations cultures (Charnley 33), suffers the same imposition of foreign laws: both turtle islands are outlawed. At the same time, though, i might also guess--and in this field of shifting meaning and relation, i ask myself whether this is stretching it, even as an environmental awareness remains a part of my analogical spiritual construction--that tortuga oil was outlawed for conservationist reasons, to protect the turtles from extinction,

stereotypically these days from *tourists'* excessive demands for rare animal products. As a result, then, perhaps the tourist woman on the beach is also outlawed in the sense that here she is as much an intruder, out-law, as any tourist, any colonizer, whether historically from Europe or currently from Canada (Chrystos, Letter 12). To that degree, recalling the satirical, transformative action of the poem, the effect is also to remind me of *my* colonizer's, out-law position in Canada: those with the power of law are no longer from the dominant white culture, but from the native First Nations cultures; the turtles have their own laws now to protect them from tourists.

And then, in the poem's final two lines, a similar multiplication of meaning and transformation of positionality and understanding, is also achieved. Returning from her contemplation of darkness and exposure, the woman on the beach hears "laughing at the other end of the beach," which "gets me wondering how it's my turn." As i began to note earlier, i read this initially as the crucial moment of change or reversal in the poem, the woman suddenly aware that now it is *her* turn to be in a position of privilege in relation to the native culture--her turn to be the isolated intruder surrounded by those who belong, spot of shade in the sun, spot of light in dark. Her tone is perhaps suddenly that of the stereotypical paranoid tourist who is certain that every word and action of the locals, even their laughter, must be scrutinized for its potential threat--again, with satiric effect for me, reconstructing all of my culture's obsessions and fears about the First Nations as the humiliating paranoia of culture-shocked tourists.

But even as the voice satirizes itself and then me, through this reversal, yet another reversal is occurring, which leaves me flatfooted on the beach, as it were, and without a hat to shade my rapidly burning skin: as i read it, the poet's wondering at "how it's my turn" also continues to speak to, rather than only in reversal of, her earlier discussion of her relief that white racism is finally being exposed back in Le Pas. Like her impulse to run and jump, both to hide from the sun's exposure, and to celebrate this recent exposure of white racism, her awareness that it's her turn similarly expresses both fear (which of course i feel intensely)--at her present position on the beach--and exultation (in which i participate . . . uh . . . nervously at best)--at events back in Manitoba. Now it is *her* turn to get revenge on white murderers

and colonizers; the power of whites over First Nations people is reversed; loss is transformed yet again into gain, dark skin exposing light; and even the poet's self-satirical voice shifts again, to leave me the object of satire, while she escapes back across the lines of shade and light--the lines of opposition which constitute *the* discursive trademark of *my* culture.

The overall effect is that several apparently contradictory meanings are carried throughout the poem--by now a familiar effect in my readings of First Nations women's writing--with the result that on the level of its commentary on identity politics, i can read the poem, with my usual "sincerity," as remaining simply multiple in this cross-cultural moment, in the way i have so far read *Halfbreed* and *Slash*: the spiritual is created as such a structure of multiplicity. The poet speaks simultaneously from several irreducible and yet mutually permeable, relational positions, as both the victim of colonization and herself a participant in one of its contemporary manifestations, as Third World tourism. But i also read the poem's double effect--and its resulting (self-)satiric spirit--as working a transformation, in the sense that Paula Gunn Allen discusses, of defeat and alienation into an at least partial recovery of health and identity and humour, negotiating "a path between tribal consciousness and modern alienation." Following this description, the poem inscribes, and to some degree even *scripts*, the change of Betty Osborne's murder, finally, after seventeen years, into something other than the victory of complacent, arrogant racism: her alienation and that of the poet are reconstructed as a source of identification (JanMohamed "Negating" 146-47). And by extension, colonization in general is transformed into the possibility of finally moving beyond the terrorism and violence of the colonizers.

This change is scripted not only in the poet's angry voice, graphically detailing the specifics of Betty's violent death and grimly celebrating the exposure of her murderers, but also in the poet's satiric voice, by which she first constructs even herself as self-alienated, making fun of herself, but which she then transforms yet again into self-connection, while still making fun of the dead seriousness and consequent continued self-alienation with which whites, whether rapist murderers or lesbian academics, characteristically view themselves and their actions. If the poem's movements work initially on a largely political level, the poem itself, in its very transformative action, is also situated more profoundly within



the larger context of the spiritual and of traditional tribal patterns of interaction with the spiritual. But then, even this situating of the poem seems to be subverted by the satiric voice, and in this self-subversion, *i* am subverted, as the white willingness to stereotype every last First Nations individual as a deeply spiritual repository of a rustic, mystical knowledge, is thrown back in my face.

In this field of constant transformations, however, this subversion is answered with another reversal, in that a significant aspect of interaction with the sacred involves precisely the capacity for self-satire, self-subversion: it involves the necessity of viewing one's own place in connection to this larger value with a large measure of self-humour, with an expansive capacity to embrace the transformative in life, rather than only trying arrogantly to *control* it, even as this embrace can sometimes drop you hard on your bum in the sand. The reversal by which the woman on the beach suddenly discovers that she has become a potential colonizer herself is thus perhaps the informing transformation of all the poem's transformations, even satire itself enlisted as a process of sacred transformation: the transformation is transformed again, turn and turn about, so that in this place of change, no single transformation or agent of transformation takes precedence or power over the next, nor over the next again--but the larger effect is one of a constant reshuffling of powers and relinquishment of dead-dull control, in an effort at a larger balance.

*So in this field of repeated transformation, i feel both fearful and hopeful at once. Recalling the woman's fear as a stranger on the beach, i also feel that fear as an intruder in her land, her poem, where her angry, triumphant voice brings about this transformation. I may have my own experience with oppression, but it doesn't by definition free me from these power relations and these internalized discourses of continued racial opposition. I can only turn to a still deeper--at present, for me, only intuitively conceived--spirituality to discover again how to move beyond such oppositions, and how to value despite this fear.*

*As i see it, fear is an expression of wanting to control what i can't control, which means that engaging spiritually with life means i have to enter joyfully and self-subversively into the play of creation. But it doesn't mean i can or should appropriate the First Nations tricksters for white use. I want to take care here to make jokes only on myself, and to embrace our own cultural construction of play (Lutz, in Keeshig-Tobias, Interview 85). So within fear, within these paradoxically split positions, the playfully spiritual is by definition possible and necessary. I'm offered another possible response than either an earnest, self-dramatizing effort to understand, or a plain giving in to silence: i can also laugh self-satirizingly, and that way rejoin myself in the creative.*

While i read such a multiple, transformative and self-subversive position for myself in "Penumbra," Annharte's "Mayan Moon," though it shares the strategy of transformative, double-meaning

structures with "Penumbra," is still more difficult to read, with its still more radical transformations and drawing of connections, working at deeper levels than the largely political, contemporary setting of "Penumbra." The complexity and transformative *power* of the main structuring image of "Mayan Moon," in which the escalators in a contemporary shopping mall shift repeatedly back and forth to the stairs leading up an ancient Mayan temple, are signalled in the opening image of reversal and return: "Running down up escalator/ Turnabout zip down tag." The jaunty rhythm of the line suggests to me the chaos (and as will become apparent, the joyful play) that could result from such a reversal of the established order, as the anxiety and restlessness of the mall break into the Native poet's own sense of pace and ease, her "shopper trance broken briefly" by the kids scrambling down the up escalator. She is "pissed off when foot is scrunched," but her "Mocassins keep coming undone" in any case, as if she already felt at odds with a sense of herself as a First Nations woman in these surroundings.

But already, as meaning multiplies and repeats, connections weaving more and more densely, the mall is also becoming the Mayan temple--a place, presumably, of comparative belonging and identification for the poet, at the same time as the mall itself still remains so alienating. As she arrives at the top of the escalator, completing her ascent,

The flat top looks ever flashy  
 Hazy ring edging around the moon  
 Making her princess entrance  
 About time she showed--Indian time  
 Sparkling glass tiara on tilt  
 Used tires on lawns turned inside  
 Out may grow wild flower gardens  
 Silver paint job hides a used look  
 Cut spiky like the tiara on her hair

The glitter of the mall's next floor also evokes an image of the moon rising over the flat top of the Mayan temple; and then the moon itself, its corona compared to the sparkling tiara, suggests an image of a princess making her entrance--and perhaps, by extension, of the Mayan virgins of a later stanza, who are presumably adorned in preparation for their sacrifice on the temple. This transformation of the crass commercialism of post-industrial society into the immutable repetitions of nature, and then into the patterns of ritual, is confirmed in the second image of such a transformation--and a bizarrely playful one

at that--by which the used tires, again transformed, turned inside out, become wild flower gardens. The transformative possibility touches even the most mundane objects, those most representative of spiritually-bereft, materially-preoccupied white society--and nothing is as it first seems.

And yet the transformation transforms again, and if the contemporary Western mall is transformed into a Mayan temple, the contemporary scene is also satirized as the superficial glitter that it is, each phrase seeming to refer both to the immediate scene and to several other images at once: the moon wears a tiara, but it is made of glass, not diamonds, and is "on tilt"--this last phrase perhaps also suggesting, returning to the mall scene, the noise and glitter of a pinball arcade, and of the modern youth cult in general which the mall represents, just as the flashy "flat top" may also suggest a faddish haircut, "cut spiky." Similarly, the "silver paint job [that] hides a used look" may suggest that even the moon is now the object of Western commercialism and colonization--its silver glow hiding, at this distance, both its own age, and its position as an object of human colonization. Or perhaps it is silver paint on the discarded tires turned gardens that hides *their* used look; or the present glitter of the mall that covers over older fads in decor and appeal; or yet again, in a self-satirizing moment, the poet's own efforts to hide her age--her hair is silvering, but she has it cut spiky in imitation of younger fads--as she too is influenced at least to some degree by the cults of mall and youth.

The stanza becomes a paradigm of the repeated shifts of meaning and reference that characterize the power of language in the poem--whether the actual words of the poem, or the cultural signs of the structures of mall and temple. In its shifts, language allows the possibilities of recapturing history in the sense of transcending a linear, uni-directional notion of time--"running down up escalator" suddenly becoming joyful, as much as disturbingly chaotic--and reentering "Indian time" (this time meant seriously as much as humorously). Language and other cultural signs are *the* human vehicle for connection with the eternal, as perhaps suggested in the lack of articles or possessive pronouns in the stanza, the lack of specificity as to exactly what each phrase is referring to: language can speak of particulars--the language of the poem grounded in the immediate details of the contemporary, always mutable and adaptable to the demands of the endless present--but in this very mutability, this capacity to reconstruct repeatedly

each new moment of the eternal present, language also participates in the transformations of the sacred. Thus the shopping mall is connected with pre-Contact spirituality and civilization, but it also remains simply a sign of the ostentatiously commercial. The poet, too, is potentially the moon moving through its cycles, or the participant in ancient Native ways that speak of history as cyclical and recuperable; but she is also (self-satirically) a grumpy shopper with sore feet, buying ways to disguise her too-intimate knowledge of time's one-way passage.

And so the joke, again, is on me, too, as my stolid sense of order is disrupted by the poet's movement down the up escalator, back in history, and repeatedly back and forth across the conventional boundaries between the spiritual and the mundane. I want to fix the mall just as a mall, or the Mayan temple as a Mayan temple, for godssake, but i cannot; i want to fix an Anishinabeg poet as a "Spiritual Indian," but she won't stay that, either, on her way to get her hair cut in a faddish, semi-punk style. Or similarly, my earlier self-conscious concern with the way my reading plays into the stereotype of the Exotic, Unknowable Indian, is suddenly turned back on me too, even my carefully sincere effort to "get it right" put back into spiritual linguistic play.

Similarly, after the subversion of the stereotype of First Nations people as simply, undifferentiatingly spiritual, the stereotype of the First Nations as a single, *political* identity is also subverted: the proposed transformative power of the poet's sense of continuity with an ancient tradition, is contrasted with the danger both that contemporary First Nations identity and politics are as superficial and as subject to semi-coercive fads, as contemporary white society is obedient to the cults of youth and fashion, and yet that the ancient tradition itself was perhaps also as coercive of the virgins who were sacrificed. The poet's "looks offend righteous instincts," presumably those of white shoppers in the mall, so that "it's so handy to carry sunglasses" as protection against white stares. But the sunglasses may also suggest the stereotypical reflective sunglasses worn by those wanting to pose as militant Native activists--after the kind of critique Jeannette Armstrong offers in *Slash* of AIM-style politics, with the militant Indian uniform and confrontational posturing. Here in "Mayan Moon," the poet objects to enforced Native solidarity and prescribed Native politics, in which she is turned into a female *type* significant only as she

falls in line with (male) activism, as she stays passively on the escalator as it moves her along, as she remains in the line of sacrifice victims climbing slowly to their deaths: "Pushed from behind into a left stance/ Keep your place in the rankfile girly/ The movement moves ahead together big mama." Contemporary First Nations politics and (i hesitantly add) some aspects of ancient practices are critiqued on feminist terms, for their *use* of women in the service of male-defined goals (also Fife, "Joy Harjo" 197).

Such politics and practice fit the poet as poorly as "these hightops"--which may be ankle-height mocassins, made after the traditional way by her aunt, but which are perhaps now part of the militant Indian uniform; or which could be part of the fad of more general Western youth, of the flat-top haircut, pinball arcade, hightop sneakers. "[The hightops] seem so baggy my foot keeps coming out," she complains, "My aunt made them for a bigfoot not me:" for a semi-mythical creature of the wilds, an undefinable, endlessly elusive myth, like the myth of the Spiritual Indian, or the Political Indian. Such ill-fitting mocassins, or sneakers, are not what the poet "should wear for grand entry," whether as the moon or as one of the women on the temple: the simplistic identifications that they symbolize do not fit her own negotiation of the relations of traditional and contemporary First Nations value and meaning.

Then, too, the poet's *actual* "return" to the Mayan temple, like her experience of the mall, like that of contemporary First Nations identities, is simultaneously a genuine moment of connection with transformative power, and a satiric encounter yet again with the intrusive commercialism of Western-style culture and tourism. Yet in the voice of the local tourguide (i think), catering to Western-style tourism, possibilities for old transformations are suggested even as the voice is soliciting further business: "Senorita, amiga gorda your siesta/ She is waiting by the temple, what next?" The humour of the pun on siesta--like the simultaneous humour and more serious significance of the earlier joke about Indian time--works as a powerful strategy of transformation: though the poet insists a few lines later that she travelled alone, not with any sister, perhaps the pun suggests that her spiritual sister(s), the women sacrificed centuries earlier, are waiting for her at the base of the temple where they fell to their deaths--are sources of connection with pre-Contact sacred ways, and allies in her resentment of male coercion. And then, too, perhaps her own siesta--her own death--is waiting for her by the temple, again with negative and positive

implications: she too might be the victim of Native (male?) sacrifice as her ancient sisters were ("keep your place in the rankfile girly"), but perhaps she has found a place of sleep or death with her spiritual sisters, has found a reconnection with the sacred that she could never find in the Western cult of the shopping mall. Similarly, the PA system, "Easy to impress me even about jumping off," presumably warns tourists of the danger of standing too near the edge on the top of the temple, but might also be both the domineering voice of the Native activist warning her against jumping out of line--against "thinking alone," for herself--and the voice, in earlier times, of some participant in the sacrifice, able to impress her with the need to jump even to her death, in fulfilment of the ritual.

"Only at your turn leap to the right," she warns--as she takes over instruction from the technologized (male?) voice of the loudspeaker--that is, jump to the right in accordance with notions of propriety in traditional Native ritual, rather than to the left in obedience to the leftwing politics of contemporary Native activism, with its emphasis on superficial, faddish solidarity, as easy to put on and off as sunglasses. And in the leap to the right, in fulfilment of the ritual and in solidarity with a deep, sacred conviction, the falling woman/women reconnects with the very beginnings of creation, becoming herself a creator--the muskrat who, in some First Nations traditions, created the world on the back of "a turtle napping" by diving deeper than any other creature and bringing "more mud on your way back up keemootch." She renews creation through her proper, self-directed performance of the ritual, renewing the mud on the turtle's back, turning the enforced passage up the escalator--or into line with Native politics, or up the temple steps--into a return, effected on her own terms, to the sacred: she goes down the up escalator--back in history, against fads of contemporary Native politics--and new life results from this chancing of chaos, this (as i guess it) trickster's action. The last word of the line--"keemootch," the glossary says, means "on the sly or sneaky" (80)--thus describes, in *Saulteaux/Cree*, the entire movement and spirit of the poem back and forth from the poet's contemporary cultural doubt, to the repeated, though never fixed, connections with traditional meanings and sacred values: the muskrat/woman/moon achieves this creative moment (self-)satirically and on the sly, despite all the coercive, controlling forces to the contrary. Over and over again, she sneakily transforms what seems like disaster and loss into a

connection with other, creative meanings beyond the enclosures of colonized, patriarchal, post-industrial experience, first satirizing both white and First Nations' efforts to control her, but then turning even the satire itself into a sacred practice.

The poem ends on a similarly "sly" note, as it shifts suddenly from the single long "sentence," running over several lines--in which the woman's fall becomes muskrat's dive into creation (rather than Eve's fall into death)--to the curt one-line call, "Say would you buy that order?" The line, recalling the slang expression, "do you buy that?"--do you believe it?--returns the poem abruptly to the contemporary order, in which all thought, action and material is valued above all in commercial terms: in an almost ridiculous juxtaposition, the mall mentality is called upon to evaluate the Mayan sacrifice and the cultural order that informs the sacrifice. Would you obey the order to jump? Do you believe the sacrifice really created new life? And then, too, in yet another switch, the "order" that is "bought" may also simply be an order of beer or spirits, as in a bar, as the poem offers "a sneaky hint of how it gets done"--how the virgins are convinced to jump: they "drown a wicked thirst/ Before they ride with jaguars/ The Amazon is full of them." Even alcohol is inscribed in this double, tricking way, as a connivance on the part of the sacrificers--those on the Mayan temple, and perhaps also the whites who sacrifice Native cultures to the colonial imperative--to numb the sacrificial victims to their fate; and yet it is also a potentially sacred substance, with ritual importance, allowing the women to ride with their gods, to connect with the spiritual.

And then, the curious throw-away quality of the last line--"The Amazon is full of them"--seems to say flippantly that sacrifices and sacrificial victims are as common as dirt, or as jaguars in the jungle, again subverting my stereotypical awe at spiritual issues while confirming the ubiquity of the spiritual in life. It denies, while raising, the possibility of reading the line as a lament as well, over just how many were lost, and continue to be lost, in drunken sacrifice to enforced Native practice, and possibly over how many Native people and nations were sacrificed to the same sort of colonizing project as is consuming the Amazon and the jaguars that live there. And yet again, the line could be read as a semi-celebratory, semi-defiant assertion that despite colonial effort, despite prescriptive Native politics, and despite the

alienation of the mall culture, the Amazon and First Nations cultures still survive, deeply embedded with the sacred, with the women who reaffirmed creation, or with the jaguars who represent a principal god of the Mayans: the poet can still connect with the sacred, despite the coercive effects of all of these influences.

The poem is thus constructed as a great field of shifting, contradictory, complementary meanings, repeatedly touching at the sacred possibilities within contemporary colonized experience, while also subverting spiritual stereotypes of First Nations people and practices. If the sacred by definition cannot be unequivocally affirmed in the thematic *content* of a poem that relies on the construction of language with which i began--as endlessly transformative, in Allen's definition, and thus as also repeatedly (self-) subversive, in Annharte's practice--the poem's *structure* as this complex field of interrelated and self-subversive meaning nevertheless places its discourse within the endlessly transforming, transformative realm of the sacred, informed by, and itself constructive of, human participation in creation. Cuthand and Annharte's poems thus construct the spiritual--like my construction of it as both linguistic and extra-linguistic--as both a *structure* simply of *simultaneous* multiplicity, but also a historically-informed *movement* of transformation by which these multiplicities are repeatedly collapsed and opened out again in new ways, so that even multiplicity itself, as a defining *characteristic* of the spiritual, is negotiable within the transformative *movement* and ongoing historical renewal of the spiritual. Cuthand and Annharte write the spiritual not so much in the singular word, text or story alone, as in the ongoing historical *interaction* of word and word, text and reader, story and story--and all of these with silence.



## Sticks

The rain turns into snow sometime in the night. I wake to utter silence the next morning, huge flakes still falling thickly, but the wind gone and the snow cradling the silence around the house, thick and fragile as the flakes themselves. After a ritual of coffee and toast, each breath i take a testing of the stillness, i force the front door open against the weight of the drifts, and head for the road. Branches have been blown down here and there, most now covered by the snow. But a few stick up at odd angles, clotted with snow on the windward side, bare on the lee.

I strip the snow from a maple branch, drag the stick behind me, listening to the slow crunch of my footsteps, the gentle slide of the branch cutting the snow. I turn and walk backward, watching the movement of the stick. The tip cuts a wavering line into the whiteness, the same as my hockeystick made when i was a kid back in Saskatoon, as i walked along the half shoveled sidewalks away from the house in the morning and back again in the afternoon.

The old house would moan with the winter's cold, each drop in the wind's temperature accompanied by the house's creaks and groans, as boards shrank into themselves and ice gathered in great leaf shapes on the windows. Beneath the hanging of the Japanese warrior, the floor would grow colder and colder, little knobs of ice forming on the heads of the floorboard nails, and a stiff, creeping draught moving through the room. The furnace would heave into sudden motion, and i would huddle in front of the register, wrought iron grate blackened with age, watching the warrior wafting slightly away from the wall, back again, with the furnace's blast, his endless movement to escape repeatedly frustrated. He was stuck there, anger frozen forever on his face, the fierce crispness of his red tassels never touched by any thaw. Just as my back was growing itchy from the register's heat, the furnace would sigh into stillness again, the warrior's efforts thwarted. His sword would fall again into painted suspension, and

the cold would rise at his feet once more.

"You said you could be here this afternoon!" Dad strode around the corner from the kitchen, Mum close behind, the frustration taut in her voice.

Dad turned to face her. "No, Ellen, I have several errands to run. I told you before."

"And I have work to do at the office. You have to be here to meet the delivery guy. God knows when he'll come." Their feet swirled past me, angry steps thudding dully on the rug. A thick Tibetan rug forty or fifty years old, rose-coloured field swirling with lines of blue, obscured now by their black shoes.

Dad continued into the hallway, heading upstairs. Their voices, increasingly agitated, drifted back downstairs. "Yeah, and I don't want to wait any more than you do," Dad was saying.

"Why did you say you'd be here, then? What's the point if you don't do what you say you will?" The ceiling creaked with their footsteps overhead, Dad's steps moving sharply from the bedroom to the bathroom. Mum's steps stayed in the bedroom, irritated pacing.

I heard the water running down the pipes from the bathroom. "This is your project, Ellen," Dad was shouting, his voice echoing slightly as if reverberating from the sink and tub. "You take care of it."

"No thanks to you!" Mum's voice tightened still further, her anger grinding out. The furnace was still off, but the warrior lifted suddenly in a draught, angling stiffly out from the wall, then falling limply back. Mum had left the door to the hallway open.

I slid my book closed and rose from the register, my legs pushing up against the cold stone of my stomach. My parents' voices grew louder as i reached the front hall. I pulled down my coat, yanked on boots and mittens, toque and scarf.

"I'm going to the rink!" I shouted up the stairs.

Passing through the front porch, i grabbed my hockeystick from behind the door, jammed a puck in my pocket. I reached for the door, then turned back to grab my skates as well, slinging them over my shoulder. The porch door slammed hard as it always did when it got so cold, the windows rattling brittly.

The snow squealed beneath my feet, and the wind caught the warmth harshly away from my mouth, searingly frigid on my skin. I pulled my scarf up over my nose and mouth, blinking cold tears from my eyes. I squirmed my shoulders deeper into my coat. My body felt solid and warm beneath its covering; my feet bit satisfyingly into the hard snow.

I crossed the street, pushing my hockeystick ahead of me, its heel carving a line through the looser snow at the edge of the walk. The line wavered back and forth, pushing the snow a little this way, a little that, separating tiny curves of snow one from the other, marking a division in the vast white spread. I curled my hand more firmly around the shaft, enjoying the sense of my hand's strength, the warmth of my fingers inside the mittens.

I tighten my hand on the stick now, then drop it in the snow and head back to my parents' house, here on Gabriola Island. The house is silent, except for the stirring of the cats when i enter. They form two long lines of fur, stretched one beside the other on the easy chair, their eyes slanting open when i come in, winking shut again. I stir up the fire in the stove, then wander into the kitchen. My parents have left a message on the phone machine while i was out: the snow has delayed their plane out of SeaTac in Seattle, and they won't be back until late today at the earliest.

I go back to the living room and check the fire again. I should have added more wood the first time, so i stuff several chunks in at odd angles to each other, close the stove door. The wood piled beside the stove is all cedar, except for a few small logs from the arbutus branch that was blown off the huge old tree back of the house last spring. It's beautiful wood. I run my hands over it, smoothing the lines, drawing my fingers over the dark, crinkled holes that seem characteristic of arbutus.

I pull out my penknife and begin.

When i got to the school rink, a collection of boys from my class were pummelling back and forth in a game of shinny, hooting and shouting with great puffs of frozen breath as they scrapped over a

ragged tennis ball. A couple of younger girls glided unsteadily on white skates, cutting small circles in one corner of the rink. When the game moved too near, they shoved immediately for the boards, clinging there until the boys moved away again.

I jammed my feet hurriedly into the brown leather skates, old hand-me-downs from my brother, wriggling my toes for warmth as i laced them quickly. I slipped uncertainly onto the ice, moving my puck slowly ahead of me along the boards. It bumped over a rough patch in the ice, slid to a halt. With a sudden surge of joy, i pushed hard against my skate blades, sped to catch the puck up on the back of my stick, backhanding it up against the boards. I skated for the ricochet, slapped it hard down the ice, where it slammed into the boards with a solid thud. Sprinting for the rebound, i slapped the puck again into the boards, and again, and again, relishing the reverberation of each blow as it shivered back up the shaft to my hands.

The boys' game swirled past me. As usual, they ignored me, unwilling to invite a girl into their game. I deked the puck back and forth on my stick, chasing its wavering line down the rink again, occasionally wristing it into the boards, pushing to catch the rebound. Then twist mid-stroke into a backwards glide, crossed over forward again, slicing an arc into the ice. I leaned the other way to cut a matching arc, sinuous line of my own body's speed.

After several lengths, i skidded to a stop near the rink entrance, drawing strained breaths in through the barrier of my scarf. The material clung wetly to my cheeks, and i yanked it down for several clean breaths before the cold settled in a hard ache in my lungs. I held my hand over my mouth, warming the air before sucking it in, and the ache in my chest faded. At the very edge of the ice, white against the boards' rough wood, little flakes of rime stood undisturbed, lace-work leaves of ice, each exquisit in their beauty.

After a minute, i looked up to see several girls from my class approaching the rink, figure skates slung over their shoulders, their coats matching red patches against the snow. Caught off guard, i felt a flush creeping into my face as Nancy nudged Lori, and they both looked at me.

"Hi, Carol," Nancy called.

"Hi," i answered cautiously. I rubbed one skate in short strokes back and forth on the ice, brief line etched deep into the surface.

"Been here long?" Nancy was surveying the ice, her eyes following the boys' game as it moved over to the far boards. Lori was kicking the toe of her boot into the packed snow, digging a little hole. Chunks of snow flew out onto the ice, pinging off my skates. Her fluffy blue mittens stood out against the red of her coat.

"Uhuh, just got here." I slid back a foot or two.

The girls sat in the rink entrance, their feet sprawled on the ice, as they put on their skates. Nancy glanced up at my brown boys' skates, her mouth tight, then leaned down again to tighten the laces on her own. I stood watching them another second, then moved off with the puck. I slapped it into the corner, hoping for a double rebound, first off one angle, then the other, but the shot hadn't been strong enough, and the puck dropped heavily to the ice. I retrieved it, skated it up the rink again.

As i turned back, Nancy and Lori were gliding onto the ice. They turned immediately back for the boards as several of the boys chased the tennis ball between them, knocking Lori down.

"Yah, dumb girls, can't even skate!" Mike taunted, his small blue eyes snapping as he slapped the ball back into the press of boys. His khaki coat had snow smeared into the elbows and seat where he'd slid across the ice.

"You aren't even on skates!" Nancy shot back, but Mike was oblivious, back in the midst of the boys. I glided past Lori as she got back to her feet, and the two girls followed me, skating the boards behind the empty net. I turned back at the next corner, deaked towards the net, backhanded it in as i crossed in front.

As i retrieved the puck, the girls had stopped in the corner, and were laughing at something. I skated backwards away from the net, drawing the puck with me, just as one of the boys cleared the tennis ball back up the rink towards us, and the pack followed it, boots slipping on the ice as they raced each other for the ball. I skidded to an awkward stop, stepping out immediately again, looking up just as the ball dribbled past the net. Mike reached it first, pulling it close, but instead of passing it back to the pack,

he wristed it into the corner, just missing the girls.

"Ha, ha, chickens!" He laughed as they cringed from the ball's path.

The game moved back down the ice. I stopped at the net, pulling off my mittens to retie my scarf. Lori stood glaring down at the ice, then nudged Nancy, and they glided over to me.

"So, Carol," Lori said, "do you consider yourself a member of the weaker sex?"

It was a trap, either way.

"Uh, yeah, sure." I twisted the stick in my bare hands, its corners cold and sharp without my mittens. The blade moved back and forth on the ice, leaving little piles of snow each side. Some drops of blood were frozen several layers down in the ice--doubtless the product of a little league fracas--and several layers below that, i could see the shadow of more blood from a still earlier game.

"Well, I'm not. Boys are the weak ones!" Lori laughed triumphantly. She skated close past me, kicking my stick as she tugged Nancy with her. They headed down the rink towards the boys.

I pulled my scarf back up and fought my mitten back on, shaking my hand to get feeling back in my fingers. I couldn't feel the stick in my hands. I stayed a few minutes longer, then changed back into my boots.

Regaining the streets after the synagogue field, the hockeystick line i had made in the snow had been largely erased by some other walker, except for the odd remnant here and there, at the very edge of the snow-packed path. The cold was beginning to get to my toes, their numbness a sign of the pain to come. I began to trot, racing the heel of my stick back and forth, trying to rejoin the few scattered arcs of the line. I held my free hand over my face again, pulling the frigid air in with difficulty. Even so, my nose was beginning to burn as well, my nostril hairs frozen stiffly together. I concentrated on the line of my hockeystick, the waver it made with each step i took.

Suddenly, a mittened hand reached out and grabbed the shaft of the stick, wrenching the blade into the snowbank beside the path. I was looking up into a boy's broad freckled face, his eyes shocking, venomous, as the butt of the stick slammed into my body, the blade jammed in the deep snow. The boy tried to wrench the stick from my hands, and i hung on desperately, gasping for a breath that wouldn't

come. Throwing my body into the pull, i yanked the stick back, freeing it from the snow and the boy alike. I held it across my body, trying tried to move past him, my boots filling with snow as i stepped into the snowbank. The boy moved with me, blocking my way.

Slowly, his eyes never leaving mine, he reached for the stick with both hands, his mittens scraping over my chest as they closed around the stick. He didn't pull, just held the stick, glaring down at me through my glasses. The wind whistled through the pale air, filtering icily into my coat, chilling my sweaty skin. My lungs ached again: my scarf had fallen from my face, exposing my cheeks to the wind.

The boy's face twisted into a sneer. "Hey, four-eyes," he drawled at last, a tiny gobbet of spit flying out through the steam of his breath.

He tugged on the stick, forcing me still closer to him. I could feel the heat of his breath on my face, grotesque intimacy.

"What's a girl doing with a hockey stick, eh, four-eyes?" He jerked on the stick again.

Still i said nothing.

He shot his arms forward suddenly, so that i had to stagger back to stay upright. The corners of the stick bit into my hands even through my mittens.

"You got a brother? Named Chris?" He kept his grip on the stick, the threat in his eyes undiminished by the lank shock of hair that dropped into his face.

"No," i said.

"Yeah, you do." He shook the stick so that i jerked slightly back and forth. I tried to pull it away from him again, but he thrust it hard against me, slamming me painfully in the chest, my coat no protection. "I've seen you with him."

"He's not my brother." I finally realized who the boy meant. "He lives next door." I didn't much like Chris next door, but my admission suddenly became a betrayal of him even so.

"Next time you see him, you tell him, I want to see him. I'm going to beat him up." He yanked on the stick again. "You hear me, four-eyes?" He pushed his face close into mine.

Then he let the stick go entirely, and my boots slipped on the snow as i struggled to keep my

balance, continuing to hold the stick across me as if it might still somehow lend protection.

The boy stepped aside, staring me down as i passed. Hot, useless tears steamed down my face.

"Crybaby," he spat at my back.

I ran the rest of the way home, wiping furiously at the tears that wouldn't stop, dropping my stick and skates in the front porch, then bursting into the house. In the safety and warmth of the house, sheer rage forced the tears out harder than ever, little puddles gathering on my steamed up glasses as i scrabbled angrily at my boot laces. My body was chilled through and i couldn't stop shivering.

When the laces finally gave way to my efforts, i sat still, trying to regain control. In that moment the house was silent, peaceful, the furnace dormant, no one moving about.

But suddenly the floor overhead creaked heavily, followed by a dull thud. Mum's footsteps, dragging something. She appeared at the top of the stairs, pulling their double mattress upturned to slide unsteadily on its edge. Her face was set in a dull anger, her fine-boned hands seeming too small for the task she'd set herself. She tugged the mattress again, just enough to tip it over the lip of the stairs. Slowly, she eased it down, bumping into the hall.

She flung the front door open, the breeze sharp on my feet, and dragged the mattress into the front porch, kicking a couple of hockey sticks out of the way to prop it against a wall. She marched back upstairs.

I crouched for a time in front of the register in the dining room, waiting for the furnace to come back on. When it did, the warrior returned to his task, flying out from the wall, forced back by gravity, flying out again. As i watched, i examined his grip on the sword, his hands oddly small and plump for the size of the weapon, as if beneath the vigour of his stance lay another, more feminine side--though his anger infused both layers. The horse reared behind him, sharing his rage, its hooves seeming only inches from the warrior's head, as if it was as likely to be attacking him as defending: i was uncertain which.

The hanging fell again to stillness as the furnace cut out, and i wandered into the kitchen, back out through the hall, into the kitchen again, the dining room. My feet pulsed with the relief of renewed warmth, my back pleasantly scratchy again from the heat.



I picked up my book, set it down again, and i was wandering back into the kitchen when the doorbell rang. Mum's steps hurried down the stairs and we reached the front door together. Mum grabbed the knob just ahead of me, pushing me back.

"I'll take care of it, Carol. Go on."

A man's voice spoke; Mum answered. Then the man went out, returning with a large object--a mattress wrapped in plastic, smaller than the one Mum had left in the porch. He went out again, brought back another. Then two sets of box springs as well, cramming them into the front hall.

Mum stood staring at the mattresses, hands on her hips. Then she grabbed one, wrenching it around until it was just angled onto the stairs. She started slowly up, dragging the thing behind her. Halfway up the red-carpetted stairs, the mattress slipped a little, Mum only just managing to brace herself to stop it, swearing at the thing.

I stood at the bottom of the stairs, then grabbed my coat and boots and went out again. In the porch, i yanked my hockey stick out from the weight of the discarded mattress. I dropped a tennis ball on the walk and guided it carefully into the back yard.

Annie's feet were just visible in the entrance hole of a little snow house she'd made beneath the lowest branches of the spruce tree. She'd piled snow up to form walls on two sides of the structure, the low swoop of the branches comprising the other two sides. Then, she'd managed to angle a slender slab of snow across the walls to make enough of a roof for the structure that it became quite warm inside after you'd been in there awhile.

Annie backed out of the house, then stood, dusting the snow off her mittens. It was pebbled into their wool, coming off with a small spray of pellets.

"What're you doing?" i asked.

"Nothing, now. I'm going in." Annie stomped through the snow to the sidewalk. "I'm freezing."

"Aw, c'mon. Let's play hockey, okay? It'll warm you up."

"Don't want to."

"I won't hit too hard, i promise." It was awful, begging your younger sister to play with you.

"Uhuh."

A sudden surge of rage gripped me again. "Well, fuck you, then!" I turned away, my eyes stinging.

She went in, leaving the outside back door swinging in the wind.

I dribbled the tennis ball up and down the back walk a few times, but it was boring. I put it back in my pocket and ran back up the walk intending to go in, but stopped and stood holding the stick loosely across my thighs, looking at Annie's house. The wind blew sharply over my cheeks, the cold pinching.

I dropped the ball again, and shot it a little ways down the walk again, and back again, then wristed it over the snow towards the entrance to of Annie's house. It missed, banging off the wall instead, knocking some snow off. I retrieved the ball, slapped it at the opening again, missing again. More snow fell.

Then suddenly, I was hacking at Annie's house with the stick itself, the packed snow chipping and powdering, chunks flying off in all directions. Heat boiled through my chest, the wind's slice conquered by my fury. A deep knotch appeared in one wall, then broke through entirely. I was a warrior, beating back enemies, untouchable, consumed by berserker rage.

I turned to the second wall, digging and hacking. And then finally I swung my stick up over my head, down through the branches, and into the roof, still just balanced between a remnant of the wall and one of the low branches. The house caved in entirely, crumbling into a pile of broken ice. The sheltering branches swung crazily in a hard gust of wind.

I stood breathing hard for a couple moments, a few tears leaving cold trails down my cheeks. I wiped my nose with my coat sleeve. The sky was a brittle arc overhead; even the trees seemed fragile. I looked back down at the house, pile of broken snow, and then turned with a sudden renewal of my fury and ran inside.

Still in my coat and boots, I dragged my hockeystick upstairs. I sat on my bed, the tears starting again, burning my face, blurring the line of the stick where it lay across my lap. A line of mucus strung

down from my nose, hanging heavily to my coat sleeve. I rubbed it out.

My vision a blur of colours from the tears pooled in my glasses, i went to my desk and got my jackknife. I sat down on the bed with the stick again. Slowly, i carved into the shaft of the hockeystick, starting first with just a notch in one corner, then turning the stick, notching it again, the blade biting deep into the laminated wood. I carved deeper still, layering slice upon slice, trying to carve right through, cut the stick off. A hot spot was forming on my finger, on the palm of my hand: it was hard going. The stick still wouldn't give. I switched to another spot. Then i started another.

My face dried and cooled as i cut, notch after notch, a whole line of them down one angle and another, then joining the notches, the lines swirling down the stick in a lacework dance of movement. My hands grew tired, blisters rising on my skin, but still i carved at the wood, absorbed in the pattern.

It is several hours later when i rise from the chair by the stove, setting the arbutus wood aside, a half-finished face glaring from one curve. I haven't yet decided what the face will show, it's easier to leave it angry, leave all the cutmarks showing, but i could smooth it out. I pad across the carpet to the bathroom. There in the hallway, just opposite the bathroom door, the warrior hanging falls the length of the wall, his sword still raised for the blow, the horse still rearing, to strike, or to protect. Nothing moves. The warrior's hands are oddly small and soft to be holding such a long blade. But now i see for the first time their strength as well, as they hold the sword endlessly back from the blow. The anger on the warrior's face is arrested, too, perhaps just at the moment before he lowers the sword back from the furious impulse that drove it up there, before he smoothes his face into a gentler emotion once more.

#### Chapter Four:

"And As a Result We All Get Strong":

*The Book of Jessica*

Having moved from an examination of First Nations narratives as emotional events and then as spiritual ones, to an examination of the theory of language that informs my reading of these constructions, i want now to move back to the issue of narrative, examining narrative not on the basis of its construction of the *simultaneity* of difference and similarity, but on the basis of the *history(-ies)* it constructs. This issue of history has clearly run through all the preceding discussions of self and story and language--as carried out in the genres of autobiography, the novel and poetry--the First Nations texts themselves underwritten with both an anger at the history of colonization, as it has been written in experience and words alike, and a desire then to rewrite history as a more inclusive discourse, looking backward and forward at once. Not only do each of the discussions in the previous chapters constitute different approaches to these basic issues of anger and healing--of the individual and the community's relation to history--but the critical genre i am adopting here also constitutes yet another effort at rewriting the history of colonization, as it is played out in the exercise of my (white) critic's power to interpret (First Nations) texts and mediate between them and other potential readers. But finally, in this chapter on the *The Book of Jessica*, i wish to address the issue of history more directly, examining how the structure of this multi-generic work, transgressing conventional generic categories, provides another opportunity to transgress conventional history as well, and to enter instead into several other processes of history in which the First Nations can actively participate.

The central issue in the question of one's access to history is clearly *power*--the power of self-determination both as historical beings and as participants in the contemporary field of power relations--

but also as spiritual beings. Indeed, as Maria Campbell (Métis) argues in *The Book of Jessica*, power and history are intimately connected, in that having any of these kinds of power is dependent upon knowing one's history: commenting on her frustration with trying to educate her co-author Linda Griffiths (Scottish/Welsh/ ?) in their *shared* history as conquered peoples, despite their present positions as members of opposing (white versus Métis) power groups, she continues,

I felt like what you guys [Griffiths and director Paul Thompson] were saying was that you wanted magic, you wanted power, but not history. But to me there was no separation, I didn't see how you could separate power, spirituality, sacred things, songs and stories from starvation, hunger, the taking away of land, because you can't. (35)

Thus the play *Jessica*--itself a retelling of the history of Maria Campbell's life, including events already recounted in *Halfbreed* and others not--becomes the occasion for a discussion, in the commentary that precedes the play, of broader historical issues. The historical concerns raised in the play, in connection with Jessica's difficult halfbreed place in history, are further complicated in the commentary, their effects broadened from the individual level of the play to a communal and perhaps national level as they are argued between the two women who created the play. As Griffiths' commentary--itself interrupted by Campbell's and Griffiths' conversations and arguments about events in the play's history--enlarges and informs the historical discussion couched in the form of the play itself, the work's multi-generic structure results in a construction of history as multiple and contested (Chester and Dudoward, n.p.). The genre of the play is opened out to new meanings by the essay preceding it, and then even the essay is interrupted by conversations in which events and interpretations concerning the history of the play's development are questioned, reformulated and questioned again. Just as each woman, from opposite sides of the cross-cultural debate, offers differing versions of events, and these differences are not particularly reconciled into sameness, nor is any one voice or generic form allowed to hold all of the "truth." The effect is that in its multi-generic structure, the work is itself modelling the multiple actions and interactions of history not as "stark and unredeemable," but as an ongoing, multiple process of healing, forgiveness and spirit (Grant, "Contemporary" 125).<sup>1</sup>

And yet, at the same time as history is written, like spirituality, as an unending, multiple process

of interaction between constantly changing differences and similarities, the two women also share certain basic approaches to history, even in this cross-cultural, cross-historical situation: this discussion--this reconstruction of history (-ies)--is driven above all by both Campbell *and* Griffiths' *anger* at history, at their own personal histories, at each other's place in history, at the place of their respective families and communities in history, and finally at history in its broadest span over millennia of accumulative effect and change. Or more precisely, they share an anger at their conventional *exclusion from* the discourses of history, as women, as the descendants of "conquered" peoples (also Tompkins 117-18). Thus, despite the fact that their anger at each other does repeatedly threaten the historical process of the play's development, anger also functions in a positive way, given a *historical* significance as it serves at least as the beginning point for these women's claiming of a participatory right to history--just as it is the beginning point, and constant refrain, of the immediate story of the play's creation. "She came out [to The Crossing, Campbell's home] to talk about that damn play," Campbell exclaims in response to the opening page of Griffiths' commentary,

she wants to have it published. She's all crippled up from whatever happened and I still feel like some Siamese twin with her. I want her to go away, to leave me alone, but we're by the river at The Crossing and she's dipping her toes in the water and I hear myself saying, 'Let's tell the story of what happened, if we do that then maybe we'll be free of the whole thing, heal everything.' And I kick myself, 'What did I just say? Who could stand to open it all again? Am I crazy?' (13)

Though, several years earlier, they had parted with acrimony following the play's opening run, it is their anger at each other, and their desire to heal it, that prompts Griffiths and Campbell to re-engage with their shared history surrounding the making of the play. By extension they are also moved, by their desire for healing, to re-engage with the various other histories that have touched their interaction--and thereby to rewrite the nature of history itself.

As in Chapter One, where individual emotional healing was shown to depend upon the historicizing capacity to re-examine our lives (Campbell examining hers, me examining mine) and to re-tell our stories, here cross-cultural healing is again a historical, historicizing process. Through this process, history is constructed in a similar way as, in Chapter Two, i constructed the spiritual in cross-cultural circumstances, as the balancing negotiation amongst stories, and in Chapter Three, even as potentially

(self-) contradictory, (self-) satiric, but nevertheless still spiritual. History is constructed as an inclusive field of the interacting movements, changes, desires and effects of individual and communal action, in which the power and effect of all such movements and desires are recognized, and the individual participates not just as an intellectual being, but as an (angry) emotional and a spiritual one as well--as herself an equally interactive, (self-) conflictive, processive and power-ful identity. The stereotypical movement by which the conquered of history are "feminized" (*because* conquered) as irrational, emotional, and superstitious,<sup>1</sup> is made instead a paradigm for the re-inclusion of all these elements--and the people stereotypically defined by them, women, First Nations and First Nations women alike--as historically valid. History itself is thus written as multiple in this sense as well--not simply as multi-vocal, but showing even these varying voices as themselves multiple, so that history occurs on all these levels: emotional and spiritual, as well as intellectual (Rich 18). Like individual identity, like language, history is written as partaking in structure and effect in the multiple shifts and meanings of the spiritual.

In the commentary, this construction of history is particularly emphasized in the inclusion of portions of the dialogues (and arguments) Campbell and Griffiths had over both the play and the commentary: the dialogue, echoing the spoken format implied in the script of the play, evokes the specific historical situation of an oral exchange,

"sorting out one's thoughts even while they are being thought. . . . Dialogue, as the spoken voice, creates some of the sense of performance, the dynamic that lies at the heart of drama, and perhaps also at the heart of human relationships. (Chester and Dudoward, n.p.)

The effect is to site the discussion of history within a performance of its actual making as a negotiated and shifting discourse (or discourses), motivated as much by the anger the women feel for each other--by the immediate issues of their personal and emotional interaction--as by the larger issues of race and politics that are usually identified as historically important. The nature of time itself is shifted from the linear one which authorises conventional Western historiography, where history is written simply as past events, to a non-linear one in which history is always an engagement with the present and the future as well, the *performance* of its present (re-)making highlighted over the simple chronology of past events: the distinction between history and historiography is in essence collapsed, so that they become simultaneous and mutually

informative events.

The structure of the play *Jessica* itself also involves a similar angry process of recouping and re-performing history, particularly in the individual, autobiographical way already discussed in connection with *Halfbreed*: like Maria in *Halfbreed*, here Jessica can come into her present power and identity only by retracing her own angry, painful history. In this context, her history is already changing from the conventional construction of autobiography, as the history of the individual as understood in a humanist, secular sense, itself drawing on the history of the European cult of the individual. The play and its autobiographical movement are constructed as spiritually-informed genres instead, as Jessica draws on the support and knowledge of the spirits of her several cultural heritages, Cree and Celtic, to reconstruct and recoup her life story. *Jessica* thus rewrites history in the sense that it is a deliberate rewriting of *Halfbreed*: it is Maria Campbell's act of taking her life story out of the controlling hands of a white editor and the limiting paradigms of the (white-invented) genre of autobiography--her reclaiming of the power to tell her own story, in her own, Métis, spiritual terms of power and meaning.<sup>2</sup>

And yet even this reclaiming is a frustratingly difficult, "impure" process for Campbell, when the white actress/writer Griffiths (and to a lesser extent, the white director Paul Thompson) is so intimately and maddeningly instrumental to the process. The story of the play's development, as it came together over weeks of Griffiths' researching Campbell's life, following her around, listening to her stories, meeting people important to her--and then Griffiths' improvising a re-enactment of those stories and experiences under Campbell's and Thompson's eyes--is the story of Campbell's constant desire genuinely to give herself and her (his-)stories in order for Griffiths to get Jessica's story "right," and yet Campbell's simultaneous need, again and again, to protect herself from Griffiths' potentially threatening, alien gaze. As Campbell watched Griffiths struggle with the pain of Campbell's own life, and Griffiths' efforts to work out how to convey it in a play, Campbell would sometimes see

my mother in [Griffiths], my mother kneeling in front of this statue [of the Virgin Mary]. A statue with white skin, and black hair, and empty-blue eyes, and then she and my mother and the Virgin Mary would merge. I'd want to take her, and hold her, and rock her, and sing songs to her, I wanted to heal her. Everytime I'd feel like that, she'd jump on the stage and she'd play it all back, and I'd stand there feeling like she'd stolen my thoughts. She'd just take it all. (15)



Campbell and Griffiths' struggle for power over the story--for power over history, as spoken in the genres of the play and its commentary--must necessarily be re-enacted as a parallel to, and perhaps an exorcism of, Campbell's ongoing struggle with her contradictory white and Native heritages; but at the same time, Griffiths' involvement still represents yet another instance of white intrusion into Campbell's efforts to reclaim power over her own history--to regain historical power.

*And then, i (Scottish/English/Welsh) have to address the third level of this discussion: my own rewriting of history, here in this thesis which is so deeply inscribed with my struggle to rewrite the genre in a way that allows me to write the kind of history i am reading in The Book of Jessica: one that also includes me, as well as these First Nations texts. If i define this history as having to be spiritually- and emotionally-based, if it is going to be genuinely inclusive and valuing, the trouble throughout this (troubled) thesis has been how to write such a history in a genre that, as i suggested in Chapter One, explicitly expunges the spiritual and the emotional from its authoritative discourses.*

*The history (-ies) modelled in The Book of Jessica, as in the other First Nations texts i have read, are non-linear, constructed as both circular, and deeply interactive and relational--as always present, subject to repeated rewriting here and now as the teller searches out, first in one context, then in another, a field of influences and connections back and forth and back again in time, circling repeatedly back to the demands of a present that seeks to be healed (Maracle "Skyros Bruce" 87-88; Silberman 114-15). I grapple with the difficulty of de-lineating, in this most linear of genres, what is explicitly constructed as non-linear, and so at the same time as i have been searching for ways to subvert this linear imperative, my own critical discourse throughout this thesis has nevertheless also been a struggle to bring these interactive elements into line, when they simply are not going to come into line.*

*So my own history here, like Griffiths' and Campbell's histories, is also fuelled with a deep and (in this genre) inherently inscribed anger at entrapment within a linear, anti-spiritual time and medium: i am put into angry historical crisis with myself--with my own critical discourse--just as Campbell and Griffiths are with themselves. As they struggle over the genre of the play and its commentary, i struggle over the genre of this thesis. In the same movement as i am reaching to write a new valuing of these histories, my own discourse by definition is undermining my effort, is devaluing what i am reaching to value: i shrink away from my desire to affirm the spiritual and the emotional, knowing how "unprofessional" (unprofessorial) and uncomfortably personal these statements sound. I am caught in the bind that Linda Hogan describes, saying that whites "want their own life, their own love for the earth, but when they speak their own words about it, they don't believe them" (75); or as Lee Maracle puts it, still more simply, "you [white people] have been cheated of your significance" ("Writing" n.p.). And so in some ways, in spite of myself, i continue to write here a self-hating, anti-historical discourse.*

*This is the crisis of this uncertainly cross-cultural, cross-generic thesis: that if, as i posit as the basis of my entire discussion, cross-cultural communication can occur even against the political, historiographic and epistemological power gradients, my challenge to myself as i near the end of this thesis is that, as "proof" that i really have learned something cross-culturally--i really have undergone a transformation, rejoined history, forgotten myself and "become something else as a way of responding to the gauntlet thrown down by imperialism and its antagonists"--i must be able to say something here that i couldn't say at the beginning of this thesis, this history: i have to be able to say something that was once unsayable in the genres and discourses of white academic or white lesbian (etc.) cultures (Said, "Representing" 225). I must be able to write a spiritual (his-)story.*

But in *The Book of Jessica*, this history, this autobiography, written in the (at least) double voices of Campbell and Griffiths alike, is constructed not as a pure, uni-vocal coming to identity--whether the fixed,

unified identity of the hegemonic Western "individual," or the paradigmatic identity of a nation<sup>4</sup>--but as a difficult and necessary process of the constant negotiation and renegotiation of power and healing both within and between people. Communal history is deliberately written as comparable to--and perhaps deriving from--the development and continued self-negotiation of the individual, while the individual's processes of change and healing are deliberately written as comparable to--and perhaps deriving from--the ongoing processes and power struggles of communal history (Maracle, "Writing" n.p.). For example, Campbell repeatedly insists that Griffiths recognize her own history, as a woman of Gaelic-Welsh descent, as a member of a conquered people--as much as Campbell is as a Métis--not simply because the analogy will lend Griffiths a way to personalize Campbell's oppression, but because it also lends an understanding of why many white newcomers to Canada, fleeing their own oppression, could then repeat such oppression by imposing it on the Natives:

While you were being overwhelmed with my history and my oppression [Campbell says], you were making me feel like it was exclusively mine. I couldn't understand why you didn't know your own history, never mind the magic and power stuff. My great grandfather was a Scot, hundreds of thousands of his people had starved in Scotland, Ireland and Wales, not even six hundred years ago [. . .] They starved to death, and when they left they died in masses on the ships coming over, many of them had been burned as witches, tortured [. . .] the history of your pain and all the things that happened to your people was exactly the same as our history. I couldn't understand why you refused to look at that. It seemed that that would be a meeting place for us [. . .] The same conqueror who had taken my grandfather's land away, outlawed his culture, did the same to my grandmother here, on this land. Then I think, 'How could people who had been conquered in that way, come here and do exactly the same thing to Indians?' That's when I started to understand that when you're oppressed, it's easier to become the oppressor, you turn on your own. Just like walking into Indian Affairs and seeing guys there implementing things that will hurt their own people. (35-36; also Campbell, Interview 59-60)

National "psychology" and behaviour is made comparable to individual psychology and behaviour, with the effect of creating a new way of writing national histories: if *Halfbreed* began to discuss the processes by which an individual can heal herself of the injuries of oppression, here in *The Book of Jessica*, the discussion is extended to examining how nations--both oppressed and oppressive--can also heal themselves: it is extended from examining autobiography as a process, specifically a corrective process of healing, to examining national histories as processes which may also reflect the coping mechanisms arising out of individual trauma, but which can then also be rewritten with a similarly corrective, healing

as the autobiography can achieve.<sup>5</sup> The play itself, like the cross-cultural power struggles that structure the historical processes modelled in the play's commentary, begins with Jessica caught in an internal power struggle between her several selves, her divergent histories. Her allegiance to and contact with the traditional spiritual ways, and her own being and sanity, are under threat from her sense of the incongruity of these ways with her experience of the contemporary, white-dominated world:

I'm not an Indian [she objects], I'm not white, I'm a Halfbreed. I live in a white world full of filing cabinets and common sense. The years go by and everyone around me is making decisions and calming down, and my life just gets weirder . . . no, it's worse than that . . . waves and waves and waves of fear, I'm drowning and I'm cracking apart. (121)

Living at least in part on these spiritual terms--these terms which render the everyday, filing cabinet aspects of her life increasingly weird and frightening--she must somehow reconcile her apparently opposing cultural and spiritual heritages. Even the old ways have to be flexible to current reality, and so Vitaline, Jessica's teacher-elder, starts Jessica on a ceremony which integrates both white and traditional Native elements: tobacco and sage are burned in accordance with Métis tradition, but non-traditionally, it is Jessica's suitcase--containing her walkman, scarves and high heels--that is made her sacred bundle (121-22). Similarly, for the first time the Unicorn--representative of the pre-Christian, "native" ways of Jessica's Scottish-Celtic ancestors--joins the Native spirits attendant to the ceremony: the Unicorn is "what's been missing" in Jessica's spiritual development thus far, "part of her power. Part of her blood" (125).<sup>6</sup>

Recognizing that at this moment of impasse in Jessica's spiritual life, "she can't go forwards, and she can't go back," the spirits decide that in this ceremony, it is they who will "take her back" (124) in a final effort to get her to balance all the spirits and powers that comprise her identity.

Each one of us will come to her in our own time [Bear says to Vitaline]. She has to find a way to swallow what we have to teach. But you know the risk, power doesn't lie with us alone. As she goes backwards, you have to be the one to catch her, you have to keep her mind clear. It will be a shadow dream of what has happened. (125)

Ceremony and history--both relational processes of connection-making--are each made a part of the other, the ceremony functioning as a route to re-enter and reclaim history, and history made subject to the spiritual, sacred impetus of the ceremony: in ceremony, history is explicitly constructed as both governed by, and itself a source of, spiritual power and healing, and thus history is reclaimed as something

available to such traditional *Native* constructions as the ceremony--and therefore to contemporary Native practitioners of these ceremonies--rather than being deliberately separated from the (then devalued) ceremonial.

In the framing story of the play's development, history and ceremony are likewise interfused. If Campbell has agreed to share her personal history with Griffiths for the sake of the play, not only must Griffiths likewise acknowledge *her* own history, but this exchange of histories must necessarily also involve an exchange of ceremonies. Campbell takes Griffiths to a Native/Métis ceremony as part of Griffiths' education, and in return for her gifts of history and ceremony--of potentially healing power--Campbell expects also to learn something of Griffiths' "ceremonial" practices (my term), in the sense that she has agreed to enter this project in the first place in order to learn the theatrical "process." The connection between ceremony and theatre is not a simple correlation, however, even if Campbell speaks of the play *Almighty Voice*, which first inspired her interest in theatre as a possible tool for Métis communal action, in terms which suggest that theatre can closely resemble ceremony in its structure and effect:

In that production of *Almighty Voice* I saw something really powerful happen, something that educated, that healed, that empowered people; it was fun and it was magical. It was a play that could be performed in a back alley, in a community hall or in a clearing in the bush [. . .] I was desperate for skills and tools to help make change. (16)

Similarly, when Griffiths accompanies Campbell to the Native ceremony, Griffiths recognizes the theatrical elements in the ceremony--elements which seem essential to the ceremonial process of historical relation--but she is not certain they are the same (28-29). At times, Griffiths also speaks of her part in her own European-originated theatrical process in terms of her interaction with the "theatrical gods" (14), and there are times when the theatrical process moves very close to actual ceremony as a response to and participation in history--as for example in Griffiths' improvised incantation to the Goddess, in her dance with the scarves, which both she and Campbell agree was the perfect healing response to Griffiths' re-enactment of Campbell's rape (46-47). But all the same, Campbell and Griffiths ultimately agree that theatre is not simply another version of ceremony, and does not necessarily replicate the healing response

of ceremony to history, despite its clear power; the clearest conclusion they can come to is that, "No one knows what the theatre is, and no one knows if it's sacred or not," but that all the same--likening the notion of the god of the white theatre to the god of the Métis fiddle players--however capricious the god, he still comes from a spiritual place, and thus a dangerous, if potentially healing, one (44).

The difference between ceremony and theatre is never made explicit, but it is clear from the commentary that the theatrical process alone somehow fails both Campbell's and Griffiths' emotional, historical needs to heal their shared anger and self-hatred. On Campbell's part, she never does in fact learn the "theatrical process" Thompson had promised she would learn in exchange for offering her life story as the subject of a play--she never receives the gift of history and ceremony in return for her own historical and ceremonial gifts--and on both Campbell's and Griffiths' part, rather than finding themselves healed and quiet when their immediate roles in the theatrical process have been completed with the close of the play's opening run, they go away angrily and do not speak to each other for several years, each harbouring an anger and a bewilderment concerning the other's part in this not-quite-ceremonial process. The process for them seems only to have gone as far as opening historical wounds--to have evoked anger thus far only as a potential threat to history in the same way as it has been for a white culture trying to forget its oppressed/repressed origins--and not to have continued on to heal them again. Instead, it is really the *multiple, historical* processes which Griffiths and Campbell model in *The Book of Jessica* itself--and not the theatrical process alone--which ultimately leads to a new healing for both of them.

*But if i write myself as thus disempowered, silenced even by my own writing, i make the same move as Campbell, and ultimately Griffiths, make to open a space for themselves in history: i draw on the power of anger at my crisis to open an emotional dialogue with the discourses of history. Reading The Book of Jessica, i grow furious all over again at how my own writing, so patriarchal in structure, excludes me, robbing me of the capacity to write my woman's power in a language that is not already anti-feminist in its oppositional, linear, unitary structuring of history. I feel cheated that because of the insistence, in current language theory, on the separation of the sign from its "significance," it feels as if my academic culture's paradigms refuse me the chance to affirm my value as a woman, as sacred, as part of creation--as part of history (-ies). I support whole-heartedly the (feminist, anti-racist?) rejection of essentialist definitions of gender and racial identities, and yet i sometimes feel that, in such a rejection, certain kinds of values and meanings--certain histories--are lost: sacred meaning is lost.*

*I mean that--and i cringe again and again from saying this, knowing its inappropriateness here--reading The Book of Jessica, i am angry again that in academic culture, and in mainstream culture in general, i am denied a great variety of strategies of self-validation: that for example, i do not get to celebrate, like Helen, the sacred power of my woman's body, to celebrate my capacity to create life and spirit. Even within my women-centred, lesbian*

culture, even within its growing spiritual elements, i am angry that the internalized prejudices of dominant culture make me uncertain of my value in that way, and make it difficult to value other women in that way, either: my sister, my mother, my grandmothers, my lover, my friends--as also aspects of the sacred and the creative. And i am angry that as a result, i also never get to value men as sacred beings, either, since i am so busy defending myself from the oppressions and prejudices of an imbalanced, anti-spiritual society and its endless self-hating discourses that the last thing i want to do is to expend any energy trying to figure out how to revere the creative, sacred place of men, too.

In this academic discourse--so essentially anti-essentialist that none of these emotional, spiritual and bodily discourses have meaning--i still do not get to be all of the people i am: in this discourse about discourse, i still have to censor most of the discourses and struggles amongst discourses that make up both my own internal history and several of the communal histories in which i participate.

So i tap this anger that menstruation, and women's discourses, and female emotional and spiritual history, have all been made to be such hidden, shameful things--concealed in the same kind of movement that banned First Nations ceremonies and destroyed First Nations languages and cultures--that even after twenty years of Second Wave feminism, i still squirm even to breach the law of the private/public opposition and mention them here, where it is so "inappropriate." But if, like Campbell and Griffiths, i draw on my anger as a beginning place for rewriting histories that include (the spirit and emotion of) my anger, like Campbell and Griffiths, my anger also blocks me from writing this history: claiming my anger, it threatens to claim me.

The thing i do not want to have to reveal, to give away, is that at the same time as i know and use its powers, anger is for that very reason the most frightening of emotions for me: i am simply too good at it, knowing in minute detail, from my own history in an angry house, the irresponsible power it can lend people over others. If i look to anger as the place to begin a new encounter with a history in which i can finally develop a deep and spiritual way to value my own female history, the heritage of my sisters, mother and grandmothers, what i find in such a search is not the healing i seek, but only more anger and still more.

Anger is my history, a legacy amongst the women of my family: if other women like Griffiths seem to have to discover their anger for the first time, its appropriateness in the process of re-examining and rewriting history, much of my family history is already a history of anger, of strong women raging and raging against (as i've finally decided it) the limitations imposed upon them in patriarchal society. And so my angry history threatens to tie my spirit up in endless tangles of fury against this very history, as it threatens the histories of Campbell and Griffiths, and it ties up my words here, shunting them into an ongoing struggle to say the unsayable: to speak from an angry history in a way that is not itself angry any more.

In the play itself, Jessica's re-encounter with her individual history involves a search for healing ceremony, for the spiritual processes that underlie, inform and allow the reshaping of history, as she relives key moments in her personal, spiritual history--moments where she encounters, and then integrates into her identity, specific spirits who exercise a kind of power over her as potential guides or guardians, and yet must also become part of her own, self-responsible spiritual power. When at age six Jessica loses her mother, Kookoom/Vitaline offers her an alternate Mother, Creation itself--"Pat the earth, stroke her, this woman is our Mother, we are her daughters and sons." In a balancing of influences, Vitaline also offers Jessica a possible father-substitute,<sup>7</sup> showing her Crow, an "old man to be your helper and show you the way [. . .] your guardian," (126). However, the quality of *his* help, in particular, is uncertain in

these post-Contact times,<sup>8</sup> proving to be insufficiently concrete and immediate for Jessica as she grows up learning the hard realities of the Métis experience of colonization: her doubts about his power and use, and thus about Native ways in general, seem to be confirmed in Crow's inability to save her from being raped, at twelve, by the local R.C.M.P. officer (127-28). In her grief and anger, she challenges the spirits, rejecting both their power and her own spiritual power, and thereby rejecting her own history as well:

Why couldn't you help me? My spirits love me and not one of them could help me. Why? Because you have no power. I don't hear you, I don't see you, I'm blind. These aren't green witch eyes, they're brown, do you hear me? They're brown. I can make you die if I just close my eyes. (128)

Trying to kill off Crow--though significantly, he does not leave her--she essentially cuts off half of her own senses and abilities as well: she cuts herself off from participatory access to history, and to the healing and the power that come from an active participation in its processes. Having been so brutally victimized, she grasps the role of the victim with a vengeance, relegating herself to years of trying to emulate the crippled, imbalanced spirits and powers of the once-conquered conquerors who are trying deliberately to write themselves as history-less in this new land, trying through denial to forget their own history of victimization. "As long as you refuse to look at history, [Campbell says of Europeans in the commentary,] of course you'll be ghosts, because you have no place to come from" (95), and cutting themselves off from their history in this way, the conquerors must also attack the power Jessica might get from *her* history, by physically, culturally and spiritually raping her.

Similarly, in the commentary on the rehearsals, Griffiths' re-enactment of the rape is one of the most brittle, uncertain moments--the most dis-spiriting--in the play's history, threatening the very processes of history. Indeed, the history of the play's development is constantly endangered by the very processes that feed it, in that, no matter what event she is re-enacting--let alone such a traumatic one as Campbell's own rape--Griffiths is constantly aware of the offense she might be giving and the risks she is taking every time she steps on stage and re-enacts, before Campbell's very eyes, her interpretation of Campbell's own character and experiences. Her ongoing appropriation of Campbell's life, her usurpation of Campbell's access to the processes of history, in the name of the theatrical process, potentially replicates

the violence of Campbell's original experience of white-Métis interaction, white appropriation and destruction of Métis history and power, rather than aiding in Campbell's own regaining of these. But even though Griffiths' re-enactment of the rape is suffused with these historical dangers, it is the history *shared* by Campbell and Griffiths that saves their interaction, and the development of the play, at this point: Griffiths tells how, in the re-enactment, when the imagined rapists finish with her, she lies "spread-eagled on the ground for a long time, hanging onto the floor and sobbing. Then I curled into a ball, and from a cracked voice, came a lullaby: 'Tour a lour a laura. . .'" Later, Griffiths tells Campbell,

LINDA	I knew that was stuff you didn't want to give, but you gave it to me. I felt like I knew what happened, I don't know if I saw the actual room [of the original rape], I saw a room . . . I don't know if I sang the song you maybe sang, or if you sang anything, but. . ."
MARIA	You really did sing the song.
LINDA	My mother sang that song.
MARIA	My mother too. . .

For once I was able to act instinctively around her [Griffiths continues], I just opened my arms. As we held each other, it was as if I'd unleashed my own memories. Not a story, or even acting, but something else. (46)

Not only do they share a common childhood history and cultural roots, as spoken through the lullaby, but they also share a history--cutting across cultural boundaries--simply as women, who, vulnerable to male violence, can use their anger to access and rewrite that history. It is this shared history that allows them then to create together the healing ceremony, mentioned above, in which Griffiths' scarf dance reconnects them with a *female* power, an affirming *female* history. As Campbell comments on the ceremony,

That scene was incredible. After the rape it was the most natural thing to do. I couldn't understand why Paul couldn't see that. As I watched you [Griffiths] break free of the bindings and dance, my instinct said, for the second time, 'Yes, she hears the same music that I do.' The rape broke something inside, the dance healed, erased all the previous hurts of the rehearsal. After that, we started fresh again. (47)

History is answered by the ceremony, and the circle of pain and then healing is completed, so that this re-encounter with history, however painful, becomes a route to healing re-connection with the affirmative powers of the sacred.

In the play, the scene immediately following the rape likewise affirms the female power which



had been attacked in the rape: even as Jessica is trying to deny the (Native) spiritual basis of her history and identity, trying to ignore history altogether, the spirits do not abandon her, continuing to work in her life--as in the scene of Jessica's first trick as a prostitute, where she and Liz, the Unicorn manifested as a white prostitute, engage in a kind of fertility or healing ceremony with their clients. On one level the scene is a parody of once-sacred ways, the healing potential of the "round-bellied goddess," in whose ceremonies presumably all participants were granted healing, now rendered a kinky sex game bought at a high price (though presumably never really high enough), and designed only to service the desires of the exploitive johns. At this point, Jessica herself, wanting to operate only on the material, non-sacred level of the colonizers' society, has clearly been sold on the material appeals of white society and power--on the need to

go fast, Crow, gobble it up. I'm not going to work like a dog and die young, like my mother. I'm going to get to Paris . . . and . . . Egypt. I'm going to have fifty pairs of shoes and eat in restaurants all the time. I'm going to know people with awards and degrees and mountains of books. I'm going to know things. (130)

But on another level, as the Unicorn tries to convey to the other spirits, trying to "convince the Native Spirits/ to draw power/ from another time,/ another kind of source," the scene *is* the repetition of a genuinely healing ritual. Associated with Liz/Unicorn, the ritual is presumably drawn from the Celtic traditions in Jessica's heritage, or at least, in a reference to yet another version of history discussed in the commentary, from the ancient matriarchal ways which many feminist histories posit as having been subsumed by aggressive, imbalanced patriarchal cultures even in pre-Christian times (72-74; also Stone, for example; Wiget 118). While the scene speaks of white male economic exploitation, it is also a genuine repetition of the Goddess's endless capacity to renew life through her fecundity and sexuality--as Crow and Bear, manifested as the two "gorfy" clients, insist (131). And in its affirmation of the Mother, the scene also serves as a kind of corrective to Jessica's earlier *loss* of her mother--which can now be read on a spiritual, allegorical level, as well as an immediate autobiographical one, as referring to her loss of the Mother, the Goddess, in both lines of her heritage, to patriarchal dominance: like the writing of national histories as comparable to individual emotional histories, here the individual emotional history also speaks

to the general spiritual history of Jessica's people.

But Jessica, too aware both of the exploitiveness of these men's self-absorption in their fantasy, *and* of the true spiritual potential of the scene--which she is trying so vehemently to deny to herself--resists the ritual throughout the trick. In contrast, Liz, as the experienced prostitute, goes along with anything for the right amount of money, and as the earthy, profane Unicorn, recognizes the healing ritual behind the exploitive scene. The scene continues with a disturbing tension between the exploitiveness and plain danger of the clients' power to buy the women and the ceremony, and the constant recalling of a genuinely healing interaction between Unicorn, Bear and Crow, as they recall the Goddess, "the earth . . . this woman . . . our Mother." The scene ends with all four participants--the two prostitutes and the two johns, Jessica and the three spirits--chanting the many names of the Goddess as she has been known in various cultures throughout history: "Ishtar. . . . Astarte. . . . Altar. . . . [ . . . ] Innanna. . . . Morrigana. . . . Mari..." (134).

Despite her resistance, Jessica begins with this scene to take on the Unicorn-element of her spiritual identity, learning to value herself as a woman again--perhaps even as a sexual woman, though that comes more clearly later--beginning to heal the profoundly devaluing experience of her femaleness as a condition only of vulnerability to the white R.C.M.P. officer's violence. In the following scene, the male clients now absent, she and Liz break out of the Goddess chant, trying to recapture their cynicism about such ideas, but "in the back of her mind LIZ remembers" the Unicorn: "[the Unicorn] says she's been around ... kind of sleeping . . . whispering and . . . spinning threads. . ." (135). Jessica challenges Liz/Unicorn, trying to refuse the spiritual power of Liz's assertion by grounding the discussion in the pragmatic and the material, insisting that *she* doesn't feel any threads, and then demanding to know what the Goddess looks like. But when Liz begins the description, Jessica joins in: they are both immediately certain that the Goddess has "humungous thighs, hips like the side of a truck [ . . . ] breasts like torpedoes," and they recognize the Goddess in each other's bodies and beings, flirting briefly with the sensuality and beauty they see in each other as women (135).

But the moment their en-charnted recitation of the Goddess's attributes somehow slips into a

Native chant--the drawn out relishing of their certainty that the Goddess is "freeee" turning into "freeyyyyyyyayyyyyyahhhhhh heyyyahhh" (136)--Jessica cuts the ceremony off again. The spirits decide that she has cut it off, rather than gone on to balance the (Celtic) Goddess/Unicorn with her Native spiritual heritage, because none of this captures the dark side of Jessica's experience and inheritance: it does not address the anger of her history as both a Métis and a woman/prostitute, the dark aspect of the spiritual powers she is encountering and taking on. This darkness must be balanced with the creative power and play that has so far been shown: "All of a sudden there was good and evil and they were in different places," Unicorn says, rather than good and evil being balanced as parts of a whole, and not separated as concepts at all. Jessica's history thus cannot be reclaimed only by reaffirming her several spiritual heritages after a hundred or a thousand years of their suppression under patriarchal dominance--and the *fact* of their suppression, and the anger and pain that result, must be addressed: good and evil, having been separated and set in imbalanced opposition, cannot simply be reconnected at will, but evil must now be addressed and somehow reassimilated into the balance.

This evil is represented in the ceremony by Wolverine, who has been lingering constantly on the edge of the ceremony, but has been repeatedly prevented by the other spirits from entering it prematurely: now he volunteers to show Jessica "the other side. I'll show her. I'll teach her about Ishtar" (136). But this time he is held back by the others, and instead, it is Crow who takes on the role of the Weird Client, whose vision of the potentially creative act of sex is perverted, in the imbalance of anti-matriarchal times, into a solely abusive act of violence and degradation. The Weird Client has himself tied up and victimized, but unable to give up his conqueror's power even so, he also insists that Jessica call herself a "dirty, filthy, redskin squaw," finally getting wildly turned on when instead of going down on him as she is supposed to, she throws up on him instead (137-38).

As she and the other Spirits watch this scene, Coyote/Vitaline is crying, her crying also becoming that of the prostitute in the next room, who, after the Weird Client leaves, Jessica discovers has finally committed suicide. Jessica laments that she didn't try to help the woman, but Liz is suddenly hard--"We're not friends," she says of herself and Jessica, and of the prostitutes in general--in sharp contrast with

the earlier scene of their affirming recognition of the Goddess in each other. The abusiveness of the Weird Client replays the effects of the (pre-)historical conquering of matriarchal society and spirit by imbalanced patriarchal ways, and here, with the darkness of the Weird Client still hanging over them, the two women are now split from themselves and each other, relegated to isolated islands of suffering and loneliness within the misogynist divisions and violence of patriarchal imbalances. Looking in the mirror, exclaiming that she's losing her looks from doing too much heroin, Jessica suddenly sees the angry, spitting Wolverine for the first time--not Crow, who had played her mirror in the earlier scene of her first trick. She and Liz shoot up the heroin--shoot up "Lady H"--replacing the Goddess, and their friendship as women, with the showy colours of the drug high and the shaky collusion of fellow junkies. The hollowness of these affiliations is clear when the women agree that the high is only a disappointment in any case, "never as good as the first time" (139), and the two women end up fighting over who has the greatest likelihood of ever escaping the present trap of their lives. Liz insists that, despite the fact that it is Liz who ought to be able to exploit her white-skinned privilege, Jessica has the advantage because she has a different, perhaps truer power--an "electricity [. . . a] magic"--that will get her out of even this hole: "If I had the kind of electricity shooting around me that you have, [Liz proclaims,] I wouldn't be shooting the Lady. I'd be talking to her" (140).

Similarly, within the framing story of the play's development, Campbell and Griffiths must not only address their lost matriarchal, spiritual heritage, but must also examine the injury and pain that have followed, specifically by coming to terms with the misogynist vision of women they have both inherited from Christianity--or more particularly, from Catholicism. Griffiths is reluctant to examine Catholicism critically "Because my mother had just cured herself by going right into the Catholic religion. I couldn't put that down when she'd just saved her own life" (72). But Campbell can see this heritage only as oppressive and destructive, given the history of the Catholic Church as it played an integral role in the loss of Creative, matriarchal ways to hierarchical, imbalanced patriarchal ways, both in Europe a thousand and more years ago, and in Canada in the last five centuries (73). Campbell can identify Griffiths, as both a woman and a person of Celtic descent, as sharing in this history of conquest and loss (35, 77), but she

is still angry at Griffiths, whose seeming impassivity and calm reminds Campbell both of her own mother --whom Campbell sees as having given up, given in to the injustices that have so brutally shaped Campbell's own life (73)--and of that paragon of female capitulation to the patriarchal, conquering church, the Virgin Mary.

For Campbell, her own mother, the Virgin and Griffiths alike, all stand as a sign of all the supposed virtues which Campbell herself cannot claim--virginity, whiteness, passivity, and a refusal of Wolverine's anger--and as a sign of all the "desired" characteristics which render women, particularly Campbell's mother, vulnerable to patriarchal, colonizing conquest. They stand for all the characteristics which made Campbell's mother a model only for how to be a conquered person, powerless to defend her daughter from racist violence and hatred. Campbell tells Griffiths,

You don't know what a love/hate relationship it's been with you, you don't know. You'd stand there with this smile on your face, just stand there wanting more. So innocent, so nice. Like a bloody virgin being raped by all these men and you didn't even know it. Paul even, all of them. And you just wanted me to give you more. You didn't know anything. And I would get so angry. I'd see you and I'd see the Catholic Church, and my mother kneeling for hours in front of that statue with that nice innocent face. She wanted to be nice like that. If she hadn't of wanted to be nice like that, she would have been able to love me, but she couldn't, because I wasn't nice, I was never nice like that, I was always angry, as far back as I can remember. I'd see you, with that stupid Virgin face, and I'd think of what they did to us, stole from us, all our strength, making us look like that, like you, with your glassy stare. You were the Church, and men, and white people, and cops, and rules [. . .] Then I'd be defending you to my friends, saying, 'You think they stole from us, our strength, our culture, the mother, all of it, but look at what they stole from her. She never got any of that teaching, not like we did, it happened to us only a hundred years ago, it happened to them thousands of years ago.' And then you'd get up there and stuff would come out of your mouth, you'd move in certain ways and I'd see my younger self, just like I was, and I'd hate you for it. (70)

Griffiths, like Campbell's mother, like the Virgin Mary, reminds Campbell of her double bind as an oppressed person, her desire for power over her own history and self--for the right to love herself--and yet her continued struggle with all of the internalized self-hatred, victimization and powerlessness which still interfere with her own efforts to achieve a balanced claiming of her power, value and history.

Indeed, Campbell's struggle with her mother, and Griffiths, and the image of the Virgin Mary, is clearly a struggle with herself above all--a renewed encounter with her own histories on terms which, like Jessica in the play, she has so far denied:

When I'd hear myself saying, 'No, no, no,' what I was hearing was a Catholic voice. When I had

to confront this woman, who was all for revolution, all for change, who really believed in . . . in the path she was following . . . to listen to her, to look at her, she was the most conservative Catholic woman I had ever met in my life [. . .] For the first time in my life, I had to deal with the woman I'd shoved away someplace. I almost went to church. I had to start looking at things in the Catholic faith, real things that came from the mother, from the grandmothers, and that looking helped me to understand for the first time why everybody's been Christian for so long. But it all confused me, shook up my easy theories, and I ended up with fears and uncertainties I thought I had already dealt with. I had to deal with 'her' and she wasn't easy. (32)

Above all, what is so difficult for Campbell to grapple with is that, encountering this conservative, rule-bound Catholic woman, she is ultimately having to confront her own self-hatred, a hatred which is expressed precisely through her suppression and hatred of her Catholic knowledge and character, and she must find a way to value even this aspect of herself. The same is true for Griffiths, who comments on her work with Campbell, that "I was battering against a stubborn, rebellious, self-hating character, who was struggling with her own power. It was Maria, of course, or Jessica." But she is also compelled to add, "It never occurred to me, not for years, that it was me" (31). Thus, if Campbell is certain that history is a place of pain and oppression, the endless story of her people's loss of history within the subsuming historical thrust of the patriarchal and the Christian, she and Griffiths alike must nevertheless go back to their several histories, their angers, to find themselves: they must rewrite history, with themselves in even their least appealing roles, in order to value themselves again.

But as in the play, where Jessica begins to re-value herself by reconnecting, through the Unicorn, with the female power of her ancient white heritage, here in the commentary Campbell also comes to a point, after much thought and healing effort with Griffiths--after their extended struggle to tell the story of their troubled history together--where she can finally begin to re-value herself as a woman of Catholic upbringing, reclaiming the positive elements of her Christian heritage as well. Insisting that her history *be* a source of validation, she can finally forgive her mother/Mother for seeming to abandon her to the pain of colonization and rape--colonization by the patriarchy millennia ago, by whites in the last few centuries, and by Christianity thousands *and* hundreds of years ago: she can finally recognize that she hasn't really been abandoned after all, and that she is thus not a hateful child unworthy of her mother/Mother's love. As a result, forgiving her mother/Mother, she can also begin to heal her

interaction with Griffiths, and can forgive Griffiths for making her "feel so . . . dirty . . .," for being

the person my mother wanted me to be [. . .] I began to understand the Old Woman, the Virgin and the Mother. Really, not from my head, but deep inside. There you were the Virgin, and there I was, the Mother, and I could also see the old woman I would be. . . ." (76)

As a sign of her healing, of her recapturing of her history, Campbell tells of going to a grotto near Batoche, "one of those Lourdes kind of Catholic places with a statue of the Mother," a "'smarmy statue, [. . .] a place stolen from us, with their simpy version of a woman.'" Ordinarily, she says, "I'd just grit my teeth and pass by," but after one of Griffiths' visits, she goes to see the statue itself, "and [. . .] it was okay [. . .] I didn't hate her any more, I didn't even feel sorry for her. I understood her. I felt she'd been kept alive at least. I put some tobacco out for her" (70-71).

In the play, however, Jessica has not yet managed such a healing, and her response to Liz's recognition of her power to talk to the Lady is a mixed up attempted suicide/Native sacrifice--which despite its understatement in the play, suddenly becomes the crucial changing-point in her spiritual journey. Unable to decide whether she's committing suicide or making a sacrifice, she is again struggling to bridge the gap between contemporary, material responses to her predicament, and Native, spiritual ones: she wants to bring her spiritual, emotional pain into the simply material world to which she is so committed, by making her pain physical and visible--"it's got to show, got to make some blood at least" (140)--and then to die, but Crow won't let her believe that if she simply ends her physical life, "you stop dreaming." If even in death her history is not erased, she is finally forced to address, resentfully at first, the spiritual aspect of herself--her history as a Métis woman. She responds to Crow that instead of suicide, then, she will "make a ritual out of it, I'll offer the blood to the grandmothers and grandfathers. . ." (141).

But the Spirits "zap" her as punishment for her flippant abuse of the ritual, and they set out the rules under which sacrifice can properly happen:

COYOTE	You can't make a flesh offering to the spirits unless you know why, and it has to be done with joy. . .
WOLVERINE	You have to have a reason, what's your reason, Jessica, what's your vow?
BEAR	If you want to die, then die, but an offering has to do with life. (142)

Engaging with history--with the Spirits--necessitates that she give something of herself to history, that she

must somehow give over her anger at it: she must sacrifice her hatred of herself, her refusal to see her spirits, and must finally accept that history and the Spirits have power in her life. This time, then, after first being zapped, she answers more seriously that she wants to know her history, in a sense, that she wants to know "what was supposed to happen, I want to know what I was supposed to be when I was first dreamed . . . ." Thus apparently accepting for the first time that her Native spiritual heritage might have some interest and value, she asks Crow to help her perform a small sacrifice--however qualified by her recognition that she "loves suffering too much"--and they cut her arm (142).

In the play itself, the ceremony necessitates a sacrifice--history demands the participation of one who gives from her life history to renew and affirm the processes of history; that is, it demands the participatory reconnection with the sacred--and therefore in the commentary on the play, a sacrifice must also be made. As Campbell explains, in traditional ways, there was a time for suffering and sacrifice--after which "you went on with the job of living, you're not supposed to suffer all the time"--in contrast with the Christian construction of Christ as having to "carry his Cross all the time, they never let him off, he suffers all the time; and they tell us that he has to suffer for us, that's what he was put on earth for, so it makes people feel guilty" (99-100). As in the exclusive version of history promulgated by the conquerors, in this Christian paradigm, history--and the power to heal the conflicts of history through the renewing practice of sacrifice--are constructed as the province of Christ alone, and people are left powerless to move beyond their guilt at this endless suffering, as Campbell notes:

We never feel the power's within us, with the Christian way. We never feel the incredible feeling of going to the spirit world, and coming back out, and the closeness to all things that gives us. Suffering has a flip side, it has the joy of coming through the pain, the joy that you've done it, you've been able to make the ultimate sacrifice. (101-02)

Sacrifice thus effects an individual and communal *transformation*, such as Beth Cuthand or Annharte developed as the basis of their poetry.

For Griffiths and Campbell, the sacrifice they must make, upon which their healing transformation depends after the pain the play has raised, is ultimately that of giving the play itself away--of giving away the history of the play's initial making and its eventual writing, and thereby of giving away to other white



and Métis (and other) readers this new version of white-Métis history, in which, in the very act of their being given away, these painful histories are also transformed, at long last, into healing processes. The degree of suffering this sacrifice entails for the two women is clear in the nature of their original conflict: the catalyst for their angry parting, after the play's opening run, was precisely the issue of the contract between Griffiths, Campbell and Thompson regarding the *ownership* of the play. And yet, for the play, for history, to *be* healing, it must precisely be given away: Campbell defines art as stealing from the community from which the material is taken (83), but she also defines it as *the* main healing tool of a community (84), as long as the art returns something to the community from which it was stolen.

Today, most art is ugly, because it's not responsible to the people it steals from. Real, honest-to-God true art steals from the people. It's a thief [. . .] It comes in, and you don't even notice that it's there, and it walks off with all your stuff, but then it gives it back to you and heals you, empowers you, and it's beautiful. (83)

Community work--art, the telling of history, sacred ceremony--thus involves "an exchange of power, a sharing, and as a result we all get strong" (90). In this way, sacrifice is the essence of community and of participation in the history and spirit of a community, and it is only when Campbell and Griffiths can give away the play and its story--can give up the anger, over the right to own the play, that threatened to suppress their shared history--that they can begin to be healed and community can be restored between them.<sup>9</sup>

*It is, of course, this question of ownership, and of the nature of ownership itself, which is the crux of First Nations-non-First Nations animosity and misunderstanding, whether the ownership of the land or the ownership of stories, words and cultures: it is this incapacity on the part of white society to understand sacrifice--to understand the transformative power of the give-away--and our consequent angry enforcement, in First Nations cultures and lands, of our preoccupations with the exclusivities of ownership, that creates such a ground for ongoing conflict and appropriation, ongoing anger.*

*It is partly for these reasons that i write my stories as part of this thesis, to try to be clear about risking my self in return for the self-risk that Campbell, Armstrong, Annharte, and so on, have undergone in giving their stories away: to attempt a small sacrifice in the hopes of at least beginning a transformative healing of these angry paradigms. And my thesis in general, its commentaries as well as its stories, is intended to be the most respectful and grateful response to the gift of these First Nations texts that i can manage, however falteringly cross-cultural my self-positioning still is.*

*But at the same time, i am not certain what i am really giving back even so: i feel clear that i am writing this thesis far less for a First Nations audience--for people from the same communities as these stories--than i am for a white (and, of course, an academic) audience, who presumably need to hear my arguments far more than First Nations readers need to (Campbell, Interview 60). At best, if i am even beginning to get this stuff "right," i can hope that my reading strategies really are useful to a truly cross-cultural, truly communicative, healing, and*

*transformative interaction between First Nations and non-First Nations . . . but i do not know: my own anger still lingers in the history i am trying to transform--i am still uncertain how to give it away.*

Within the play, the immediate consequence of Jessica's sacrifice--her acquiescence to Native spiritual power and to the history it implies--is that she has a nervous breakdown and is committed to "The Looney Bin": despite her initial sacrifice, the effort of trying to integrate the two lines of her heritage is too great as yet. Indeed, the remainder of the play is underwritten with the constant tension of Jessica's battle to stay sane while to everyone around her, her visions and powers make her seem "crazy as a hoot owl" (149). However, it is in the Looney Bin that she narrates, in the story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman, not only her own split condition, but also the beginning of her determination to heal herself: as in *Halfbreed*, the act of taking over story-telling/history-telling functions as a sign of her healing effort. In this oral tale, the White Buffalo Calf Woman fights off the hunter who is a potential rapist, who has "never been taught," and follows the other, peaceable hunter to his people's camp (143). The woman makes a choice, as Jessica herself is now choosing, *not* to be victimized, and to come "home" to her people through the use of her own power. The commentary on the play makes clear that the story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman is the story of the beginnings of a people, telling of "a woman who comes from the spirit world, to bring the pipe to the people and teach them the prayers and songs" (59): Jessica's at least passive acceptance, thus far, of her spiritual heritage and history is couched in terms of the birth of a people at the instigation of a goddess-like figure, a female creator, conjoining communal and individual history. This affirmation of female power as historically important becomes an affirmation as well of Jessica's own desire to take control of her own history by finding new origins for herself, in order to be reborn healthy and balanced--a desire narrated in an explicitly Native structure and practice of history, as the telling of an oral tale.

This act of telling presages Jessica's eventual reconnection with a traditional power, but for the moment, the simultaneous hope and danger of her transitional state are emphasized in her own narration: the White Buffalo Calf Woman "knew she was on the brink of what all the suffering had been for, and for the first time, she was afraid [. . .] why, when she was so close, should she shake with fear?" (143).

In the story, however, a starling comes and guides the woman into the safety of the Native camp, just as Vitaline, watching the scene and directing the ceremony, insists on bolstering Jessica's own tentative affirmation and strength with "some loving that isn't part of the bargain" (143): the spirits agree that it's time for the strength of Bear. From her relationship with Bear/Sam, despite all of the difficulties and pain of their relationship, Jessica begins to learn to value herself as a Native person--particularly as a Native woman living in contemporary colonized times--just as she learned to value herself as a woman from the (white-Celtic) Unicorn. When she objects to Sam's certainty of the possibility and usefulness of Native activism, saying to him that "we don't know who 'we' is," his response is to include her: "'We' is Native people. Or maybe not, maybe 'we' is anybody with a pure heart" (145). To her objection again, that she is a Halfbreed, not a Native, his response is to assure her again of her inclusion in the strength of that revolutionary "we" (146). Sam thus offers her the possibility of claiming a place in history, such as the story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman also suggested, but for Sam, it is a history constructed as a revolutionary process, based on such models as the French Revolution and the Black Panther movement. Sam teaches Jessica about Native activism and the ways it works to empower Natives at least politically, when her impulse since her rape has been to discredit any form of Native identification and claim to power. With Sam, she also discovers the possibility of truly enjoying herself sexually with a man, presumably for the first time.

With this acceptance of her value and power as a woman and a Métis--her acceptance of the Unicorn and the Bear--she and Sam exit hand in hand, as the Spirits congratulate themselves that from now on the spiritual world, or at least a power-ful world of some kind, will be as real to Jessica as the purely material world which has *dis*-empowered her so much: they have succeeded at least to that extent. But the Wolverine's final word in Act One, as he responds to the Spirits' optimism with the warning to "Just keep her alive for me," presages the conflict she has yet to reconcile in herself--that having begun to accept her potential power as an (until now) disempowered Métis woman, her newly affirmed desire for power, fuelled by a deep store of anger, might lead to the same imbalance which the once-conquered Celtic peoples came to in conquering the First Nations territories, of looking for too much power, where

once she had too little (146).

In Act Two, this conflict between the darker, unbalanced side of Jessica's power, and the creative, balance-seeking side, is structured as a conflict between her desire for power at any cost—even the dangerous power of a ruthless, white-style politician or businessman such as Bob the lawyer represents—and her efforts to learn the kind of controlled, responsible spiritual power that Vitaline is trying to teach. Though her encounter with Bear—with Sam the Native activist—has been essential to her spiritual growth, the opening scene of Act Two demonstrates the dangers of the power that Bear/Sam offers Jessica: they are filling in a (white) government form to apply for the money, and thus the power, to run a Native shelter, when the Wolverine's angry, violent spirit speaks to Jessica in the form of a phone call that threatens violence against her children if she continues in her Native activism (148)—that threatens her female, life-giving power as a mother, if she continues to exploit the male, warrior power she has taken on through Bear. Sam's traditional warrior power, in the patriarchally-imbalanced conditions of colonized times, is shown in a later scene to be crippled and sick in any case, when in his helplessness against the Wolverine strength of white, high-level power mongers, he turns his warrior's power on Jessica, beating her up because she is "the one thing around that's lower than me." The Native men have in some ways been more devastated by colonization than the women, because the white patriarchy has simply replaced them—and thus, in a sense, emasculated them—while Native women (and in the commentary, white women, to some degree) are at least still left in a place of potential matriarchal opposition to the patriarchal system.

I fight [Sam says to Jessica]. . . . Somehow that's what I'm supposed to do but it gets all screwed up. There's a place for it, I know there is, but I don't know where. You look at me, all bruised up, and you think you're the one that's hurt, but it's me that's dying. . . . You've got your mysteries, all I've got is that sometime I was a warrior. So I'll get drunk, and sing, and pound the drum, and dance in the gutter. There's got to be somebody out there dancing. That's all that's left of war. (161)

Observing that Jessica's continued development of the Bear's warrior-activist's power is leading her into a similar imbalance and loss as Sam has experienced, Vitaline insists that now it is time for Jessica to encounter Vitaline's own Coyote power: it is finally time for Jessica to begin to learn the lesson she glimpsed in the story of the White Buffalo Calf Woman, to learn her power and value as a Native woman

--rather than as a woman and a Native as somehow separate categories--as this power is constructed in traditional Native spiritual terms, rather than in white-Celtic spiritual terms or Native-political terms. The spirits discuss Vitaline's suitability as such a teacher, questioning her traditionalism when "we need someone who understands the new modern woman" (151), but Coyote defends Vitaline's (Coyote-like) adaptability and experience. The Spirits' hand is forced in Coyote's favour in any case, by their need to defend Jessica again from Wolverine's eagerness to get at her, to make sure that she isn't "losing her scent"--"she's got no anger left, give her to me" (151).

Vitaline's role is explicitly to reconnect Jessica with the processes and powers of history, to help her recover her "memory," not just of her immediate personal history, but also of her spiritual history as a Native woman (152). Her first lesson is a reiteration of Vitaline's lesson to the six-year old Jessica, and of Liz/Unicorn's lesson years later, both of which Jessica succeeded in rejecting with the help of "Lady H": the lesson of the vital female basis of human life and power, though now the female power is called again by the Native names Jessica had learned in childhood: "the Mother, the Old Woman" (152). Though Jessica is now actively seeking after this power and history for the first time, she must still contend with the fact that recovering such history and knowledge will mean she can no longer operate only on the simplistic, materially-based level she has so far tried to live as a prostitute and an activist alike, and she must finally accept the difficulties of a life split between these (at least) two kinds of realities and histories: "No more trying to be normal, no more pushing them away. I'll walk into Safeway, feeling them at the checkout counter: *'TV Guide*, six chocolate bars, four packages of gum, and some tobacco for that Bear behind your head'" (153). Despite her efforts, since her twelfth year, to deny the Native, spiritual side of her self and her perceptions by entirely banishing it, she has finally consciously recognized the conflict that has been shaping her entire life thus far.

The degree to which colonization has perverted the balance of power that Jessica is seeking to relearn is made clear in the fact that Jessica's movement into the realm of Coyote-woman's power precipitates Sam's decline--as if, after the pattern of millennia of oppositional patriarchal thought, only one side can be powerful at the expense of the other--as her increasing grasp of female power only

reinforces for him the tentativeness of his access to Bear's Native male power, and reminds him forcibly of his present conquered condition. But while Jessica is beginning to grasp the Coyote power available to her, this is the moment when Wolverine finally begins to act directly on her: he manages to slip from the control of the other Spirits, and in the form of Bob, the white lawyer, begins to teach Jessica the unlimited power that her anger can offer her if it is allowed to work unbridled and imbalanced within and through her.

Let her see what she hides [Wolverine chants], let her know fear beyond fear. Let her find claws and see if she knows what to do with them. Let her look in the mirror and see a face with no soul. Let her know nothing, no worth, not to walk the earth, no right, no reason, let the blood drip from her mouth [. . .] let her give no ground . . . revenge . . . let her howl[. . .] let her be nothing, a nothing, not a thing at all. (154-55)

His is the power that results from taking one's oppression to its logical extreme, in a sense: having been told by the dominant powers that she is worthless, that she is nothing, Jessica can turn her worthlessness back on the oppressors and simply reverse the direction of the violence, doing to them what they have done to her. Thus while her anger gives her a participatory access to historical processes which her former passivity and fear of anger did not, it can also threaten the revolutionary project of rewriting the nature of history, in that if she allows her anger too much power, she risks only replicating, rather than truly changing, the imbalanced, irresponsible processes of history which the conquerors, *as* the conquerors, set into motion in the New World. At last granting to herself that she has the right to historical power and anger, she chances becoming governed *by* her anger and the power it lends her, rather than controlling them.

Similarly, in the commentary, although it is Campbell's and Griffiths' anger that fuels their persistent search for healing--for rewriting and re-balancing the imbalanced processes of history--it also threatens this process: first, as the women are repeatedly tempted simply to give up their history-telling in the face of the immensity of their anger at each other and at history in general, and second, as their inability to give up their anger prevents them from making a sacrifice, a gift, of the play itself as a route to achieving a new balance, a new, empowering access to history. The danger is always that they will simply retire to the safety and aggressive, ungiving power of their separate angers-- the safety of the

closed oppositions and confrontations of European-conventional history, European-conventional language—and will not risk the third possibility of the sacrifice, of relinquishing their separate safety in the expectation of achieving a healing together, a cross-cultural, cross-national healing.

In the play, now that Jessica has accepted her power and history, this internal conflict shapes the remainder of the play's story and drives the rest of the ceremony. Bob agrees to teach Jessica his dangerous, sophisticated power in return for her teaching him her powers of "magic [. . . and] mysticism" (158); the fact that she is willing to trade knowledge of her Native power for knowledge of his corporate power—when as she says herself "you're not supposed to use it for yourself"—indicates her dangerously imbalanced, irresponsible state, her certainty that, as the Unicorn says, "she doesn't have to play by the rules" (157). But playing with such powers, mixing them so incautiously, becomes more and more dangerous to herself and Bob alike—to her world and history, and his (though less crucially)—when, after Sam beats her up in his effort to reassert his failing warrior's power in the face of her power games, Bob enters with the story of his dream of hitting the wolverine with his car.

As Bob recounts the incident, Jessica is led to confess her own vision, in which she tells the same story, but from the perspective of the wolverine that is hit by Bob's car. While Bob is badly frightened and the body of his car dented, it is Jessica's own body that has been bruised in the "accident," and she is again contemplating not just the self-destruction of suicide, but the concomitant destruction of her people—the murder of her lover and her bloodline, her children, as well. As she plays back and forth between the two different kinds of power, violating both, Jessica herself and her Native spiritual power are particularly in danger: this is the danger when First Nations spiritual knowledge is given irresponsibly away to the irresponsible, corporate, technological power of the conquerors. As Campbell says in the commentary, "if we exploit [Métis culture and spirituality] and don't even fully understand it ourselves, then we're giving something away to be abused" (86).

Doubly bruised by Sam's broken warrior power and Bob's white-corporate, technological power, Jessica is drawn back to Vitaline for a final effort to bring her power back under responsible control—to regain herself and her proper, balanced place in history. Jessica has already rejected Bob's claim that he

loves her, but Sam's claim on her is stronger: afraid of her ongoing quest to develop her own female power as she tries to bring her wolverine aspect under control, he tries to coax her back to serving his wounded Native male power. While Vitaline struggles to hold the powers precariously balanced until a proper, healing balance can be achieved by and in Jessica herself--defending Sam from Wolverine, Jessica from Sam, Wolverine from Jessica--and while Sam is trying to draw Jessica out of Vitaline's house against Vitaline's wishes, Jessica herself is being torn apart by the multitude of opposing powers and impulses within herself. Vitaline recounts to Sam the history of the imbalance between male and female power--telling in the play, in Native terms, the history of the patriarchal attack on the ancient matriarchies that is also discussed in the commentary on the play (69-70). The effect is not only to persuade Sam of the value of his male power, and yet the necessity for Jessica to develop her own female power free of the coercive imbalance of this history, but also to provide an explanation, within the logic of the ceremony, for the origins of Wolverine's imbalance, and Jessica's hardly controlled power. Sam departs, leaving Jessica to her struggle with the Wolverine that has now, significantly, left Bob and inhabited her, struggling to steal her power and control her.

In the commentary, the heritage of anger that the women see as resulting from this history of the split of men from women into divided camps of opposition and animosity, is discussed not only in terms of the Native paradigm of Wolverine but also in terms of the Christian one of the Devil. Exploring the evil side of this split creation, Campbell asks,

But what is that hate, what is it that makes humans destroy? What made the men destroy the very thing that made them strong, because when they put us down, they put themselves down, devoured their own power and turned themselves into babies. (74)

When Griffiths replies that a Catholic would call it the Devil, Campbell answers that she has herself seen the Devil, "out at The Crossing one night, [when I was] trying to write, and I was feeling this . . . anger, this hate and it was like a physical thing, and it was frightening me." Going outside, she challenges the Devil to come and answer her questions, and suddenly "I could feel him, like this dense ball of energy the size of a grapefruit . . . ooh and it was ugly. I started running for my life along the river, I was terrified." Finally, feeling certain that "'it can't be worse than it is now,'" she turns to face the Devil, and



"it was gone, just disappeared." Standing there, she asks herself why she is so afraid of being alone, and looking at the solitude even of each of the stars overhead, finally "really [feels] what it was to be alone, and it was alright" (74-75). She thus confronts first her rage, the Devil, and then the deeper fear that fuels her rage--the fear of aloneness, the necessity that only she can face her own fears and rages--and she finally accepts that only she can and must take responsibility for herself and her emotions and healing.

With this move, she begins to heal in herself the anger and pain of the millennia of imbalance between men and women, by which men stereotypically have abrogated emotional self-responsibility, turning the realm of the emotional entirely over to female care, and women have become the endless caretakers, taking responsibility for emotions and events that they cannot possibly be truly responsible for. Accepting that she is alone, Campbell accepts responsibility for her emotional well-being, for controlling and healing her rage--and thus for her active place in history--but equally, she accepts that she is responsible *only* for her own anger and healing and history, however lonely a process it is to establish and maintain such boundaries. Her anger does not then simply go away, banished like the Devil, but instead, she has redefined it as her *own*, and thus as controllable: just as she has redefined the Virgin Mary as hers--as another version of the Mother--she has in a sense redefined the Devil as hers as well, as the Wolverine, which, unlike the Christian paradigm, where anger/the Devil is defined as having no rightful place within the structures of balance identified with the Good, is defined in the Native paradigm as being *part* of the balance within a healthy, healed, and balanced individual and world--and thus as *part* of the individual's (self-)responsibility, rather than as something only to be denied, to be placed elsewhere, in Others.

*So i must somehow give away my anger, risk being alone; i must give away my history and my thesis in the same movement as i am only just achieving them--though now, in this communal, spiritually-informed context, the achievement and the giving away presumably need not cancel each other out, as one transformation allows another and another, as participation in spiritual history results in my ongoing inclusion in these power-ful processes. I think, then, that what i have to do is to reverse the problem, in a sense: rather than struggling to fit a spiritual history into my overarching anger, or to fit the writing of the spiritual into the authoritative discourses of the academy, i have to do the opposite.*

*I have to learn to integrate, as Campbell and Griffiths do, the blocks to my history into my history: i have to transform my own wolverine history of anger into a part of my spirituality--give my anger into my larger desire for self-responsible healing--rather than continuing the Christian-type denial that anger (sin) has no place in healing,*

*in the creative and the sacred; i have to integrate even my angry, exclusionary academic discourse into a larger spiritual discourse. So if i carry that anger everywhere--my own anger, generations of anger handed futilely down mother to daughter to granddaughter--perhaps the beginning of its healing, the beginning of this new history, at least for me, is that over and over again i can carry the anger even into the uncertain rituals of peace which seem to have developed in my life, in my history, even in the story(-ies) of my thesis.*

*I try to do this here in this thesis by undertaking creative action/creative writing: with every word and movement, i am trying to convert anger into creativity, write the creative into the academic--write a mixed-genre thesis--so that this creativity, driven by a deep anger at anti-creative forces, involves precisely an interaction with this anger. The product i arrive at may not particularly be any more spiritually immanent, any less deferred, than the thesis i write against here--i don't think i solve the difficulty of how to say the unsayable--but the process is at least as important, i think, as the product. So perhaps as in *Slash*, i'm writing the spiritual and not writing it at once--it is both inscribed here, and yet deferred to another place, another language or discourse. And the academic, with its endless process of deferral, is thus integrated into the spiritual, the inscription and the deferral alike partaking of the spiritual--anger remaining simply anger, and yet inscribed in, and inscriptive of, history--and the sacred.*

In the play, however, Jessica still has to learn this lesson of how to integrate the Wolverine into her spiritual power. Vitaline, trying to get through to the half-possessed Jessica, assures her that the Wolverine is "just you, a part of you. You're strong enough to take that Wolverine, he's the last one, Jesse, the last one" (171). But Jessica is almost lost, the Wolverine moving her back to Bob's office, where she/it scares even Bob with the ruthlessness with which she claims for herself the money intended for the Native shelter, and where she then turns Bob's own medicine on him when he objects. "Power is a commodity [she retorts]. Cream always rises to the top. Money is power. Idealists get bitter. Isn't that what you said?" (172). When he accuses her of his own crime--"you're an opportunist using the suffering of your own people for personal gain"--the "unbalanced WOLVERINE," as it is named in the stage directions (172), now all but controlling Jessica, first pleads with him, then spits out a fury of hatred and invective: Wolverine/Jessica rages against Bob and against patriarchal history and its conquest of the Natives, recounting loss upon loss that have accrued as a result, and finally trying to strangle him as he has, in a sense, already strangled himself with his own imbalances:

Nothing to trust. Your songless throat closes with no chance for a prayer, they've been ripped from your chest, regret is like smoke, you breathe it in and it never goes away. . . . You've stolen the breath from yourself, you've stolen the breath from yourself. . . . (173)

But if she is chanting Bob's death, she is also recounting what will happen to her if she allows her Wolverine aspect to control her, as Bob's has controlled him, and she gives in to her desire for power

upon power, out of all control or balance.

Similarly, in the commentary on the rehearsals, Griffiths' and Campbell's encounter with the Wolverine is an equally chilling moment, when Griffiths discovers, perhaps for the first time, the anger she carries against her life and its suppressions and losses: she says of the day when she finally decides to try acting Wolverine, that she was "just dying to be as ugly and as vicious and as black as I actually fucking felt inside" (38). As Campbell describes it, Griffiths simply *became* the Wolverine on stage:

I was watching, and I knew something was happening [. . .] It's like knowing when there's a Warrior walking in I could feel it coming with you. When you went up there I knew what you were doing, and when you started I saw the Wolverine. I saw his teeth, his claws . . . it wasn't you [. . .] You had changed [. . .] I don't know what anybody else saw. I only know what I saw . . . and I remember watching you and feeling my hands becoming claws too. (39)

Years later, Griffiths can finally elaborate on the source of her Wolverine anger at the time: she can name her privileges--"white, two parents, a nice home, only two kids in the family, two cars [. . .]; a decent education, no trouble about food, no beatings, no overt violence"--but beneath it she sees

a different kind of violence. Everything repressed under the dining room table. It's amorphous [. . .] You can't find it. It's like coming from a shopping mall, and that's your culture. Nothing worse happened than shopping at Simpsons, but underneath Simpsons, underneath the ground the shopping mall is on, are lies and fears and horrors nobody knows. (75)

For Griffiths, then, the discovery of Wolverine is a liberating moment of the discovery of her right to anger, even as a white woman, as much as it is a frightening moment:

When I started to . . . act you [Campbell] . . . write you . . . whatever it was I did, I could act the way I felt, as if somewhere I had been beaten, raped, oppressed. I could act from the part of me that wasn't a nice clean girl, the girl inside me that was huddled in a corner, who wanted to destroy herself because she hurt so much, and no one would listen because it looked so good on the outside. I couldn't speak of her then, but when I heard your story, there was finally a reason to act the way I felt. (75-76)

But for Campbell, familiar with the dangers of uncontrolled anger, the moment of Griffiths' discovery of Wolverine contained no triumph; it was instead a chilling re-encounter with her own Wolverine anger:

Sometimes when people say they are freaked out by me and they think maybe I'm going to do something to them, I know now that they must see that part of me. The part I never see or want to, but I know is there, and when I looked at you, there it was [. . .] I just knew that, no matter what happened from then on, I couldn't take any more chances. You know? Make sure you were protected. Make sure I was protected. Make sure that we had a circle, because

who knows? Maybe you'd attack one of the other actors. Because at that point, that Wolverine had no control. What would have happened if it had pulled me in there? One of us would have been alive when it was finished.

Never in my entire life has anything ever spooked me like that. (39-40)

For Griffiths, theatre rehearsals are by definition protected space, but the incident reminds Campbell that it is only through the careful ritual of the ceremony that safety can be established and Wolverine controlled, kept within the larger balance of the universe:

I thought I had taken you [Griffiths] totally into a dark side and couldn't do anything to protect you. I should have been doing our circle every morning and every night, but of course I hadn't [. . .] All I knew was that I hadn't done what I was supposed to do, all I knew was the Creator, the grandmothers, grandfathers, and the rituals that they required. (40-41)

Their different orientations are again emphasized: for Griffiths, a member of the history-less newly-come race, safety comes from a place, from the immediate space and practice of the theatre--it is somehow governed by the "theatre gods," though these gods are not named, their origins and provenance never discussed--while for Campbell, a member of a people rooted in this land, safety comes through the *connection* with history that the place and practice of ceremony establishes, through connection with the grandmothers and grandfathers and the Creator.

In the play, this realization of the deep danger of imbalanced power allows Jessica/Wolverine to break away from her attack on Bob, "remembering the ceremony," and to recognize the eternal double bind, that by killing Bob, she is killing herself as well: she looks up from strangling him and sees that "I'm not standing in a fertile place, I'm standing in a place that's dry and empty, like a desert. . ." (173). With this revelation, she is suddenly in control of her Wolverine anger, rather than controlled by it; her Wolverine aspect gives up its grip on her, and "the ceremony/ returns full circle" (174). When Vitaline asks Jessica, "where's Wolverine?" she can now safely and confidently reply, "inside," just as she does when Vitaline goes on to ask after Crow and Coyote and Bear as well--and after a pause, even after Unicorn, Jessica's white-blood spiritual heritage--as each of these spirits then leave the circle of the ceremony. But despite her integration of all these components of herself, Jessica must still make a final leap of faith to complete the ceremony. Standing outside the circle, in which Jessica, having named her history, in a sense, now stands alone, Vitaline urges Jessica to name what she sees in the present, what

the culmination of this history is: "a woman [, Jesse replies . . .] we've conjured her up, and she can't quite get through [. . .] She's bigger than she should be, I don't want her to be that big. . ." (174). Vitaline repeatedly insists that Jessica--standing on the brink of life and death, between history as (self-) affirmation and history as anger; feeling as if she's drowning, but urged to "keep breathing"--must name the woman (174). Vitaline finally calls on the grandmothers and grandfathers, "give me strength!"--calls once more on history for the active strength to shape the present--and tells Jessica that she must "call her now or you'll never see her again. Name her" (175). At last, finally drawing her history into herself for the strength to risk a new, life-affirming present--to give away her fears as Campbell does in facing the Devil--Jessica at last answers with her own name, "Jessica!", birthing herself and her song, claiming the spirits and powers, confirming her spiritual and cultural histories and her active place in their multiple processes.

The ceremony of the play--its version of history--thus completes the circle that has been repeated over and over again in the histories constructed in the commentary: the histories which, rooted in the search of the individual--Campbell or Griffiths--in the present, cycle again and again into the past, examining the conflicts and pains which shaped the past *and* the present, and resolving them into present and future healings. The multi-generic structure, crossing boundaries, transgressing divisions, as Annharte's poetry repeatedly crossed conventional oppositions, thus constructs history as partaking of the multiple, creative transformations of the spiritual. If *The Book of Jessica* has worked as a struggle between Campbell and Griffiths over the genre of the play, over the history it tells, the inscription of this struggle, first in anger and finally in healing, re-creates the play as a different genre entirely, repeatedly broken into by the alternate levels of commentary but then transformed by the intrusion. The work re-creates history as a different kind of story, repeatedly interrupted by different voices, but made equally accessible and powerful to all participants on all levels of emotional, intellectual and spiritual response--just as art may begin by stealing from the community, but ends in the act of giving something back to the community, transformed and transforming.

## Photos

Another house, this time my grandparents' bungalow in a semi-rural area of Tennessee. There is a sense of air and light as we enter, speckles of sun swaying gently on gauze curtains, but the room smells slightly of mothballs, and the walls are covered with darkwood shelves, carpets layered like memories. Grandpa greets us on the porch, then Grandma comes slowly through from the kitchen, an old, old woman bent beneath her own weight. We all exchange awkward embraces, then pause to look again.

"You've lost weight, Walter." Grandma eyes Dad up and down. "Are you sure you eat enough?"

"Yes, have you had a check-up lately?" Grandpa is suddenly Dr. Stanton again, carefully considering the colour of Dad's skin, the slenderness of his chest.

Dad is almost gaunt, his large head balanced on long twines of limbs, but he's always been like that. He blinks self-consciously, just barely smiles. "Well, it's been a year or so now."

"Yes, it doesn't matter how we try to feed him up, he just won't keep the weight on," Mum says in a rush of words. "The doctor says there's nothing wrong, but it's a worry that he doesn't have any reserves, you know, if he gets the flu or something."

"You should eat more." Grandma says sharply. She brushes roughly at her own heavy bulk.

Grandpa's looking at Annie and me. *I* clearly haven't inherited Dad's light build, and i'm taller than both Grandma and Grandpa, now, ten years since they visited us in Saskatchewan. Annie wouldn't take after either of my parents anyway, but usually fashionably slender, she has begun to put on weight lately, too, her face rounder, her body thickening. Silent under Grandpa's scrutiny, she leans a little towards me, and i to her. Everyone's looking at her, nobody's saying anything.

We've come to help Grandma and Grandpa sort through their house, in preparation for their move into the rest home in Johnson City, but it's really that Grandma wants her sons near her again, it's

a constant refrain throughout the visit. A hospital bed, gleaming steel and hunched mattress, crouches in the next room. The sun pulls around the corner of the house, abandoning the curtains.

I tug at my camera strap, embarrassed at my mere eighteen years. Annie's hands are clutched nervously together in front of her, her brown skin and lighter palms, like we ten year olds in church again. It feels like she and i have hardly even seen each other in recent years, two adolescents each turned intently on our own escape from our parents' silent house, the draughts that blow between habits and anger, but in this place of hanging dust, i am suddenly grateful for her.

Then, Grandma turns and waves at the long, polished table, the chairs tight against it. "Let's have lunch. I made a tuna casserole, and Glenda, you know we have a woman come in to help out, she made soup and a salad." Released into safe formula, Annie and I achieve our chairs. We raise our eyebrows at each other over the jello salad, which is still shaking a little from its trip to the table. Annie picks up her fork and starts to poke at the casserole, but i cut the air with my hand, gesture with my eyes at Grandpa, who is bending his head to start grace. Dropping her fork, she bulges her eyes out at the vibrating salad again. I bite my lips shut just as Mum turns to glare me into silence. Grandpa is finishing the prayer.

"What's Peter doing this summer?" Grandma asks. "He's twenty now?"

"Almost twenty-one, actually." Mum takes the casserole from her. "He's tree-planting again, up in northern Saskatchewan. It's hard work, but he earns a lot, and he seems to like being outdoors." She smiles, shaking her head. "That far north, the insects are terrible! Mosquitos and black flies, and what they call no-see-ums. I don't see how he stands it."

"The mosquitos have been bad here this year, too. And you should watch out for chiggers when you walk in the forest," Grandpa says.

Annie and i glance at each other again: chiggers? I imagine tiny hairy bogeymen, lurking behind trees, waiting to waylay passing maidens. Annie hides her smile behind a forkful of casserole, and i reach soberly for the lemonade. I catch Grandma's eyes watching me, but i glance away quickly.

"You should put mosquito repellent on your socks," Grandpa is saying. "And around your pant

legs, and your neck and sleeves, before you go out." I swallow my lemonade firmly, thinking about garlic for vampires, mosquito repellent for bogeymen. Annie is looking intently into her soup, her face drawn tight against a grin.

I chase a glob of salad around the plate with my fork, finally get it balanced, but it falls off immediately with an audible splat. Annie snorts, almost chokes. My foot touches the table leg: the jello wobbles again, shedding several bits of grated carrot. Annie's face is gratifyingly pink beneath the brown.

"What grade are you in?" Grandma frowns at Annie, looks at Annie's hands with a seeming distaste.

"Eleven." Annie stops. After a pause, "and some ten." Beside me, Mum stops chewing.

"Why ten?"

"I ... uh, didn't finish a few of my classes last year." Annie glances nervously towards Mum. I reach for my glass, but it's empty.

"You should take your education seriously. You have to have a good education." Grandma's voice rises with conviction. Her eyes flicker over Annie's lowered face.

"No, she's a little too interested in parties, gallivanting around until all hours." Mum pretends to speak lightly, but it doesn't hide her disgust. It's the endless battle. My chest tightens on a sudden knot of hatred.

"And you, Carol?" Grandma's eyes fix on me. She must know the answer already.

"I'm going to be starting my second year of university," i admit. I glance at Annie, knowing my betrayal, but helpless. She is braced against her chair, staring past her belly to her lap. She won't look at me. I think i already suspected that there wasn't much difference, university or drop-out. Just different ways out.

"You see?" The damned old woman is relentless. "You should follow your sister's example." Mum is nodding.

After lunch, Grandma goes to have a nap, leaving Dad and Grandpa chatting at the table. Mum is already immersed in a book. I signal to Annie. "Let's go outside."



The trees are loosely scattered, stilling the air over sagging ferns. Once sufficiently concealed from the house, Annie looks at me, then lights a cigarette that she had stashed in her sock. She blows smoke out defiantly, looks at me again.

"Look out for them chiggers," i say, gesturing back at the house. I could say sorry, but it's not the way in our house.

She grins through another drag, blows relief out with the smoke. She looks around at the trees. We've already reached the back fence of my grandparents' yard.

"Kind of boring here, eh?"

"Yeah," i say.

We lounge against the fence for awhile, start a game of tossing bits of twig at a mushroom, trying to see who can hit it first. Our aim is pretty bad.

I watch Annie bend awkwardly down to retrieve some of the twigs, her jeans too tight since she's gained weight. I pick up a few she missed, swing my hand back casually to toss one again, but i accidentally backhand her instead, not hard, but enough to tell. Her rounded stomach is solid and firm, not loose like fat: i knew it would be, but i hadn't been saying, not even to myself. I'm cold with the realization that no one's saying anything, no one has been for years. I guess it's too late for an abortion.

Annie knows i know, too: she must guess i planned that backstroke. I want to comfort her, but that's not the way we are in our family.

"Let's go in," she says, throwing her cigarette stub into the ferns.

I follow.

Grandma has gotten up, and Dad and Grandpa are talking about China again: a lot of the stuff my grandparents have to clear out is from their missionary days in China. We wander over to where Grandpa has gotten out several pieces of traditional Chinese clothing, one of them an embroidered silk robe, vibrant blue with green decoration.

"It's a man's robe," he says. "Fits me."

"Put it on!" Annie says.

"Yeah, put it on, let's see what it looks like!" I grab my camera from the table.

Grandpa grins shyly, then carefully sticks his arms through, buttons it up. It fits perfectly.

"It's beautiful," Mum says from her chair.

"Here, let me take a photo!" Grandpa obliges, standing obediently still while i fiddle with the exposure. I snap the shutter. I might have caught him mid-blink, but Grandma's already saying, "We already have a photo, of both of us in traditional dress, remember, Ronald?" She leafs through several books on one of the shelves, finally retrieves an old black and white print. We crowd around.

Grandpa couldn't have been more than twenty-five, wearing the same robe as he has on now, and Grandma, though already a little plump, is tiny beside him in an equally ornate robe. She is almost beautiful, certainly vibrant: her eyes would be compelling, except that her hat has slid down, half concealing them.

"You had a moustache!" i exclaim at Grandpa.

"He's cute, eh?" Annie nudges my ribs.

She grins at Grandpa at the same time as Grandma turns an astonishing, almost flirtatious smile at him, too, but her eyes drop immediately to the photograph again, the look so brief i'm not sure i've really seen it.

"You should have told me my hat had slipped!" she exclaims. It must be exactly what she said fifty years ago.

"Let's do it again, then!" Grandpa says, tugging at his robe. "We still have the other one."

The robe is a deep blue, trimmed around the sleeves and down the plaquet with an ivory silk, delicate reddish flowers twining between blue borders. One side folds over the other, the cloth buttons fastening at one side.

But Grandma's gesturing emphatically. "No. It won't fit. I'm too heavy, I don't want anyone to remember me like this."

"Well, without the robe, then--" Dad says.

"No. I won't."

Dad and Grandpa, without his robe, stand side by side, then Mum and then Annie, her hands held tightly down her front. She looks only sideways at the camera.

I take several photos, aware of Grandma behind me. Then Dad takes the camera, and i stand beside Annie, feeling huge beside Grandpa and Mum. Mum goes to make tea; Annie, Grandpa and Dad are looking at the other photos. Grandma pushes herself from the chair, moving slowly to join Mum in the kitchen. I raise the camera and snap: her hearing is not so good that she'll catch the sound of the shutter. Grandpa looks at me in surprise, but i shrug: she's my grandmother, my history, and this is probably the last time i'll see her. I figure i have some rights in the matter, too.

Later, my parents and grandparents are sitting at the table, discussing the planned move to the rest home, Grandma insisting again that she wished Dad's brother were here to help, too. They talk about wills and sharing stuff out between the brothers, discuss how much space there is in the rest home, what to do with the furniture.

Annie and i sit side by side on the couch in the corner, paging through old National Geographics. Annie looks tired and uncomfortable in the humidity.

"Let's play a game," i say, gesturing at the pack of cards.

Annie shrugs indifferently, but after we've played just three hands she's already twenty points ahead of me, and i've got a hand of nothing but duds. I chuck down the first card i touch, and Annie takes another trick. I throw my hands up in the air in exaggerated despair, dropping several cards: Annie picks them up for me, making a great show of not seeing what they were. I pluck another from my hand, place it emphatically on the couch between us. Annie takes the trick. I start making stupid puns on the cards i'm playing, Annie puns back, taking more tricks, and pretty soon we're so giddy, everything's funny. We're laughing and laughing, hardly able to stop.

"Shsh!" I say, suddenly remembering our grandmother at the table. Annie thinks even that's funny too, but her laughter stops abruptly. I look over and see that Grandma's already watching us,

frowning as usual. Mum notices Grandma, and turns to look at us, too. Mum's face is creasing into her own frown, her head begins to shake in disapproval, but Grandma's face has already opened into a smile as, drawing her eyes back from a great distance, she sighs and says:

"I used to laugh like that once, when I was young."

## Conclusion

The cumulative effect of the cross-cultural reading strategy i have developed here might be described by James Clifford's comment on the Western ethnographer's similar project of writing cross-cultural interactions: that "there is no picture that can be 'filled in,' since the perception and filling of a gap lead to the awareness of other gaps" (Introduction 18). My discussion has clearly been motivated by my desire to address what i perceived as limitations in the conventional academic approach to reading First Nations and perhaps other minority texts--approaches so bound up in Western European-originated historical, epistemological and ontological paradigms, and initiated so exclusively by Western, academic issues and debates, that they seemed to me to miss or misunderstand vast areas of First Nations meaning and concern (as i *guess* it), and many of the immediate politically and historically-embedded issues of everyday white-First Nations interaction (as i "*know*" it). But at the same time, my alternative reading strategy also inscribes an "inherently imperfect mode of knowledge that produces gaps as it fills them" (8). The reading strategies i arrive at are thus by no means to be taken as any more "genuinely" or "accurately" "First Nations" than the more conventional responses i claim to reject; indeed, my entire project here, the process of change i have decided these texts demand of me, has been to try to discover how to be "true" to myself, to my own cultural identities, experiences and discursive expressions--including the academic--as the necessary predicate to a (proposed) non-dominating, non-appropriative cross-cultural interaction: to learning how to quiet my self (selves) enough to be able finally to *listen* to someone "else." As Robin Ridington quotes Simon Lucas, an Nuu-Chah-Nulth elder, as saying, "'It's important that we remain different. That way, you and I will get to know the meaning of understanding. What it means to understand another man's culture'" ("Cultures in Conflict" 275-76).

This complex effort to remain obstinately and necessarily "myself," faithful to my cultures'

discourses while also undertaking an all-encompassing process of change that could potentially affect my behaviour in every aspect of my discursive, social, emotional and spiritual identities and actions, means that even my basic academic/critical voice, as inscribed in the commentaries i develop on the various texts, is altered. Writing with difficulty (it's hard to break a habit of power) against the conventional "objective" stance still taken by most critics, despite recent discussions of its power-ful implications, and in nervous awareness of the concomitant assumption of the transparency and accuracy of our critical discourses--again, in spite of our recognition of the problems in this assumption--i attempt instead a critical discourse that works at *naming, extensively and repeatedly*, the biases and desires that shape each interpretive decision i make and thus at highlighting the partiality and opacity of the resulting texts of my readings. In addition to my extensive use of endnotes--which "[drag my] text beyond its immediate . . . confines," but also demonstrate the extreme limitations of my own commentary, extensively contextualizing the conditions of their validity--my italicized insertions into the commentaries are further intended both to limit the authority of my critical responses and yet to push these responses into new areas of concern (Bannerji 33). They are meant both to bracket the validity and define the responsibility of my readings within a very carefully localized, immediate and personal field of values, experiences and discourses, and yet also to demand of me a new kind of emotional and spiritual responsibility for my critical utterances.<sup>1</sup> Risking myself in this very personal way--answering the very real risks taken by First Nations writers in their texts with a grateful gesture of risk in return--i am forcing myself to consider far more deeply and personally the real political, personal and emotional implications of my responses to their risky texts, both for me and for them.

It goes without saying that i actually achieve such self-awareness and accurate responsibility only sporadically in my several levels of critical and personal response, and at that, always under the influence of my own continued biases and desires--so that if i do manage a gesture of emphasizing, at least in this metonymic, representative way, the simultaneous limitations and responsibilities of my readings, i am not at all certain that i am doing any more justice to the First Nations texts i am reading than a more conventional reading might. For example, in the main commentaries, my choice of a genre-based structure

was intended to function on both symbolic and practical levels as the deliberate imposition of a European-originated system of identification and thought onto the First Nations texts--a deliberate staging of the appropriation of First Nations writing for use in a white academic project (Tapping 93)--but at the same time, my purpose was also to set my own critical project up as a straw woman, as it were, to be knocked down under the necessarily subversive influence of the First Nations texts themselves. If i began with an intentionally power-ful act of appropriation, my assumption was that the texts themselves were easily "powerful" enough themselves to respond with an equally power-ful movement of reclaiming First Nations meanings and identities from such colonizing, appropriating actions. That the texts do effect such a subversion and reclaiming is clear, i think, as for example Maria Campbell's autobiography or Jeannette Armstrong's novel shifted the structural parameters, discursive conventions and resulting epistemological and ontological foundations of their respective genres (at least as these genres were defined in European-based literary histories), and thus called into question this very action of taxonomizing as a way of inventing knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

But though my strategic choice of such a genre-based study was at least partly effective in helping to close the "gap" i perceived in our continuing *unconsciously* to apply European-based critical categories to First Nations writing, the result is to open up a new gap--by which in calling up such European generic issues, the traditional ceremonial and popular "genres" of First Nations oral literatures are not then allowed to work, as they do in several of Paula Gunn Allen's essays, as the basis of a more truly *First Nations*-centred discussion of First Nations writing (*The Sacred Hoop* 54-75, 102-117; also Cornell; Grant 63: Maracle, "Skyros Bruce" 89). My "excuse" for such an omission is to return to the premise of my project: that my goal here is not to "become" First Nations--it *cannot* be to attempt a First Nations reading of First Nations texts--and is rather to learn how to be more comfortably and self-acknowledgingly my *self* (selves) so that i am in a position to be more genuinely valuing, but *not* insecurely appropriating, of First Nations textual and cultural meanings. My goal must necessarily be to conduct a more valuing, sensitizing *Euro-Canadian* reading of First Nations texts, and thus to inscribe an overtly cross-cultural reading.

But this omission points to a further potential weakness in my choice of strategies in both the

commentaries and their italicized insertions: that in both cases, the danger in focussing on the significance of First Nations texts to *Euro-Canadian* meanings and systems of significance--whether the effect of First Nations writings on European-based generic distinctions or the personal, emotional effect of First Nations stories on my own--is that the exercise can too easily become self-indulgent and self-absorbed.<sup>3</sup> If i propose that *for me*, such a cross-cultural reading must necessarily be staged from the range of stances offered by my *own* cultures' discourses and structures of meaning, taking repeated care to try to define the action of this bias--at the same time, i risk simply *using* First Nations texts as a way of talking only about myself yet again, after the same old Eurocentric patterns that, as Daniel Francis details extensively in his *Imaginary Indian*, have characterized European interactions with the First Nations since the first moment of contact (also Tompkins, "'Indians'"). I do not think that i resolve this dilemma in any definitive way here--i am uncertain even by what criteria such a solution could be evaluated, except as each individual reader judges for him or herself--but the best solution i can offer is to work again and again to de-authorize the conventional assumptions of authority that have underwritten the critical enterprise throughout the history of its development as a set of conventions.<sup>4</sup>

As already noted, this de-authorizing intention shapes both the critical commentaries and the insertions; and then, it is further enhanced in the inclusion of my stories and poems in between the chapters, as part of the range of responses which i read as newly enabled by the First Nations texts themselves. The effect of these stories and poems is not only to contribute to my efforts to define the limitations and histories of my several critical and personal voices--to undermine the conventional authority of the critical voice (Gunew and Spivak 139)--but it is also to suggest an entirely different way of reading both the First Nations texts *and* my critical response: bracketing my (conventionally non-figurative) critical voice between two figurative, fictionalizing voices--between the First Nations "fictional" texts themselves and my own fictional texts--the effect is to demand of *my* reader a similarly interpretive, participatory engagement with *my* cross-generic thesis as i read the First Nations texts as demanding of me. In a reversal of the usual hierarchy by which the fictional texts are written as dependent upon the interpretive authority of the supposedly transparent (and thus *not* interpretively demanding) critical voice,



my critical voice is made dependent upon these several figurative texts for meaning. Thus, though i think that my thesis might still be seen, with justification, as a *self-centred* repetition of the usual pattern by which, as Clifford notes, "the simplest cultural accounts are intentional creations, ... [and] interpreters constantly construct themselves through the others they study" (10), at least i do write into this self-centred text an invitation for its critique and deconstruction: writing "an inherently imperfect mode of knowledge that produces gaps as it fills them" (8), my response is to choose a structure that explicitly refuses the claims to comprehensiveness conventionally demanded of the literary critical response--the demand of (non-fictional) critical discourse that it repeatedly perform a *closing* of (fictional) gaps (Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 313). I write instead a deliberately self- and generically-contradictory discourse that depends precisely upon the *creation* of such literary gaps.

Specifically, as i began to suggest of the personal insertions into the main commentaries, the stories and poems are intended to work as gifts given in return to the First Nations writers whose texts i have been given. They are a way of giving healings in return for healings, after the fashion described by Maria Campbell in *The Book of Jessica*, by which if the cultural process--the creation of identities, stories, communities of meaning, works of art--begins with the act of taking something from the community, the other half of the circle involves the deliberate act, then, of giving something back. Thus, in response to my invitation into the healing, forgiving communities of these texts--however carefully limited my place in these communities is--i participate in them first by trying to learn how to listen to these utterances, but then also by offering in return some healing stories of my own. I locate these healings within an action of retelling my histories, performing an act of reinventing my several critical, personal voices yet again, in the very acts of the remembering and the telling (Hall 324). And yet, at the same time, these histories and voices--these acts of remembering and telling--also continue to remain negotiable, shifting, always provisional and partial.

Thus, i have heavily (and rather clumsily) framed my "Grandmother Story" within the possibility of the healing i construct Carol, the teller, as having found in the present, *and* as presently telling--though it is a healing still deeply marked by the patterns of the past, the red poppy appearing amongst the white

flowers of the morning glory like the First Nations Annie amongst the members of her white family, and Carol's hands repeating the sturdy shape of her grandmother's. This action of remembering wavers between the desired remembrance of a healing, even at the time of the grandmother's visit, and a more self-critical, unforgiving remembrance of the failure of a healing, in the grandmother and in Carol alike. The healing relies upon the awareness and even the recreation, in the telling, of a gap--between people, between desire and actual accomplishment, between the two races of a single family, between the missionaries' presumably good intentions and yet their implication in the power relations of colonizer and colonized--but also upon the safe acceptance and successful forgiveness of these gaps, these dualities.

Seeing her grandmother, finally, as not having learned such self-forgiveness--as still struggling to close the gaps in her life and her self (between her selves) as forcefully as she crushes the relics of Hainanese culture<sup>5</sup>--Carol thus remembers her own generationally constructed history as marked by the failure of healing: she has not learned the process of healing from her mother (as in "Sticks") or her grandmother (as in this story). This is the trouble with the power-fully imbalanced structures of the white, patriarchal society that has surrounded and shaped these angry, ambitious women (Carol, her mother and grandmother)--that it does not teach such a healing, forgiving structure of thought by which contradiction and change can be safely accommodated within the supposedly singular identity of the individual, race, nation or religion: it does not teach them the self- and communally-empowering act of sacrifice by which their anger might be given creatively away and transformed into the multiple structures of a healing. But in a refusal of such a failure herself, Carol's telling is still framed with the possibility of the healing she has found in the present in her connection with her lover, with someone who can hear her stories and participate in the creation of this story, this community of healing.

The use of a highly figurative style to tell such stories moves the discussion of gaps and healings to a stylistic and linguistic level as well. Through such a figurative telling, symbols such as the various flowers in the grandmother's story work to create meanings and connections amongst the characters, suggesting repetitions and inheritances from generation to generation. But such symbols also work to refuse the *actual* establishment of connections between the characters through their own actions or words,

as for example, the unfinished gestures of various characters' hands function as a substitute for their actually *making* the connections with each other that their hands only gesture at. If their hands' movements speak symbolically of their desire to connect meaningfully with each other--in the way that, in the present, healing circumstances of the telling, Carol's hands actually *do* speak her love to her lover--the gestures in her childhood are always truncated and incomplete, the characters' desires separated from their actual accomplishment. The symbols, the words, thus both achieve and refuse meaningful relation, inscribe and breach in the same move, so that written into the action of telling, the very words and structures of telling and meaning, are the simultaneous movements towards and away from connection-making, analogy-making. The language and style of the telling might allow both such possibilities, of creative construction--carving the stick into a face, naming my First Nations sister *sister* even across racial anger--or anti-creative failure of meaning--angrily cutting the stick into useless fragments, or allowing the frustrating ambiguities and dis-integrations of language and of the discourses of racial dominance to refuse my sister and me our cross-racial relationship. The making of connections out of gaps, while still recognizing the continued existence and emergence of further gaps--the creation of healings that function precisely on the basis of a respectful recognition rather than denial of injuries--lies in the action of the reader as much as in that of the teller: meaning lies in the community of the textual occasion, of a multigeneric autobiography, novel or thesis, or of the individual and her several, repeated, shifting histories (Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse" 187-89).

What i think i *do* achieve in this multi-layered effort to position my cross-cultural reading within such carefully noted political and participatory confines, is to subvert and then reconstruct in a new way the power dynamic of a white academic approach to First Nations texts, through the subversion and the reconstruction of the act of reading as a multi-layered, multi-disursive process (also Krupat 37). Though the conventional stance of "objectivity," and the resulting valorization of the emotionally detached gaze as the source of "true" "knowledge," have been repeatedly deconstructed in the *content* of recent criticism, these notions have rarely been deconstructed in the actual *discourse* of criticism--the actual discursive features of the texts in which such deconstructions are written. Thus i try to put into actual discursive

*practice* the changes that such deconstructions demand, performing the subversion in practice as well as in theory, of this "objective," impersonal stance, and replacing it with an ethic and action of participation. I repeatedly position my critical exercise *within* the political and historical immediacies of contemporary colonized Canada, within the personal immediacies of my own experience of a kind of "colonization," and within the proposal of other kinds of (here, figurative) discourses for then inscribing and retelling these issues again. The effect is to shift the mode of cross-cultural interaction, as Clifford also notes of the newly "multisubjective" version of ethnographic writing that he advocates (15), from one based on a visual paradigm to one based on a discursive paradigm, with the result of a potential shift in power.

Once [Other] cultures are no longer prefigured visually--as objects, theaters, texts--it becomes possible to think of a cultural poetics that is an interplay of voices, of positioned utterances. In a discursive rather than a visual paradigm, the dominant metaphors for ethnography shift away from the observing eye and towards expressive speech (and gesture). (12)

This multi-layered discourse-based approach to First Nations texts transforms, in Clifford's words, "the 'cultural' text (a ritual, an institution, a life history, or any unit of typical behavior to be described or interpreted) into a speaking subject, who sees as well as is seen, who evades, argues, probes back" (14). As a result, i can read the First Nations texts as themselves inscribing reading instructions--instructions in how to change, how to learn to *listen*, and eventually, for how to write again--even for *me*, for a non-First Nations reader. I begin my reading with an assumption of the *power* of First Nations texts and people, the power of First Nations texts to empower themselves, on their own terms, based on their own constructions of balanced power, rather than relying on my white approval for their power. My reading is therefore actively set, as Clifford notes as well of the "proper" place of ethnography, "*between* powerful systems of meaning" (2, his emphasis). The effect is to locate "cultural interpretations in many sorts of reciprocal contexts, ... [obliging] writers to find diverse ways of rendering negotiated realities as multisubjective, power-laden, and incongruent" (15).

In the same action, the intended effect is also then to *historicize* the cross-cultural discussion, so that my own critical voice and project is refused the timeless stance of the detached observer who examines the fallacies and foibles of an Other culture or text from the normative, de-politicized standard

of European versions of knowledge and meaning: the myth of the European right to conquer with this knowledge is exposed. My own "observations" and interpretations are instead placed within a carefully limited and provisional cultural, experiential, political and historical context, as narrated in all levels of my discussion in the commentaries, their insertions, and the fictional stories that follow. And equally powerfully, as i read the texts for instructions here and now for how to change, the First Nations voice is also placed in an ongoing, historically significant and effective position rarely "granted" (as if it were mine to give) to the First Nations in the dominant paradigm by which the Euro-Canadian desire, as discussed in Chapter Four, is precisely to continue to deny history of any kind as a deeply implicating, constantly shifting process, and to substitute for it the fixed meanings and values of myth instead--myth which continually mythologizes the First Nations in the many diverse ways discussed in *Imaginary Indian* and thus deliberately denies them continued historical agency and significance, here and now.

However, where i *fail* even so in my concerted effort to specify time and again the political and historical context of my readings, is in focussing this effort more on myself than on the First Nations texts themselves, in the sense that though i take care to "rehabilitate" the First Nations, as a group, as historically significant and effective (again, as if it really were in *my* power)--and i take care to position myself (selves) minutely and repeatedly in relation to many of the issues arising from my readings--i have not dealt with issues of the *specific* cultural, historical and linguistic characteristics of the *different* First Nations, and instead have focussed on this larger political agenda of re-examining white-First Nations political and textual relations. I think, in *this* cross-cultural moment, that mine is a legitimate tactic, to the extent that the broad interaction of all of the First Nations and their various communities with Euro-Canadian culture and power is much the same everywhere within the institutional borders of Canada.<sup>6</sup> And as Wendy Rose (Hopi/Miwok) notes, such a tactic is used for Native purposes as well: "to be tribal and to be Pan-Indian exist side by side, and in fact Pan-Indianism is intended to protect those tribal identities, not replace them" (Rose 129; also Harjo 61; Hogan 82). But my strategy still replicates at the same time the misapprehension and mythologizing of the "Indians" as a single cultural and political unit, both historically and in the present (Chester and Dudoward n.p.; Krupat 38-43). I can only guess, for

example, at how much deeper my reading of *Slash* might be if i knew more about the Okanagan language and culture: perhaps such a knowledge could allow a far more detailed analysis of the Okanagan oral telling situation, and the patterns of rhetoric and expression that shape it, as these characteristics are inscribed in the novel. Or equally, if i knew Cree and had a better sense of the patterns of Cree spiritual meaning, i might be able to read Beth Cuthand's "Horse Dance" not only in terms of the significance of its specific pattern of symbols, but also in terms of how its system of meaning and structure compares cross-culturally with Annharte's poetry, or intra-culturally with the poetry of Connie Fife (also Cree), for example.<sup>4</sup>

*But as i noted in Chapter Three (n. 4), the strategies available for "acquiring" such information--and i want the deliberate implication of a commercial trade-off, as if First Nations languages and cultures were saleable commodities--are themselves highly problematic. Though i rejected the unproblematic usefulness of ethnographic material, i could still have consulted Okanagan or Cree speakers ("informants" [Hoy, n.p.]) in person. But i kept coming back to the sense that to do so only replicated the problems of using ethnographic sources, except that i would have been taking the place of the ethnographer myself.*

*Well, okay, maybe that's true, but i also kept turned back from consulting the First Nations writers themselves because i was simply afraid, intimidated: i still haven't stopped "doubting my own insides" enough that i could feel safe that i'd be able to give my (white-lesbian-academic) reading "faithfully," and that i wouldn't have wanted the First Nations writer's personal approval so much that i'd end up writing what i thought she wanted to hear rather than what i really got out of my "own" reading.*

*Of course, such a distinction is false. It's impossible to try to isolate my own thoughts from all of the influences and sources of information that i clearly drew on--including interviews of and articles by the writers. As if i could speak "purely" from some essential, isolated "selfness." But as a way to try to establish both the extent and the limits of my own responsibility as a reader of First Nations texts, i wanted at least to concentrate as far as possible on the immediate textual question at hand, especially in the sense of the difficulties of "performing" those questions in my text--which i was already finding an intimidating, and a deeply emotional, personal task. But i'm still uncomfortable with this decision, still doubting my own insides. What a long journey this will be.*

As well as the problems involved in treating the First Nations as a single "identity," a similar danger of fetishizing First Nations meanings also remains in my choice of evoking the issue of the spiritual as the primary mechanism for reading cross-culturally. Not only do i run the risk, as i began to note in Chapter Three, of simply repeating in a new way an old stereotype of the Indian as the repository of mysterious, unutterable knowledge, but i also extend this fetishizing action to all other aspects of First Nations textuality as i push my discussion repeatedly towards the issue of the limitations of utterance in general. I call not only upon the explicitly spiritual to stand as that which might be the

extra-linguistic, extra-textual supplement to the sign, but also upon the notion of the emotional as both a discursive event and an a-discursive event beyond the possibility of discursive control, and upon the humorous or the parodic, the historical, the environmental, and even the linguistic itself, to function as such a metonym for the indefinabilities of the cross-cultural moment and process (Tapping 87-88).

Perhaps it is inevitable that, in this time of critical preoccupation with the limits of representation, i should construct that which is most Other from me--that which i thus choose to identify metonymically as the most representative of the cross-cultural moment-- as being beyond any discursive construction, beyond representation (Goldie, *Fear and Temptation* 127; 143). At the same time, however, it is crucial that such a set of symbolic identifications be linked not with the First Nations themselves, as just another set of stereotypes to load on their already overburdened "sign" as it functions in Western discourses of power --but with the action and experience of the cross-cultural moment instead. That is, perhaps the moment of true cross-cultural communication, whether with a "spiritual" "Indian" or not, really *must* be a spiritually- and emotionally- charged event--one requiring, as i posited in Chapter One, a kind of faith or trust in the possibility and value of such communication, even where the *knowledge* of such value fails. Thus, while i do not think that i have by any means managed to write a construction of First Nations texts and meanings that does not replicate my culture's stereotyping constructions of them, i hope that i have at least enabled a new process of listening that inscribes the value of silence as a way of responding to the risks of cross-cultural interaction--the value of the gap, of the emotional and the spiritual as extra-linguistic events, and so on--as much as it inscribes the value of the critical analysis that forecloses gaps with its linear, binarist, and discursively-embedded logic.

My thesis thus functions in some ways as an echo of Clifford's repeated siting of ethnographic practice between cultural and epistemological gaps: i write here a kind of aesthetics, ethics and politics of the gap as both the threatened loss or destruction of (Other) meanings, and yet as the source of meaning itself--as the source of political, emotional and spiritual injury, and yet as the source of forgiving healings as well. Whatever its ambiguities, however, the crucial action that such a poetics and ethics of the gap allows, is the possibility of cross-cultural understanding--since the gap functions as the informing

structure and basis of the analogy-making process which i advocate when identity or knowledge fail in the cross-cultural moment. That is, when i cannot *identify* with the experience, meanings or stories of an Other, i both create and bridge at once the resulting gap of understanding--the resulting failure of representation, awareness of Difference--by falling back into the newly valuable "gap" of silence while i am forced to look instead for equivalencies, at least: for relatedness rather than strict sameness; for approximate substitutions rather than identical matches.

It is this process which i identify as a participation in the spiritual, a participation in new meanings beyond those inscribed and circumscribed in my own culture's discourses. This process enables me to answer with new stories and meanings of my own: to write such a metonymic, approximate, frightened and joyful, and *healing* cross-cultural and cross-generic thesis. My thesis is thus only the very beginning of the beginning of my espoused project of learning to silence the incessant noise of my selves sufficiently to be able to listen cross-culturally, and across the power gradient, in a genuinely non-appropriative and non-distorting exchange.



## Notes

### Chapter One:

1. Stephen Slemon and Helen Tiffin discuss this issue of the "disempowering energy" of Western critical theory "against other forms of registering experience and of interpreting artistic expression," in their Introduction to *After Europe* (ix). Tracing the origins of contemporary critical theory to Derrida's assertion that "'there has never been anything but writing,' . . . [that] 'what opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence,'" they note that though this argument does not necessarily imply an erasure of "social materiality . . . of the actual determinants gender, race, class, and cultural difference," the practical result of this "'suspension' of a referent in the literary sign" and the consequent "'crisis of representation'" has nevertheless been "a wholesale retreat from geography and history into a domain of pure 'textuality' in which the principle of indeterminacy smothers the possibility of social or political 'significance' for literature" (x; also Hartsock 195, 204).

That is, the result has precisely been, in Maracle's words, the separation of theory from story, the separation of thought from humanity's interaction (though see Spivak [1-9]). As Slemon and Tiffin note,

such a reading practice could only have gained credence within a dominant segment of a dominant culture. For more than anything, this ostensibly apolitical script for reading functions as an apparatus of cultural authorization. Under the hegemony of Anglo-American 'theoretical' methodology, we now read critical texts . . . from the footnotes backwards; and the paradoxical result is that even as the theoretically vigilant critical work establishes its autonomous grounding by ploughing under the now debunked thematics of the *literary* text, it also initiates an astonishingly filiative network of semantic and citational obedience towards the master-texts and master codes of 'theory' itself. (x, their emphasis)

They continue on to note "the ways in which this overarching extolling of the crisis of representation functions as a technology of containment and control within the cross-cultural theatre of neo-colonial relations" (xi; also Wynter "Afterword" 359).

Though i should make clear that Slemon and Tiffin go on to suggest, all the same, some very positive results of post-colonial criticism, and its concomitant discursive practices, even as they rely in the first instance upon this suspension of the referent from the sign, it is on the basis of such a critique of current critical practice that i establish this opposition between dominant, academic-critical practice and minority, First Nations, and/or lesbian, practice. As Maracle and Slemon and Tiffin do, it is an opposition which i too ultimately unravel, at least to some extent: such an opposition, after all, would seem to preclude the possibility (and reality) that Third World and minority critics themselves also do work *as theorists* (Maracle, *Oratory* 7, 13, and "Writing" n.p.; Slemon and Tiffin, xi; also Christian 52). (See also R. Radhakrishnan's thoughtful discussion of the possibilities of siting ethnic identity *within* post-structuralist theory.)

2. Though Slemon and Tiffin likewise disavow a practice which speaks "dynastically within the customary 'language' of 'theory,'" which engages in the "filiative footnoting [or for me, endnoting] enterprise, . . . [in]

'theory's' linguistic obliquities," and so on, their essay--no more than my critical discourse here--nevertheless does not sidestep this difficulty (xix; also Christian 55). As i do (if only by implication, so far), they define the "trustworthiness" of their enterprise as depending on the post-colonial critic's "recuperation of intentionality in the production of meaning," not as it is "narrowly located in the name of the 'author,'" but as it is

fastened to an anterior, though not determining, cultural dimension to writing: a grounding--as Mark Williams and Alan Riach explain--of post-colonial representation in an on-going cultural refiguration of 'the various inheritances, traditions, cultural memories . . . which make up the post-colonised world'. (xviii)

And similarly, "trust" is produced in critical discourse through an adherence to the "principle that theory is always grounded to a cultural specificity, and that both 'theory' and 'criticism'--in the first instance--are always material practices that are ideologically motivated and positioned" (xix; see also Mohanty, for a parallel discussion of the production of *knowledge* in the academy [191 ff.]). But for me, these careful reservations and awarenesses do not entirely answer my concern, and i follow Jane Tompkins in my discomfort with the "public-private *hierarchy*," which i see as inscribed in Slemon and Tiffin's solely academic register of discourse, as well as in my own academic discourse here. Tompkins identifies this hierarchy as "a founding condition of female oppression" ("Me and My Shadow" 169, her emphasis), and i suggest it as a condition of the oppression of other minorities as well: one of the most common heterosexist retorts to lesbian and gay efforts to be heard, for example, is that what lesbians and gays do in the bedroom is their own business and should not be made public--as if sexual practice were only a private matter and not also a historically and culturally grounded practice; as if heterosexuality, as a private practice and socially-sanctioned history and culture, were not everywhere apparent.

Thus for me, the issue of trust must also include some element of the personal or the private in it as well--the risky--which thus far i locate in my adoption of a politics of identity as the beginning-point of this reading, and which i try to develop in the italicized insertions: in my inscription of my reading self *as white, as a lesbian, as an academic*, and so on-- and in my inscription of these texts *as First Nations, women's (and so on) texts* (Hall 319; Rich 10). This is not then to privilege these personal discourses as any less subject to the historically and culturally vigilant scrutiny Slemon and Tiffin advocate (also Lugones 169), but it does demand a personal accountability and risk which i see as crucial in the delicate issue of cross-cultural interaction, especially when it is between dominant and minority cultures, across a distinct power gradient where trust is all but non-existent on either side. (In *The Book of Jessica*, written collaboratively by the Métis Campbell and the white Linda Griffiths, one of Campbell's complaints about Griffiths' almost predatory interest in Campbell's painful life, is that Griffiths doesn't return the intimacy, doesn't share the less savory aspects of her life, too, in fair exchange [87]). I too, then, partly recover the notion of authorial intention--at least as an explicitly *discursive*, rather than (apparently) *extra-discursive*, characteristic--and as the notion is subject to the redefinition of individual identity, whether the author's or anyone else's, which i will carry out in the course of this discussion. (See also María Lugones for her discussion of such issues as a concern with how to love, as well as trust, properly ["Playfulness" 160-67; also Kroeber 36].)

I should add that, though i am not certain, i wonder whether my proposed strategy of speaking, at least at times, in a more personal discourse, is not similar to Houston A. Baker's proposal of a "vernacular" Black American criticism. This vernacular approach is intended to effect an "invasion and transcendence of fields of colonizing discourse [characteristically dualistic in their conception of "*self-and-other*," for example] in order to destroy whitemale hegemony" in "a triple play that changes a dualistic Western joke and opens a space for the sui generis and liberating sound of the formerly yoked" (382, his emphasis).

3. Also Tapping 96. Regarding the interconnection of storytelling and healing in various First Nations

cultures, see, for example, Cuthand, "Transmitting" 53; Brant, "Coming Out" 59.

4. At the same time, however, i am extremely uncertain about my own judgements regarding Campbell's style, or that of other First Nations writers--an uncertainty i carry throughout my thesis--wary of the kinds of assumptions i bring to the discussion. My description of her style as informal and conversational suggests that she might equally have chosen a more formal, "literate" style, as if such a choice were, at base, a neutral issue, one style as good or effective as the other--when my *guess* is that a more formal style, carrying with it a specific European-based literary history, and a great weight of political, ideological and epistemological assumptions, would simply have been "wrong" for the subject. This is not suggest that an informal style does not also imply a history and ideology--my discussion makes clear that it does (also Tapping 89-90).

I wonder again whether Baker's discussion of the "vernacular" as a minority strategy, whether in critical discourse as Baker proposes it, or in literary discourse as here, isn't a useful concept in this discussion (see n.2). Indeed, the style of Campbell's more recent writing is still further from any kind of formal, conventional use of English: she writes in

very broken English . . . . I can't write in our [Métis] language, because who would understand it? So I've been using the way that I spoke when I was at home, rather than the way I speak today. And the way I spoke when I was at home was what linguists call "village English"--you know, very broken English. It's very beautiful, but it took me a long time to realize that. Very lyrical, and I can express myself much better. I can also express my community better than I can in "good" English. It's more like oral tradition, and I am able to work as a storyteller with that. (Interview 48)

To suggest that Campbell might as easily have chosen a formal style as an informal one also assumes that she has equal "access" to such a style--such a discursive power--again, as if it were an issue isolated from such historical and political concerns as Campbell's access to white institutions and institutionally-sanctioned discursive conventions, and the applicability or appropriateness of these conventions to a Métis woman and a Métis subject. Campbell repeatedly emphasizes, for example, that she does not consider herself a "writer" because of all of the inappropriate (European) cultural weight the term carries with it, and she calls herself a storyteller instead, in accordance with Métis cultural conventions:

My work is in the community. Writing is just one of the tools that I use in my work as an organizer. . . .

So, I am not a writer, bumping around all over reading and talking about "great literature." I don't think of myself as an authority on that. I get quite embarrassed when I have to speak from the point of view of a writer, because I really don't know what that is.

I know what a storyteller is. A storyteller is a community healer and teacher. (Interview 41-42)

Equally, however, i want to be absolutely clear that i am not suggesting Campbell did *not* consider the issue of a formal or an informal style in writing *Halfbreed*, when it is clear that, at least more recently, she has thought a great deal about style and tone: while wary of the assumptions i mention above, i want to be equally wary of unthinkingly evoking the racist stereotype of the Native (or Black, etc.) writer as somehow naive or "natural," almost in the archaic sense of a "natural" person as mentally deficient, or at least unsophisticated and ignorant. The fact is finally that i do not know what specific stylistic concerns affected Campbell's writing of *Halfbreed*, nor do i know how much influence her white editor had on her style in the final version of the work--whether he was subject to any of these stereotypes or assumptions (or others i may not have thought of). (See also Cornell's article, regarding not only stylistic analysis of

Native texts [in this case, especially oral ones], but also the European generic assumptions that inform the stylistic analysis.)

5. See also Agnes Grant ("Contemporary" 127) and Kate Vangen (189-94), regarding the use of humour in *Halfbreed* as both a mode of resistance to white oppression, and an element in her re-creation of a Métis discursive community. As Vangen notes, the effect is that, "while [white] readers are invited to participate in the narrative, made both palatable and realistic with humour, they nonetheless remain the outsiders" (190).

6. Elaine Savory Fido elaborates the rationale for such a participatory, interactive approach: speaking of the specific instance of Caribbean women's writing and criticism, she argues against the false division of race from gender, from nationality, from class--as if one could only ever use one stance at a time as the basis for criticism or political action--and suggests instead that

[I]t is a truer perception to realize that we are bound to be less than fully aware of the intersections of various aspects of our complex reality most of the time and to cause ourselves to be as conscious as possible of these limitations by the admission of subjectivity and the analysis of it in both creative and critical work. . . . There is really only the choice of dealing with that [multifaceted] experience in a [sic] integrative manner, of tolerating the differences within the personality. . . . Criticism could then proceed beyond the fairly futile ground of deciding between outsider and insider views of a literature. . . . It could become a matter of sharing the complexly personal vision of writer and critic as they interact together, which I want to suggest is a major way forward to unlocking the deeper value of writing and reading as communication of a special, profound nature. . . . Criticism then, in this sense, is a self-exploratory act on the part of the critic, understanding that even the apparently objective perception of form in literature is best comprehended with the knowledge that form is philosophy, and as such politics and ideology as well. . . . I, too, as a critic, am on a journey of development, which hopefully will never use the works of writers but rather explore them as a source of knowledge and experience of form and content which can bring me more self-awareness as well as an awareness of the writer's creative power and achievement. (30-31; also Gunew and Spivak 136-37)

7. For herself, Jeannette Armstrong is very clear that this goal of change, in *white* people, is one of her motivations in writing:

[W]e are resisting the kind of cultural mold the dominant society is forcing us into. We're not talking about it enough and we need to do that. I think the Indian writers that are here [at the Women and Words Conference, Vancouver, 1983] need to grasp that so that we can go forward into this next generation and fulfill the prophecy of the reason non-Indian people are here. They aren't here to change us; we're here to change them, and that's my point of view in my writing. ("Writing" 55; though see Maracle, "Writing" n.p.)

See also Adrienne Rich's "Notes Towards a Politics of Location," especially 16.

8. Regarding this construction of "dominant culture," see my summary, at the beginning of the next chapter, of Sylvia Wynter's article. To oversimplify, she demonstrates how contemporary culture privileges the white, male, bourgeois subject through the deliberate denigration of Others--how, in essence, contemporary mainstream culture is "dominant" in the sense that its entire mode of self-affirmation, self-

definition and self-perpetuation, as both a culture and as individual members participate in its perpetuation, depends upon the domination of "minority" groups and individuals by "non-minority" ones, economically, socially and morally.

I thus define dominant culture less as a definable object or construct per se, than as a series of hierarchizing practices which change historically--just i go on to define identity as processive and relational, rather than fixed and unitary (for examples of some of these practices, see Frye 113-18; Mary Louise Pratt, "Scratches" 139-41). This series of practices, while empowering some groups over others for the sake of the system's own self-perpetuation, is by definition of its "dominance," pervasive as a mechanism of meaning and exchange throughout all groups in "Canadian" and general "Western" society, both the privileged and the less-privileged. It is the degree and manner to which these practices are accepted as rightful ("naturalized," or "ontologized," as Wynter might put it), rather than resisted (as we have seen JanMohamed and Lloyd define minority groups as doing) that ultimately distinguishes dominant cultural group(s) from minority ones--though even this definition constructs an overly simplistic binarism, when of course many individuals, like myself, can be identified as participating in both "sides" at once.

But the fact that even *within* its supposedly privileged categories of people and groups (white, male, bourgeois), power is distributed unequally, only emphasizes the nature of its profoundly hierarchizing practices. If even many supposedly privileged members of contemporary culture are to varying degrees disempowered through such practices (as i have no doubt many are), my point is reinforced: that even the powerful of society are harmed by the self-privileging. Other-hating practices that define dominant culture--self-privileging *through* the hatred of others, as if one could only ever have power at the expense of someone else's autonomy and power--and that i must therefore heal myself of *both* aspects of dominance, of being both victimized *and* victimizer.

9. To this degree, it is necessary to carry out precisely the critique of academic critical discourses that i have begun in these endnotes: i must examine the "self" i have been made--or that i have made myself--in the discourses of the academic community.

10. Similarly, academic discourse can be read as inscribing structures of mistrust: even the very act of engaging in the critical project, particularly as it makes "arguments," which at least in the context of this thesis, i must then "defend," speaks of the academic individual and her place in the community as an issue of contestation and conflict, in which the understood object of the contest is to secure an apparent authority and thus power over a topic or a text. As an academic, i participate in the construction of a textual community based upon an informing construction of the community and its individual participants--of me--as competing users of a hierarchically-understood power and as competing desirers of that power.

This is not to preclude the possibility that much academic (communal) interaction is presumably done in a genuinely non-competitive, cooperative spirit--but even so, i think the *discourses* of the academy, as well as many of its practices, still speak of an underlying ideology of competition for the power of knowledge--the power to construct and control knowledge (Tompkins, "Me and My" 170-71). Some First Nations thinkers define white-dominated society in general as characteristically "adversarial" in its most basic structures and practices (Cardinal and Armstrong, 17, 26).

In complete contrast to any kind of critical activity, for example, Ruby Slipperjack (Ojibway) offers her sense of the practice of criticism: the reason she doesn't get a lot of feedback on her novel, *Honour the Sun*, from Native readers is that

you don't do that.... It is like questioning someone! You don't question people. You don't make comments. That is why the lecture theatres are such a foreign environment in universities, the debates, and the discussions, the panels--those are totally foreign. It is just like pointing a finger

at somebody [which is very rude]. (Interview 213)

The "objective" stance adopted in conventional academic discourse functions as the discursive correlative of such a finger-pointing--or as the discursive correlative of the voyeurism of the white men Campbell tells of, who watch the Métis men beating their wives--as the invisible critic objectifies the "other" as a suitable object of scrutiny, never allowing these "others" to be themselves capable of either their own scrutiny of the (then *not* safely invisible, universal) critic or of their own concomitant discourse. Thus we academics also write ourselves as incapable of self-reflection, fixing our critical view always on some "other" practice than our own, even when we are critiquing (other) academic practice.

Chris Bracken summarizes this (by now familiar) argument concerning the power relations that inform the academic study of Native and other minority texts: like Lee Maracle (*Oratory*, 11-13), he argues that simply to identify Native writing *as* an object of academic-style study is to induct the texts into a "conceptual system that uses knowledge to open up a field where a highly charged set of forces is put into play." It is to draw the texts into a

local phenomenology which is also a technology of power-knowledge. For the categories that bring forth the 'aboriginal' text as something to be known serve to entwine it in very specific relations of power that . . . tend to work in Canada's national interest. . . . [The] colonising gaze intersects Native writing and declares sovereignty over it. . . . [T]he category of (cross-cultural) intertextuality is a particularly effective means of situating Native writers in the mainstream of Canadian writing. . . . When the assimilating gaze falls on texts from other cultures, however, it forces them into the grid of what is already known--namely, the literary tradition of its own culture. The effort to understand texts creates avenues for the deployment of power. . . . (4-6, his emphasis)

Thus while it is important to recognize the value of the kind of politically-, historically- and geographically-specific reading practice which Slemon and Tiffin advocate, and to recognize the kind of self-responsible academic persona and community which the resulting critical discourse constructs; at a still deeper level of critical self-awareness, i have to ask myself whether my argument-making discourses don't inscribe an anti-communal, non-inclusive ideology of thought and reading, even so, which is in its very essence, based upon the same hierarchical desires for power which sustain, and are sustained by, current structures of power?

To this degree, in order to read these First Nations texts, part of the change i must undertake as a condition of the effort to *listen*, to heal Métis-white relations as Campbell has asked, is to stop reading as an academic, in a sense, though this would of course be both an impossible and even an irresponsible course of action at the same time. The point is not to stop being my (several) self; it is not to change into something i can never be--to "go Native," appropriatively and impossibly--but to stop doubting my own insides, speak the private through the public, in the sense that i can at least temper my conventional critical discourse here with other reading and discursive practices, based on the other ("Other") discourses of (my) identity and politics that are being enabled by the reading itself. I cannot help but to read as an academic, but i can *also* permit myself to read as my other selves. (See also Tompkins's discussion of these issues in "Me and My Shadow").

11. Campbell expresses this hope regarding the effect of her stories--that they will elicit further stories--though in this case, she speaks of a specifically Indian context, where she hopes that a Cree child, reading a Cree book, will help to create an environment in which her grandmother will be drawn to tell her more stories ("A Conversation" 18). See also Anzaldúa, "To(o) Queer the Writer" 259; Lugones and Spelman 573-74; Tompkins "Me and My Shadow" 170.

In my case, i want to take care that this story-telling is done in the spirit of remembering (remembering after being "dis-membered from myself" as a result of participation in racist systems) that Kim

Hall articulates:

Remembering is not only a movement backward; it is also a movement forward. Remembering forward is an exploration of the unknown, a movement in which the possibilities of relating [across cultures] unfold and begin anew. Remembering involves not placing myself only in a negative relation to womyn of color. If, in my remembering, I stop and say, that I have oppressed you, that I have silenced you, and nothing else, I not only do not see you, I also do nothing to change myself. Remembering means realizing that the process of remembering is undertaken with the positive goal of change in mind. It involves the realization that you are not only a survivor of racism and that I am not only an oppressor (324; also Campbell, Interview 60).

Even so, however, Edward Said reminds me that not all narratives are given the same value or validity across the board, depending on the writer-teller's and reader-hearer's own position and desires within structures of political and ideological power, so that even as i move to evade one paradigm of control, another is enabled ("Representing" 221-22; also Keeshig-Tobias, Interview 81).

12. Nancy Hartsock notes, for example, that this project of "the construction of the subjectivities of the Other, subjectivities which will be both multiple and specific," is a strategy common to various minorities in their struggle "to reclaim our pasts and remake our futures on our own terms." As i note of Campbell's work, Hartsock also suggests that a common minority strategy also involves a *communal* emphasis: in a subversion of the stereotype by which the "natives" are often represented as an undifferentiated mob--in relation to which the white observer, as the writer/observer, distinguishes his separate, individual self--minority strategy often relies precisely upon the creation and nurturing of the community as a source of minority value and strength (195-96).

However, Hartsock does go on to emphasize the need to "dissolve the false 'we' I have been using [to refer to all minorities without distinction] into its real multiplicity and variety. . ." (204). As with Campbell's construction of individual identity as safely multiple, Hartsock suggests that more general minority identity relies upon both an identification amongst and within minorities, and yet a recognition of inter- and intra-minority difference and multiplicity.

13. In such a process--in its repeated doubling of the possible meanings of each trope, each narrative line or generic identification--*Halfbreed* might be read as constituting itself as a *hybrid* text, part First Nations, part white in content, style and structure. This is how Barbara Godard reads First Nations writing as working, for example ("Politics" 220; see also Brydon's valorizing of the concept ["The White Inuit" 27]; McGrath 169-70). I clearly share Godard's ultimate goal, like Françoise Lionnet's as well, of demystifying "essentialist glorifications of unitary origins" (Lionnet 9), but while the text's use of English to convey Métis meaning, or its written evocation of an oral culture, or its use of the European-originated genre of autobiography to write a communal Métis story, and so on, might be construed as signalling its hybrid position between two cultures and their modes of expression--i want to resist such an identification, leery of its potential appropriative effect.

The notion of Métis culture itself, as it expresses Lionnet's concept of *métissage*, for example, might lend itself to a reading of *Halfbreed* as hybrid; but while the Métis claim genealogical and cultural roots in French and/or Scottish, and Cree and/or Ojibway cultures, the result is a variety of Métis cultures. Resisting distinctions between "pure" Cree or "pure" Scottish culture, and a supposedly hybrid (i.e. "impure") Métis culture--through her inscription of her culture's differences from both the others--Campbell writes her several selves back into safe coexistence within herself, and her Métis culture back into its *own* self-healing, through its *own* stories. Questions of purity and hybridity are subsumed by the text's repeated action and structure of double meaning--its repeated action and structure of forgiveness--in which no meaning, history or story is ever pure of its historical and social context, and yet because of its context, it is always also unique. (See also Edward Said, concerning the ideological implications of claims

to "purity" ["An Ideology" 40-43]; also Homi Bhabha's discussion of the nation as narration--as i define the individual identity as narration--with the result that such narration is ambivalent, incomplete, endlessly negotiated ["Introduction" 4 and "DissemiNation"]).

As a white reader, i can never, in any case, read this Métis meaning purely or authentically in *Halfbreed*, but as *Halfbreed* itself inscribes in story and structure, this is to ask the wrong question, self-defeatingly, and even irresponsibly--certainly unforgivingly--as if there were only an either-or choice between opposing, mutually exclusive possibilities, and not a community of possibilities in constant relational transformation (see Maracle, "Preface," for example, where she articulates her own struggle with such a negotiation [11]).

14. Jeannette Armstrong speaks of the importance in Okanagan culture of such a multiple sense of oneself, "the principle of being fully prepared from a multi-positioned self." She translates the Okanagan word for this, *q'wít'míst*, as

'put your most confident self power outward.' Collectively, this refers to the physical skills, analytical skills, total spiritual awareness and emotional intuitive sensitivity that should be engaged to face an unknown of any nature. . . . In [all matters of serious consequence], to attempt to act without the total self involved, is considered foolish and dangerous. The process of opening oneself in this way allows for a totally new approach to emerge. (*The Native Creative Process* 35)

15. W.H. New reminds me that even for Europeans, the use and development of this linear narrative structure has a *history*. It is not *essentially* and unchangeably European: it developed at a specific time in history, under certain conditions, for specific reasons. While I have not had a chance to research the history and development of narrative conventions over the course of millenia of European storytelling, Sylvia Wynter's article on the history of the novel suggests, as New does, that such developments in both narrative and historiographical conventions were ultimately motivated by a movement for some kind of *power*, suppressing other forms of story and history--most likely in a struggle between political and religious forms of social and discursive power, between the vernaculars and Latin as appropriate media for literary and philosophical expression, and so on (see "On Disenchanted Discourse"). Such a movement for linear power thus also marks our own history and loss.

## Chapter Two:

1. Andrew Wiget proposes a similar model of the absolute interconnection of story and spirituality, suggesting that ceremony--at least as it functions as the central metaphor in *Ceremony*, by Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna), as it functions as a metaphor for story itself--"requires *myth*, which sets the pattern for the event, *rites*, which reenact the prototypical events, and *medicines*, which effect the integration of the prototypical and the historic" (87-88). That is, spiritual action requires story and the participatory retelling of story to effect the healing and empowerment of the people here and now.

2. As W.H. New reminded me in reading my argument, i want to be careful with this argument from *origins*--as if the novel were only a single thing, as if it were not also subject to history and change, and had not undergone considerable development, particularly in the last few decades, in terms of its possibilities as a tool of anti-imperialist writing (see Brennan, for example). However, i think that



Wynter's construction/history of the novel is still useful, not only in setting up the conflict amongst possible ways of writing novels that i see these novels as negotiating (in greater and lesser "imitation" of once-European models), but also in suggesting the ways in which different orders of discourse--or here, of narrative in particular--still work either to perpetuate or to subvert and replace the kind of dominant-cultural, hierarchical practices and economies of thought and behaviour that i discussed in Chapter One (n. 8).

Mikhail Bakhtin would suggest a far less oppressive understanding of the novel, with his proposal of its inclusive, heteroglossic nature. And yet he, like Timothy Brennan, closely associates the development of the novel with the rise of nationalism and nations in Europe--a period which, as Bakhtin notes, saw increasing intolerance of both intra- and international difference as a feature of the struggle for national identities:

the world becomes polyglot, once and for all and irreversibly. The period of national languages, coexisting but closed and deaf to each other, comes to an end . . . . The naive and stubborn co-existence of 'languages' within a given national language also comes to an end--that is, there is no more peaceful co-existence between territorial dialects, social and professional dialects and jargons, literary languages, generic languages within literary languages, epochs in language, and so on. (as quoted by Brennan, 50)

Brennan goes on to criticize Bakhtin and other theorists of the novel for not pursuing the "national-political implications of their work on fiction," leaving these "merely implicit," so that "the contemporary consequences of their findings have remained completely submerged. . . . For of course the triumph of European nationalism [and its expression in the novel form] co-existed with the consolidation of empire . . ." (54-55). What follows in Brennan's history is the development of new forms of the novel, particularly as he links the rise of the postmodern novel with "the conflicts now occurring between developed and emergent societies" (55). He goes on to examine a similar problem as i do here: how the neocolonial writer can write in the "imaginative form of another and oppressing culture," though his precise definition of the problem differs somewhat from mine (58).

3. In another article, "Afterword: 'Beyond Miranda's Meanings: Un/silencing the "Demonic Ground" of Caliban's "Woman,"'" Wynter also emphasizes how

with this same secularizing narrative schema . . . [the peoples of western Europe] were also to effect that far-reaching mutation, in which they were to displace, not only their own *religious* version of the narrative schemas of good and evil and their modes of 'story-telling,' . . . but *all* other religious versions to the marginally private, rather than centrally public, spheres of human existence." (362, her emphasis)

Thus the effect of this shift to a secular description of humanity was not only to replace a philosophical guarantee of being with a biological one which enabled and required the denigration of the Ontological Others, but also to place the possibility of any (non-European) spiritual/religious version of narrative schemas--any spiritually-based story--under profound question. On both "racial" *and* spiritual grounds, a "First Nations woman's novel" might thus seem an impossibility.

4. As Valerie Raoul commented to me when reading my argument, this shift from a biological definition of humans to a discursive one might raise the issue of whether discursive constructs are any less deterministic than biological ones. In the context of my immediate discussion, while i think too absolute a pronouncement on either side of the argument is neither constructive nor "realistic" (if i dare say so), i think that in defining the biology of human societal behaviour as *subject to* societal discursive

conditioning, Wynter effects a redefinition of human biology *as* discursively *malleable*. My own bias towards the deterministic view is clear in my suspicion that there is ultimately no way of defining criteria by which to judge to what degree individual choice and action are pre-determined by the socio-discursive constructs that define and contextualize our efforts to define ourselves--precisely because, immersed in the system, our efforts to create such criteria are *indefinably* influenced (or not influenced) by that system (though see Tompkins "'Indians'" 116-17).

But equally, the very topic and healing motivation of this thesis demonstrates my equal bias towards the more optimistic view as well, of a faith in a capacity for self-criticism and desire for change. Perhaps rather arbitrarily (or perhaps not, if my biases are pre-determined by my white, middle-class, prairie pragmatism, or equally, by my lesbian survivor's refusal to be a victim), the initiating premise of my entire discussion is the deliberately optimistic one that there *is* some point in trying to change (see also Fee, "Upsetting" 178; Krupat 29-31). Other commentators deal with the complexities of the issue in far greater detail than i have room for here, particularly examining the issue of whether they can write truly non-dominant or minority meanings in the English language, which they often see as by definition inscriptive of racist, hierarchical meanings (see Bannerji 29-33; Campbell, Interview 49-50; Cuthand, "Transmitting" 53; Fedorick, "Fencepost" 33; Gates, "Authority" 40-43, and "Editor's Introduction" 13-18; Huggan 27-28; Lorde "The Master's Tools"; Maracle, "Just Get")

5. At the same time as this opposition between an essentialist and a post-structuralist or constructivist reading stance enables me to discuss the possibility of reading multiply as i propose to do, drawing out several stories with significantly different ideological, epistemological and ontological underpinnings, i am also uncomfortable with this opposition, still uncertain of its applicability to First Nations texts. First, the very idea of identifying some story, event or idea as "representative" of First Nations "reality" seems nonsensical to me, when my guess is that the various Nations' definitions of this concept ("reality," "real") would differ radically from my own, in terms of both its content and the assumptions that inform it.

Barbara Godard, for example, comments on the way that the European valorization of the written over the oral results in a different sense of "truth" than might obtain for First Nations cultures and contemporary First Nations *writers*:

The cultural mainstream's high regard for letters has led to the lauding of craft over truth, of text over event, of the quotable commodity over sacred Truth, and, as a result, to the exclusion, and silencing, of much of the Native people's . . . cultural production. ("Silencing" 137; also Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* 108; also Dale, n.p.; Kroeber 18-19; Monture 136; Tapping 88).

(I feel an equal discomfort in writing about the spiritual, wanting to take it seriously, as equally "real"--in the only sense that i understand the word--as my culture takes "verifiable facts" and other such constructions of knowledge and experience, but not certain how to write that recognition [also Patricia Clark Smith 139-42, 146].) In addition, the very idea of attempting to define First Nations reality is, in any case, counter to one of the basic premises of my discussion: that it is not my place to name other people's realities, especially in a cross-cultural situation (see also Cardinal, *The Native Creative Process* 44, 49).

Second, reading First Nations theoretical texts, such as Cardinal and Armstrong's *The Native Creative Process* (for example, 38), i become convinced that this separation of the essentialist understanding of language and the world, from the constructivist understanding, is a nonsensical distinction in this context. The First Nations alternative seems at times to involve elements of both an essentialist and a constructivist understanding of language, but also something else, as well--which, as will become apparent, is the structure i thus adopt in dealing with the several kinds of stories the novels seem to tell: the novels each tell both kinds of stories, but something else as well.

I find the comments of N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) the most informative as regards a Native sense of the relationship between language and the world:

"[W]e imagine ourselves, create ourselves, we touch ourselves into being with words"; "Language is a way of life. . . . by language we create knowledge." . . . "It seems to me that in a certain sense we are all made of words; that our most essential being consists in language. It is the element in which we think and dream and act, in which we live our daily lives. There is no way in which we can exist apart from the morality of a verbal dimension." (as quoted in Coltelli, Introduction 2; also Wiget 108; Fife, "Joy Harjo" 199)

His summary seems to express both the post-structuralist sense of language as mediating all human interaction with each other and the world, and the more essentialist sense of language as also genuinely connected with "being." (See also my summary of Paula Gunn Allen's discussion of language, at the beginning of my Chapter Three. Gayatri Spivak also provides a useful analysis of the way my essentialist/post-structuralist opposition might work even for post-structuralist theorists [1-2]).

As a result, despite my efforts to be clear, i am afraid that i am uncertain what sort of critical vocabulary to use in carrying out my discussion of the novels, wanting to approach First Nations novels with a respect for the complexity of stories and registers of stories that they tell. Wanting to recognize the seriousness and real pain of some of the events the novels recount, i deliberately employ the now out-moded and perhaps rather reactionary vocabulary of "new criticism" (strategically reactionary, as Spivak might put it [12]), with its comparatively untroubled assumptions of the mimetic possibilities of language, and of the connection between signifier and signified. At other times, however, trying to highlight the "mediated" nature of the novels, i use a more current post-structuralist vocabulary, underwritten with all the problematics of the "crisis of representation" (Slemon and Tiffin, x). It may be that neither is really appropriate.

6. Douglas Cardinal makes a similar comment about the way that different cultures in general should interact: "Cultures are not being bridged into in a balanced way and as a result each culture has become a victim of the other. Cultures must enhance each other and each one has a hundred percent responsibility to bridge. We cannot be adversaries" (*The Native Creative Process* 17; also Campbell, "A Conversation" 22).

Or Marnia Lazreg, herself employing a historicizing, contextualizing movement, phrases the idea of balance in this way:

The collapse of the colonial empires, the rise of consumer societies, and the crises of the late capitalist states have formed the context within which assertions of "difference" have emerged. The celebration of difference between women and men, homosexuals and heterosexuals, the mad and the sane, has since become the unquestioned norm.

What is problematical in this conception of difference is that it affirms a new form of reductionism. The rejection of humanism and its universalistic character in discourse analysis and deconstruction deprives proponents of difference of any basis for understanding the relationship between the varieties of modes of being different in the world. Difference becomes essentialized. . . . The discourse and deconstruction approaches to difference obviate the crucial issue of *intersubjectivity*. . . . To take intersubjectivity into consideration when studying [in her case] Algerian women or other Third World women means seeing their lives as meaningful, coherent . . . instead of being infused "by us" with doom and sorrow. . . .

For the intersubjective component of experience to become evident in the study of difference within and between genders, a certain form of humanism must be reaffirmed. But the rejection of humanistic philosophy, which subsumed woman under man while making claims to universalism, has so far been replaced with the essentialism of difference. . . .

Antihumanism has not provided any authority higher than itself that could monitor its excesses. (96-98; also Mohanty 181; Radhakrishnan 208-209)

7. Though he does not define it in spiritual terms, Arnold Krupat develops a similar ethics and aesthetics of the cross-cultural effort, in his discussion of the (interdisciplinary) practice of ethnocriticism as both "on and of the frontier" (29, and his Introduction in general).

8. See, for example, the passage in which she describes her sense of violation even in recounting in court the details of the rape--her sense that as the victim, she's still being implicated in what happened to her: it is an effect of blaming the victim similar to racist stereotyping (164-65).

9. In terms of the very *real* effects of Native writing for Native people, several Native writers also comment that their writing literally saved their lives, helping them to combat their own self-hatred. Joy Harjo (Creek), for example, asserts that writing is a means of survival

[o]n both a personal level and a larger, communal level. I don't believe I would be alive today if it hadn't been for writing. . . . Writing helped me give voice to turn around a terrible silence that was killing me. And on a larger level, if we, as Indian people, Indian women, keep silent, then we will disappear, at least in this level of reality. (58)

Similarly, like her character, April, Beatrice Culleton was evidently herself raped, as Agnes Grant notes; Grant goes on to suggest that for Culleton, recounting the rape in her novel may have been an important opportunity to speak out, tell her story for herself and for other First Nations people and/or other women ("Contemporary" 128-29; also Campbell, Interview 53; Cuthand, Interview 38-39; Maracle, "Skyros Bruce" 91).

For "non-fiction" analyses, descriptions and histories of the political, material and social "reality" of First Nations (here, predominantly women's) lives in colonized times, see also Adams; Armstrong, "Racism"; Beaver; Brody; Cameron; Charnley, "Concepts"; Frideres; Haig-Brown; Jaimes; Knockwood; Maracle, *I Am Woman*; Miller; Morrison and Wilson; Pheasant; and Silman.

10. Barbara Godard's reading of First Nations texts in general, and of the novel *Slash* in particular, is that this is their primary subversive strategy: that *Slash* re-writes "the conventions of representing the Native", through exploitation of (in Bakhtin's terms) the inherent dialogism of the genre of the novel, in which

the words of others are put into quotation marks, "qualified" and "externalized".... In this clash of many speech genres, the word is shown as "incomplete" and "conditional." Such hybridization "appropriates" and "reworks" the other's discourse redistributively in a mode of "symbolic dissidence" . . . or resistance, a mode of "disidentification." ("Politics" 201)

Thus Godard's definition of the novel form along Bakhtinian lines replicates Wynter's identification of the novel as expressive of *discursive* humanity, rather than *existential* humanity, but she does not propose, as I will go on to do, that in (Armstrong's) Native practice the novel form undergoes any further redefinition for specifically Native use.

11. Noel Currie provides a succinct example of such a "contamination", in her discussion of the sexism of the macho image which *Slash* and his "Bros" adopt as part of their militant act. She posits sexism, like racism, as an element of the larger action of colonialism--as a *white* importation into First Nations cultures --and demonstrates how the "Bros'" entire macho image replicates, as Lee Maracle comments of the American Indian Movement leaders, "the worst dominant, white male traits. . . . The idea of leadership was essentially a European one promulgated by power mongers" (*I Am Woman*, as quoted by Currie 145).

Thus, they take on for Native use, a cultural, discursive power that was once entirely in the hands of whites, but in so doing, they also take on--their movement is contaminated by--many of the white ideologies that underlie the immediate discursive structures they have adopted (also Cuthand, Interview 39).

At the same time, however, i don't want to call up a binary opposition between "pure" First Nations stories and "impure," "hybridized," European-First Nations stories. Instead, what i am talking about is a notion of the power dynamics of identity, in which i set up an opposition between a balanced, self-affirming, empowering form of identity/story (or form of identities/stories within one identity/story) and an imbalanced, self-aversive, dis-empowering one. In the former, several versions of story can safely interact with each other within a larger story of the balance and conflict amongst stories/powers, while in the latter, one (here European-originated) version of story, by definition of its informing ontology/epistemology, precludes other versions of story, self-aversively disrupting the *play* of identities and stories that comprises such story/identity.

12. Jacques Derrida would suggest that such deferral also characterizes even the oral situation--when i have been at pains to distinguish the oral situation from the written--in that, in the grammar and structure of the language being spoken, and its structuring of the individual speaker's very patterns of thought, Derrida argues that the oral utterance is also "always already" written, deferred. ("Signature, Event, Context" 318-20; also Goldie, *Fear and Temptation* 107-110). I think, nevertheless, that *some* distinction must exist between the oral and the written situation, and that most importantly, that difference *does* exist for the First Nations speaker/writer, and must be taken into account in this reading (Silberman 111-12).

Ruby Slipperjack, for example, speaks of her sense of displacement and loss that accompanies just the taping of her interview, for replaying in her absence, let alone writing it down. She particularly laments the loss, on tape, or in her writing, of all the non-verbal aspects of her communication as a person from a "non-verbal culture," trying to "put all this non-verbal communication that is going back and forth into words, and English [her second language] on top of that!" (Interview 212; see also Abena P.A. Busia's use of the oral-written distinction [82-84;103-04]; and Coltelli, Introduction 3; Cuthand, "Transmitting" 54; Kroeber 22-35; Sangari 165-69; Tapping).

13. Not to imply a false dichotomy where Armstrong is at pains to refuse one: she makes clear that ultimately, she believes this power to be generally human, not just female, but that as a result of historical gender constructions and current usage, the "female thinking and the empowerment of people through love, and compassion, and spirituality," of which she is speaking, are conventionally associated with female power (Interview 18). Wendy Rose (Hopi/Miwok) makes a similar comment about how, depending on (white vs. Native) context--*not* on conviction--she is or is not a "feminist":

There are a lot of Indian women, myself included, who consider ourselves to be feminist, but we're not feminist like non-Indian women are. We come from a different base; we have a different history. If I'm on the Hopi reservation I am not a feminist; if I'm in Fresno, California, I'm a feminist. (127; also Allen, Interview 13-15; though see Cuthand, Interview 36)

This distinction recalls the more general discussion amongst Native and other women of colour, about the applicability of white feminist distinctions and concerns to the cultural and political realities of women of colour (davenport; Frye 110-12; LaChapelle 261-63; Lazreg 89; Lorde, "An Open Letter"; Lugones and Spelman 575-81; McKay; Messer-Davidow, "Knowing Ways" 191-92; Moraga 33-34; Spivak 15).

14. Barbara Godard quite rightly warns against precisely this kind of reading, which might be seen as rendering history as "timeless myth as in traditional Native 'historical' narratives of mystical orality which

reify an 'original source.'" She points out the important work *Slash* achieves in historicizing rather than mythologizing the "imaginary Indian" of white invention (also Francis 221-24; Goldie, *Fear and Temptation* 127-47). *Slash* writes

a new history and historiography . . . the history of struggle in the 1960s and 1970s in a hybrid narrative mode. This is history as narrating, as telling, in traditional native fashion, but within recognizable dates and events and the conventions of 'colonial' history. ("Politics" 203)

My argument differs somewhat from hers, however, in that while i agree that *Slash* achieves this redefinition of history and historiography, it also still writes this linear construction of history, as it locates events according to the numerical dating system of Western historical practice, *within* the larger circular construction of history and story against which Godard warns. The story writes of, and is written within, our contemporary historical period, inscribing Armstrong's analysis of her own (and *Slash*'s) "position within an active struggle of decolonization" ("Politics" 203), but this struggle is here approached precisely through the process of the novel's reinscribing that struggle within traditional (spiritual) Okanagan understandings of history, myth and story.

Thus, if Godard's description of Armstrong's narrative practice is ultimately that Armstrong writes a hybrid text, writing the oral, for example, or displacing the dichotomy between English and Okanagan ("Politics" 214ff), in contrast, i want to try to resist the danger i see in Godard's reading, recalling Chris Bracken's argument (n.10, Chapter One), that in this reading she is too easily erasing the Difference inscribed in *Slash* and other Native texts: i want to suggest a little more firmly that these texts are finally speaking a rather more definitively Okanagan, or Ojibway (etc.) meaning. So Godard decides that *Slash* only "shows the necessity for a third way", but never articulates it, while i think that the novel does actually *demonstrate* not just "a position of dis-identification where one may signify otherness yet refuse the trope of subordination" ("Politics" 217), but also, to put it in more positive terms, a re-identification with "the Indian way" (*Slash* 199).

15. Though i want to be careful not to distort or appropriate to my discussion an argument that, understanding it only partially at best, i *guess* might share some similarities with mine, i wonder whether my definition of spiritual meaning and practice might not correspond with Sylvia Wynter's definition of "womanist" feminism, a phrase which, she says, "expresses the paradoxical relation of Sameness and Difference" to the dominant paradigm of Western feminism: like my definition of spirituality, womanism by definition incorporates stories of sameness and difference, incorporating even dominant paradigms of thought, but not *exclusively* dominant paradigms. Emphasizing again that i don't feel confident that i understand Wynter's argument, i wonder whether my proposal of a spiritually-aware, structurally multiple minority reading doesn't correspond to her proposal of a

second epistemological mutation--based on the new metaphysical imperative of the now conscious alterability of our governing codes, their modes of ontological difference and their rule-governedly generated behaviour-regulatory meanings, together with their always non-arbitrary "designs" of interpretative readings--one able to complete the *partial* epistemological mutation of the first which ushered in our modern age as well as that first process of the non-conscious secularization of human modes/models of being . . . of whose *incomplete epistemological mutation*, the gender hierarchy of the ostensible equality of our symbolic contract, as well as of the "hard and uncomfortable life" . . . of all those who inhabit the global archipelagoes of hunger in the midst of a new technologically produced surfeit of global abundance, are an imperative effect and consequence. ("Afterword" 365-66, her emphasis)

I think that her proposal of an "epistemological mutation based on the new metaphysical imperative of the now conscious alterability of our governing codes, their modes of ontological difference and their rule-

governedly generated behaviour-regulatory meanings . . ." might, in a very different register, correspond with my call for an emotionally-engaged reading, in which we are self-consciously and responsibly aware of our own emotional conditioning, and consequent behaviour, as members of a variety of historically empowered and disempowered communities. (I even wonder whether Wynter's idiosyncratic style, with its immensely long sentences, incorporating one qualifying phrase after another, isn't motivated by a similar desire as i am discussing, for a kind of "holistic" expression: as if each sentence were intended to bring into multiple and intense interaction all of the associated ideas, contexts and histories of its primary idea, no idea ever presented separate from its surrounding field of relational meaning. Each sentence becomes a kind of world of relation and difference unto itself [?].)

16. See also Slipperjack, Interview 207. Slipperjack also notes of *Honour the Sun*, as Armstrong does of *Slash*, that she has maintained a circular structure in her novel, reflective of spiritually-based Ojibway paradigms of knowledge: "I stuck to my four seasons. I wanted that connection with the land. . . . On page 210 it says, 'I feel like I have just completed a circle.' The book starts in the summer and ends in the summer" (214). She also notes that the Medicine Man reiterates to Owl, Owl's mother's advice to honour the sun.

### Chapter Three

1. Thus, despite my repeated efforts to emphasize the differences between First Nations and Western academic theories--in an effort to forestall my own (academic) propensity to assume, appropriatively, that i know things where, cross-culturally, i probably do not--i see recent Western theories of language, by which language is now generally defined as a self-referential, relativistic construct, and human discourses and knowledge as thus constructed and intra-/inter-referential, as potentially analogous to traditional Native understandings of language. And i see my own construction of a spiritual, cross-cultural reading practice as also drawing on analogous assumptions (Tapping 91).

Indeed, as Allen herself points out, neither does the traditional Native construction of the nature of the universe differ absolutely from the contemporary Western (Einsteinian and post-Einsteinian) constructions of the universe. If the Native outlook insists on the material and the spiritual as "mutually interchangeable and, in many instances, virtually identical aspects of a reality that is essentially more spirit than matter," Allen finds an analogy for this conception in the Einsteinian construction of matter as "a special state or condition of energy"--the construction of matter, then, as itself a relative category, mutable and transformative (60). And as i see it, the Native notion of the individual as a "moving event within a moving universe" (147), "shaped by and shaping human and non-human surroundings" (149), finds its correlative in contemporary Western physics in the notion that the observation of the universe is actually a description of the relation of the observer and the observed, and the act of human observation itself affects that which is observed.

Despite such similarities of approach to language and nature, however, the usual bent of Western language theorists is to see this construction of language and human knowledge in very anti-creative, non-healing terms: language is rendered as a structure of self-enclosed play at best and of despair at worst, language and thus human existence seen as always already differenced and deferred, and human beings as deterministically imprisoned in pre-constructed social roles and power relations (Slemon and Tiffin, x). However, it seems to me equally possible to see contemporary language theory and its concomitant social and political implications as allowing a deeply creative, liberating engagement in society and its structures of power. For me, the crucial difference lies in the basic values brought to contemporary Western language theory as to traditional Native understandings of language. For example, Allen returns to the analogy between the Native concept of a spirit-based universe and the Einsteinian understanding

of matter and energy, but insists as well on a crucial difference:

American Indian thought makes no . . . dualistic division, nor does it draw a hard and fast line between what is material and what is spiritual, for it regards the two as different expressions of the same reality, as though life has twin manifestations that are mutually interchangeable and, in many instances, virtually identical aspects of a reality that is essentially more spirit than matter or, more correctly, that manifests spirit in a tangible way. The closest analogy in Western thought is the Einsteinian understanding of matter as a special state or condition of energy. Yet even this concept falls short of the American Indian understanding, for Einsteinian energy is believed to be unintelligent, while energy according to the Indian view is intelligence manifested in yet another way. (60; also Campbell, "A Conversation" 19. See also Sangari, concerning not just the different *values* that inform this difference of "belief," but also the way different *histories* might also result in this difference in value.)

So i think that the Native view of language and the universe is in some ways simply a step further in the same direction (if such a linear analogy applies at all) in which Western language theory has only recently been moving, so that such absolute relativity of language, life, and the universe can now be valued as a route to a deeply creative, participatory, and thus caring, emotionally-engaged--and spiritual--interaction with the universe, rather than being feared precisely as an eternal sentence to our separation from life, nature and the universe, as caused by our Fall into knowledge and language (Allen 57).

2. Such phrasing--"the unitary nature of reality"--would seem to set Native constructions of language and reality in direct opposition to the Western post-structuralist constructions which, as in n. 1, i am in fact proposing as analogous. However, i feel no compulsion to try to reconcile such an apparent contradiction: i do not want to quarrel with Allen's choice of phrasing when it is *her* description of traditional Native literary theory, and i particularly want to take care not to erase Allen's distinction that such issues *as* unity, wholeness and continuity are traditionally associated with women's roles in at least some Native cultures, while men are often associated with change and transitoriness (101; also Coltelli, Introduction 5; Godard, "Listening" 151).

Nor do i particularly want to sustain such an essentialist/constructivist opposition in any case: as in my n. 6 in Chapter Two, where i question the appropriateness of the opposition, i suspect that traditional Native understandings of language and literature in some ways incorporate elements of both essentialist and constructivist positions, as well as elements of neither. I *think* it need not be a contradiction, then, that in contrast with Allen's language and practice, Gerald Vizenor (Anishinabe), for example, calls upon an extremely post-structuralist language, style and practice to discuss the trickster--"a semiotic sign in a language game"--in Native cultures ("Trickster Discourse" 204). In both critics' work, for example, the notion of healing as it can be achieved in narrative and language is a common concern, even given their supposedly different theoretical approaches.

3. Allen does make clear, however--drawing a distinction between the genre of ceremonial literature and the genre of popular literature--that not all traditional Native literature is by definition ceremonial (72-75): that based on various criteria which she sets out, it can fall in any number of places along a continuum between ceremonial works and "trivial, popular forms" (74). Following Allen's reading of various contemporary Native women poets, the ceremonial is often called on as part of contemporary response to traditional and colonized Native experience, but again, this is not to call all Native literature "ceremonial" in structure or effect (see "Answering the Deer" 155-64, and "This Wilderness in My Blood" in *The Sacred Hoop* 165-83).



4. At the same time, i also turn back repeatedly from consulting anthropological material to fill in the gaps in my knowledge about Native spirituality and ceremonial practice, cautioned by the extensive debate going on in the discipline concerning the power relations that inform its most basic practices. Edward W. Said provides a succinct summary of the issues of the debate:

... there is no way I know of apprehending the world from within our culture (a culture by the way with a whole history of exterminism and incorporation behind it) without also apprehending the imperial contest itself. ... The real problem remains to haunt us: the relationship between anthropology as an ongoing enterprise and, on the other hand, empire as an ongoing concern. .

[A]t least three derivative issues propose themselves for reexamination. ... One ... is the constitutive role of the observer, the ethnographic "I" or subject, whose status, field of activity, and moving locus taken together abut with embarrassing strictness on the imperial relationship itself. Second is the geographical disposition so internally necessary, historically at least, to ethnography. ... [W]e would not have had empire itself, as well as many forms of historiography, anthropology, sociology, and modern legal structures, without important philosophical and imaginative processes at work in the production as well as acquisition, subordination, and settlement of space. ... In ethnography the exercise of sheer power in exerting control over geography is strong. Third is the matter of intellectual dissemination, the exfoliation of scholarly or monographic disciplinary work from the relatively private domain of the researcher and his or her guild circle to the domain of policy making, policy enactment, and--no less important--the recirculation of rigorous ethnographic representations as public media images that reinforce policy. ("Representing" 217-18; also Allen, Interview 23-26; Mary Louise Pratt, "Scratches" 139. See also Mohanty regarding a similar critique of the application of Western feminist assumptions to Third World women's issues [180]; also my n. 13, Chapter Two)

As a result of such indictments (though they do not take account of the position of "native" [Native] ethnographers), much recent ethnographic work has been devoted to examining ways--not unlike my own work here--in which these inherent power relations can somehow be lessened or subverted at the same time as they are also necessarily evoked (see Clifford and Marcus).

But the effect for me is that, especially as regards Native sacred practice, reading ethnographic material simply for its information--as if it were a neutral source of uninflected knowledge--is impossible since, as Said puts it, "innocence is now out of the question of course" ("Representing" 213). At best, at least for the purposes of my discussion (though see Slagle, and Ridington "Cultures in Conflict"), consulting ethnographic material must involve as extensive a project of unpacking their unspoken assumptions and underlying gestures of power as i am carrying out over the course of this entire thesis as regards my critical assumptions (and at that my unpacking will of course not be "complete"). Paula Gunn Allen offers an example of how Western ethnographic assumptions should be re-examined in the course of her re-reading *Black Elk Speaks* from a Native perspective ("Something Sacred Going on Out There" in *The Sacred Hoop* 102-17), while from quite a different perspective, the first three chapters of Arnold Krupat's *Ethno-criticism* also involves a re-examination of the history and resulting epistemological assumptions of ethnography.

5. And instead, the practice i think i *can* adopt for reading and participating in the ceremony of the text is one enabled precisely by the connection i am relying on between spirit and language--this construction of language and spirit alike as deeply and inherently relational in nature. If i cannot read "literally"--or, given Allen's description of the symbolic significance of traditional Native literature, if i cannot read "symbolically"--then i can at least read "analogically."

I can read by looking for cross-cultural narrative equivalencies as it were, in that, if i do not understand the specific symbolic and cultural content of the poetry, the type of (in Cuthand, quest? test?)

story it tells is still somewhat familiar to me, even from my own cultural paradigms, and i know intuitively and rhetorically/allegorically, how the story should move, at least in broad terms. (Allen, Interview 24. Following Sylvia Wynter, i read intuitively and allegorically at once, even when such a combination seems contradictory--the emotional and the highly abstract at once--in the sense offered in her "On Disenchanted Discourse," where as detailed in Chapter Two, she demonstrates that the intuitive and the allegorical are precisely conjoined in the individual psyche: they are almost collapsible practices, when our mythic societal narratives are understood as the purveyors of rhetorical motivational systems, by which intuitive and learned thought are now one and the same, even organically inscribed in the individual's brain chemistry.)

Thrown into an epistemological crisis, as it were, by Cuthand's poetry, i look for other ways of knowing, based on other epistemological constructions (Sangari). My reading strategy is thus a continuance of the one i discussed in Chapter One, regarding the process of unlearning racism: the practice of analogy-making, of translation, as it is understood in post-structuralist thought as a highly problematic, partial and difficult movement--one dependent upon an assumption of difference, or here, of the silent spaces between cultures. If in the previous chapter, then, i approached Okanagan or Ojibwa spirituality not directly, but only as it inscribed, and was itself inscribed in, the multiple structures of story--*translating* it into a narrative event--here i interpret the spiritual basis of these poems through analogy to the specific emotional movement--reading intuitively--of the story of healing that i discussed in Chapter One.

In either case, the important thing to note as regards this aspect of cross-cultural reading is that i *cannot* responsibly read the precise nature and content of the spiritual practice and culture expressed in these poems as accessible to me: Lee Maracle, for example, noting European ignorance of the connection between the First Nations' spiritual and cultural traditions and their respective laws, reminds me again how little i understand First Nations spiritualities despite my analogy-making efforts (*I Am Woman* 47-48). Thus, like the double nature of silence, the process of analogy-making which i advocated in the first two chapters must finally be highlighted not only for its usefulness in cross-cultural, cross-racial interaction and understanding, but also for its limitations in this effort: i *guess* at meaning through careful, self-questioning reference to my limited, Eurocentric knowledge and experience, but i cannot say that i *know* the meaning of these poems; my goal is more to learn how to value them precisely *without* having to "know" them.

My attempt at a spiritual, cross-cultural reading practice thus works its careful, multiple way(s) through the shifting connections of cross-cultural similarities and differences, working more associatively than logically, as i search for equivalencies while remaining constantly aware, at the same time, that even this spiritual process is bracketted within, and indeed dependent upon, a still larger possibility of silence--of what is *not* available even to my analogy-making, metonymic reading strategy. As in my reading of *Slash*--where the spiritual simultaneously *was* and was *not* written in the English-language text, the very novel itself inscribed within the larger spiritual narrative of Okanagan history and knowledge and yet profoundly underwritten with the precise absence of any Okanagan-language words, Okanagan spiritual practice, in its pages--here the spiritual is written, at least for a non-First Nations, non-Cree reader, as both linguistic and yet by definition extra-linguistic at once, beyond direct linguistic expression and inscribable only through the indirect means of evoking its effects "intuitively" for the reader.

I *think* that such a construction of the action of the spiritual in my reading--as both linguistic and extra-linguistic; as itself the sign of both concepts--might correspond with the notion of the supplement to the sign as Vizenor articulates it, quoting Bakhtin, in his discussion of the trickster:

"Discourse lives, as it were, beyond itself, in the living impulse toward the object," which in this instance is the trickster; "if we detach ourselves completely from this impulse," . . . "all we have left is the naked corpse of the word, from which we can learn nothing at all about the social situation or the fate of a given word in life. To study the word as such, ignoring the impulse that reaches out beyond it, is just as senseless as to study psychological experience outside the context of that real life toward which it was directed and by which it is determined." ("Trickster Discourse" 191-92,

Vizenor's emphasis [or Bakhtin's?])

6. Houston A. Baker, Jr. makes a similar connection of ecological concerns with anti-colonial discursive concerns in his discussion of Caliban as a model of the vernacular language and criticism that Baker advocates as genuinely subversive of whitemale hegemonic practices. Constructing Caliban's island as itself Caliban's language, as it were, which Caliban teaches Prospero, Baker notes that Prospero's denigration of Caliban's language as "monstrous and deformed" (391) symbolizes the usurpation, "by men who refused to brook difference," of "a shared nature *as* language--as a fruitful ecology of communication" (392, his emphasis). Cross-cultural communication and environmentally-respectful interaction with nature are both rendered as issues of the balancing and tolerance of difference. See also Armstrong, *The Native Creative Process* 42.

7. As i began to suggest earlier, then, the effect even of contemporary Western-academic language theory, given its construction of language as utterly relational and (in my view) potentially creative, is to create the possibility for me of a reading practice based on such spiritual (self-)recognition and environmental accountability. Contemporary language theory, inscribing all knowledge and life, as we "know" it, as discursive in nature, also constantly and repeatedly tests the edges of what is not/cannot be said: struggling with, and simultaneously celebrating, the limitations of language, then, we venture repeatedly into what i read as the potentially the spiritual, into that which is beyond human (linguistic) expression or understanding.

However, i want to be aware of the process of thought i am following here: i am defining the spiritual as partaking of, and itself constituting, the very (linguistic) essence of humanity, at the same time as i define it as absolutely *other* from this definition of humanity, as non-linguistic or extra-linguistic. This definition involves a move not unlike the stereotypical logic by which the woman or the native is sentimentalized as *the* measure of human meaning--the woman as the civilizing influence on man's brute, macho animalism; the native as the noble savage who serves as an exemplar to our chaotic times--and yet by which in the same move is thus *excluded from* the definition of humanity--by which the woman is irrational and animalistic, the native is sub-human, savage. I think my shift, from placing the "native" in this defining but excluded position, to placing the spiritual in this position instead, is significant, but given the cultural stereotypes that by definition must still inform my exercise here, whatever my intentions, i still draw the native with the spiritual: i still play into the inscription of the Indian as the exotic and the unknown (Campbell, in Griffiths and Campbell 17).

Nevertheless, i hope that my recuperative movement comes from the fact that here (i hope) the consequence of this construction is not then to *close* this exclusion by bracketing off First Nations' expression from any significance but the exotic and the unknowable (First Nations expression as simply inexpressible), but is instead to re-open this movement of exclusion by effecting first the bracketing off of *my* (critical) expression instead--exoticizing it, as it were, making it strange even to myself, precisely by virtue of its conventional anti-creative non-participation in the spiritual--and then to re-open the opposition itself and propose the possibility that even Western academic critical discourse is tending towards a spiritual expression, for example, in its discussions of what is supplementary to the sign (Bhabha, "DissemiNation" 304-06).

8. Penny Petrone does assert that Cuthand's grandfather was "given the privilege of performing the beautiful horse dance ceremony," but the source of her information is not made clear, nor particularly the significance of the dance (*Native Literature in Canada* 159). As an example of the way such references might create meaning, see also Lee Maracle's discussion of the significance of the Wolf in the poetry of Skyros Bruce (Squamish), where, as well as becoming a paradigmatic figure for Bruce's own identity, it speaks to Bruce's "lineage memory" as a member of the Wolf clan in Squamish culture, a lineage which

lends ceremonial and sacred power and authority to Bruce's poetic vision (if i understood correctly) ("Skyros Bruce" 88-90). Such an action may be intended in "Horse Dance," constructing the ceremony of Cuthand's individual healing as her reconnection with the specific familial (and totemic?) traditions of power and spirit, as much as with creation and cyclical time more generally.

9. Again, I am uncertain of the precise meaning of the mountain's layers of green or black--whether to read each repetition literally, as meaning the different greens, for example, of green vegetation on the green stone of the mountain, against the green of the earth in general--or whether the repetition has (as well/instead ?) a more strictly symbolic meaning of emphasizing, through repetition, the great contrast of the deep life-giving properties of her spiritual quest for reconnection with the earth, with the danger and death of the actual and spiritual darkness she is encountering as part of the quest. The repetition might also be intended to evoke the specific value of repetition itself as an element of the ceremony's ritual: perhaps, as i begin to do here, the repetition signals the various meanings of greenness, of the ceremony, and demands that the reader-participant explore the connections amongst these meanings and levels of meaning (see Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* 63-67).

10. And then, even this spiritual relation--a field of action, rather than a static state--is inscribed at least partly with the (self-) satirizing process that shapes Annharte's poetic transformations, so that again, the emphasis on play in current Western discourse theory finds an analogous concept in First Nations writing and understandings of language. (See especially Vizenor's efforts to play with both traditions ["Trickster Discourse"]. Allen emphasizes the transformational effect of such humour [Interview 22], while Lugones elaborates its characteristics and uses as a survival mechanism for minority people, particularly in cross-cultural circumstances [172-73].) However, the difference, for me, is that the play that occurs in most experiments by Western white writers still seems to spiral down into a basic refusal of emotional, caring engagement with the subject matter/discourse at play, and the play often seems simply self-indulgent, self-enclosed, and thus ultimately, not really very playful in the sense of really risking one's self/selves in creative chance. We're still taking even our play too damn seriously (and not seriously enough), insisting on the capacity and the desirability of controlling and containing its field of influence, which is precisely not in the spirit of play (Lugones emphasizes the necessity of playfulness, in a non-agonistic, non-conquering sense, as necessary to cross-cultural "travel" [175-77]).

I wish i could make better use of Vizenor's discussion of the trickster as a sign of and a catalyst for just such play: i am convinced that it is apropos, especially as becomes clearer in my discussion of the "keemootch" effect of Annharte's "Mayan Moon"--but i do not understand Vizenor's argument, nor the style of his (tricky?) argument, well enough to make the connections clear.

11. In the meantime, as Allen notes, what the effect of the humour would be for a *Native* reader is probably outside my understanding:

[Humour] creates a metamorphosis in the reader, if the reader can understand what's being said and what's not being said. And that's the hard part, of course, for non-Indians. It's hard for them to understand the terms of the dialogue that's going on between the writer and his or her fundamental community. Because that's where we're writing from, you know; it's the dialogue between "I" and "we" that's going on in the work. (Interview 22)

As i detail, i do undergo some kind of change in my perceptions of both myself and the text, but presumably not the same sort as a Native reader could.

## Chapter Four:

1. Helen Hoy's reading of *The Book of Jessica* suggests that the provisionality and contestability of history is further complicated in the text--or more accurately, in what the text does *not* address--in such issues as why Griffiths' name appears before Campbell's on the title page, and what implications arise from Griffiths' having final editorial control over the text, Campbell having withdrawn in the final stages of its preparation in order to run for president of the Métis Society of Saskatchewan. Though the work is still billed as a collaboration--and i assume, where Hoy apparently does not, that Campbell simply would not allow her name to be put on a work that she would not want to take responsibility for, especially after her bad experience with *Halfbreed* (see n.3, below)--the effect is to raise again the vexed question of what real degree of self-determination and control Campbell had over the writing of her own history in *The Book of Jessica*; to emphasize the extra-textual political and material conditions that limit access even to such contested histories as the text constructs (also Ridington, *Little Bit Know Something* 246); and thus to put under question, as Hoy does, the healing that the text claims to achieve by the end of its process.

2. Alice Miller (German) explains the "logic" of such a psychological "division of labour" (JanMohamed and Lloyd, "Minority Discourse--What Is to Be Done?" 15)--relegating the emotional to solely female expression, for example--in her *For Your Own Good*, where she concentrates on the example of Nazi oppression of the Jews. Examining the most popular German child-rearing manuals from the period when future supporters of the Third Reich were growing up, she finds a repeated emphasis on obedience, the ruthless suppression of feelings and the development of a tight self-control (89). As adults, she argues, citizens of the Third Reich were offered the Jewish people to serve as the repository of these qualities--of all emotion and the loss of control it implied--which were abhorred because "they had been forbidden and dangerous in their childhood." Thus,

freed from their "bad feelings," so-called Aryans could feel pure, strong, hard, clean, good, unambivalent, and morally right, if everything they had feared in themselves since childhood could be attributed to the Jews and if, together with their fellow Germans, these "Aryans" were not only permitted but required to combat it relentlessly and ever anew among members of this "inferior race" (80).

See also Wynter "On Disenchanting," especially 215, n. 23.

3. Though in Chapter One i deliberately wrote *Halfbreed* as an affirmative work fully authored by Campbell herself--wanting above all to set up a newly (self-) affirmative, (self-)healing context--rather than just a context of victimization--within which to discuss the First Nations works read in this thesis, and thus writing Campbell's act of telling her own story as a vital element in the healing action recounted in the story itself--*Halfbreed* was in fact extensively edited by a white man who urged editorial changes on Campbell against her own judgement (Interview 42).

For example, the story of her rape, as a child, by several white R.C.M.P. officers was apparently considered too inflammatory and perhaps libellous--not to mention too subversive of the myth of the R.C.M.P. as historically-destined white male protectors of the land, charged to *maintiens le droit*--and was excised from the work (see also Armstrong regarding the effect of white expectations and editing on Native publication ["Writing" 56]; and Maracle, Interview 170; Silvera 70-72). I think that my opening discussion of *Halfbreed* still works, for the most part, even given the manner of its editing, but it is equally important to recognize even at the publishing stage the degree of white control that has been exercised over First Nations stories--a fact that has only recently begun to change with the establishment of such First Nations publishing houses as Theytus Books.

4. See Brennan regarding the history of the concept of the nation--as the concept called up both a unitary and a "composite" definition (51, his emphasis), especially 50-54. While the history of the idea thus actually involves *both* aspects of the opposition (of the singularly unified versus the multiple) upon which i am relying, i think the notion of *identity*, as it has been applied to both individuals and nations, has conventionally depended on the notion, repeatedly deconstructed in recent attacks on essentialist identifications, of a unified, singular self-awareness (JanMohamed and Lloyd, "Minority Discourse--What Is To Be Done?" 15; Wynter, "Afterword" 365). See also my n.5 in this chapter, regarding the way *The Book of Jessica* rewrites the *histories* of nations as also multiple narratives.

5. Not only is history redefined, then, but so is the concept of the "nation," as well--part of a larger First Nations commentary on the concept of the nation, as for example written into their very self-definition *as* the First Nations of Canada/*before* Canada. "Nationality" is thus also made a multiple concept--and not just for the (plural) First Nations: as Campbell urges Griffiths to recognize, the Europeans' coming to Canada and creating a "new" nation does not mean that earlier national histories have been safely left behind. Instead, their new national history--a history conventionally couched, even given the ongoing "question" of Québec, in terms of a unilinear, almost "manifestly destined," narrative of Canada's coming to unitary identity and meaning--is now written as continuing to be profoundly influenced even centuries later by their many individual and national histories back in Europe, and is thus constructed as a deeply relational, multiple construct and process. (See Chris Bracken for further commentary on the effect of First Nations writing on the concept of Canadian nationality.)

Given a possible equation of individual and national psychic/emotional histories, i wonder whether the current fad, in North America, of identifying oneself as somehow a victim of any number and order of abuses and oppressions, is not also an expression of a larger societal shift to begin at last to admit our centuries-old histories as the cast-offs of Europe and the terrorists of North America, as it were, and to try to heal ourselves of these historical injuries. No matter how ridiculous and self-indulgent such claims to victimization seem to be to those not sharing the experience, this process of self-identification, telling our stories the way each of us really see them, rather than the way we've been told to tell them (or more like, to *forget* them), is an important step in beginning to take real responsibility for our selves, our histories as victims and victimizers. It *is* a frustratingly self-indulgent moment in history, and one which we would hope to move beyond, but it is also the first time many people have actively taken part in a history of their own telling, their own creation. It's as if, as Maracle says, North American society has been arrested in its adolescence ("Writing" n.p.), and is only now beginning to try to teach itself to grow up, learn true self-responsibility.

6. As in the previous chapter, i am uncertain how to elaborate the specific cultural significance of the Native spirits. Wolverine, it is clear from *Halfbreed*, has a prior resonance in Métis culture, at least as a figure in their stories and presumably as more (63-65); and Bear participates in the ceremony Campbell takes Griffiths to during Griffiths' preparation to play Jessica, though Campbell explicitly prevents Griffiths from giving away (or rather, *stealing*) more (*The Book of Jessica* 29). Analogizing from the use to which Unicorn is put in the play, the effect of the Native spirits is to create history as spiritual and as transgressive of European historical conventions: Unicorn reappears as a forgotten part of Jessica's heritage, and re-establishes her present significance and power in Jessica's identity and history. Her history is constructed, as Lee Maracle puts it, as "lineage memory" ("Skyros Bruce" 88-90).

7. Thanks to Valerie Raôul for suggesting this reading.

8. Regarding the particular difficulties of male First Nations power in colonized times, see my discussion of Sam's loss of his warrior power (138).

9. In her reading, Helen Hoy decides that for Griffiths to adopt the give-away as something she must do, too--particularly for her to draw on Campbell's story of the red cloth as both the title for the last section of the work, and a metaphor of Griffiths' desire to "own" the play--is appropriative of Métis culture and of Campbell's individual experience and pain (also Egan n.p.). Similarly, then, my own decision that reading the text also demands that i give something away--give away my European-cultural assumptions as far as possible--would be equally appropriative. Though i do not disagree with this interpretation, i don't see what the alternative is: how do i undo the history of my power except by learning how to give it away, give away the structure and practices that lend me such imbalanced power?

#### Conclusion:

1. Though see Gayatri Spivak's argument that at least for such influential theorists like Foucault, because of the nature of institutional discourse, their movement towards specifying their own place in the systems of power that they critique actually results in a kind of double displacement by which their "discipleship" "very quickly [transforms] them into universal intellectuals" again (4).

2. Edward Said comments on this "epistemology of forcible separation between things *for the sake of separation itself*," calling for "ideologies of difference" to be reinterpreted "from an awareness of the supervening actuality of 'mixing,' of crossing over, of stepping beyond boundaries," which he calls "more creative human activities than staying inside rigidly policed borders" ("Ideology" 43, his emphasis).

3. I take to heart Houston A. Baker's warning about how cataloguing the ways Europeans have oppressed peoples of colour can too easily function as "whitemale confessional[s]": "'Look what we have done,' it naughtily delights, rubbing its hands and looking pruriently sidewise" (388).

4. As Helen Hoy notes of the "insistent personalizing of the conflict" between Campbell and Griffiths in *The Book of Jessica*, the effect of *my* insistent personalizing is to obscure "the broader social and economic forces at play" (n.p.). Or as Chandra Talpade Mohanty puts it, the result of such a personalizing action is that though "the histories and cultures of marginalized peoples are now [made] 'legitimate' objects of study and discussion, the fact is that this legitimation takes place purely at an attitudinal, interpersonal level rather than in terms of a fundamental challenge to hegemonic knowledge and history" (195). Though i think the reasons for my choice of this personalizing action are clear--and i think that my study does not remain quite so limited as the kind of discussion Mohanty criticizes--it does mean that my reading largely ignores the issue of social and economic limitations on First Nations "literary" expression: for example, when in Chapter Four i speak of minority access to history-making as an emotional issue, i tidily evade such basic questions as the inequality of economic and political access to the media that officiates in the writing of history.

I would add that despite my repeated efforts, precisely *through* this personalizing strategy, to limit my claims to knowledge or expertise, the effect is also to "domesticate" the multiple economic, political, cultural, institutional, religious and historical issues of racial oppression: repeatedly drawing racial and political issues back to the personal (to a level where the idea of personal responsibility really makes any

sense), the implication is that these issues are somehow all available for me to personalize in this manner.

5. Hainan Island, south of mainland China, where my grandparents had their mission.

6. Though see Beth Cuthand's discussion of the different ways in which treaty and non-treaty people chose to react to Canadian constitutional debates (Interview 34).

Gayatri Spivak points out that, in any case, the distinction between such historical and political specificity, and the universalist impulse against which the repeated action of specifying is intended to work, is not stable:

I think it's absolutely on target not to be rhetorically committed to [such concepts as universalism and essentialism] . . . , and I think it's absolutely on target to take a stand against the discourses of essentialism, universalism as it comes in terms of the universal--of classical German philosophy or the universal as the white upper-class male . . . etc. But *strategically* we cannot. Even as we talk about *feminist* practice, or privileging practice over theory, we are universalising--not only generalising but universalising. Since the moment of essentialising, universalizing, saying yes to the onto-phenomenological question, is irreducible, let us at least situate it at the moment, let us become vigilant about our own practice and use it as much as we can rather than make the totally counter-productive gesture of repudiating it. (11, her emphasis)

7. As, for example, Georgina Loucks does in her article, "The Girl and the Bear Facts"--though reading Vizenor, I am reminded of the potential appropriation involved in such a discussion: "translations of narratives and the comparative studies of tribal myths are . . . revisions of power and knowledge in social science." This social science approach to Native texts, he notes, involves "a monologue, an utterance in isolation, which comes closer to the tragic mode in literature and not a comic tribal world view" ("Trickster Discourse" 196 and 191, respectively; though see Mudrooroo Narogin, regarding the usefulness of comparing various "Fourth World" literatures [as quoted in Tapping 94-95]).

In addition to the issue of tribal distinctions, Paula Gunn Allen also notes that even within specific cultures, there are significant differences between male and female roles, with consequent differences in male and female writing:

. . . the tribes have always been sex-segregated in certain ways. So many rituals and parts in rituals are gender specific. So if you're drawing from ritual or from the oral tradition or from folklore, the women are going to draw from one set of symbols and narrative structures and the men are going to draw from another one. . . . So what you'll notice, if you read the women and the men, is a very real difference in preoccupation and theme. You'll notice some similarities--they are both spiritual, they are both very inclined to use a lot of, let's call it, natural imagery . . . . But they'll have very specific preoccupations, and those preoccupations, or perspectives, will show up in structures as well as in the content. (Interview 15-16)

I have also not dealt with the issue of mixed white and Native heritages that occupies many writers from a mixed background, with consequent effect in their writing. Despite my concern with the potential appropriateness of assuming Native writing to be a hybrid of European forms and Native content, as if Native writers only wrote in imitation of white forms (n. 13, Chapter One), many Native writers, like Maria Campbell, do see their mixed cultural and familial heritages as offering them a unique opportunity to bridge the gap between white and Native cultures (*The Book of Jessica* 19-20). As Linda Hogan comments, "My father is a Chickasaw and my mother is white, from an immigrant Nebraska family. This created a natural tension that surfaces in my work and strengthens it" (Interview 71; also



Allen, Interview 16-17; Rose 122-23, 126; Wiget 103).

My efforts to seek out how First Nations cultural and conceptual paradigms differ from Euro-Canadian ones also establishes too strict a dichotomy in the sense that i think i perpetuate a distinction between "real" Indians, who maintain strong linguistic and cultural ties with their traditional, "pre-Contact" ways, and less "real" Indians, who do not know their Nation's language and traditions (Dudoward, n.p.; Fedorick, Interview 225-26; Petrone *Native Literature in Canada* 138). I do not know what such a distinction (loosely, between "reserve" Natives and "urban" Natives?) really implies about the range of distinctions that can be drawn between Euro-Canadian and First Nations cultural practices and paradigms (Krupat 30)--certainly the range is doubtless far greater than i suggest in my own discussion. Arnold Krupat offers a general critique of the kind of practice i have relied on here, of establishing too stark and totalizing a contrast between European and Native meanings, suggesting that the practice does, after all, only replicate the kind of oppositional and de-contextualized thinking against which both he and i write (37-43).

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\* In order to give a sense of how much writing is being done, i include in my primary bibliography not only the specific works i have studied here, but many other recent works by First Nations women.

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