

Trickster's Way

Volume 1 | Issue 2

Article 2

4-1-2002

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Susan Brill de Ramirez

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Recommended Citation

Brill de Ramirez, Susan (2002) "Listening to the Trickster voice in Walter Dyk's Navajo Ethonogrphy Son of Old Man Hat," *Trickster's Way*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 2.

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Listening to the Trickster Voice in Walter Dyk's Navajo Ethnography Son of Old Man Hat

Susan B. Brill de Ramírez
Associate Professor of English
Bradley University

Left Handed is the Navajo storyteller behind and within the ethnographically constructed text *Son of Old Man Hat*. However, he is not an autobiographer relating his own self-referential life history. Left Handed is a turn of the century (19th/20th C.E.) Navajo man who speaks Navajo, not English. His world view is a Navajo informed world view, not the Euroamerican perspective of those who might privilege literary romanticizations of the self. Perhaps the trickster Coyote might demonstrate such self-privileging, but then Coyote is hardly the example most Navajos would have traditionally chosen to emulate. As a conversive reading can demonstrate, when Left Handed steps into his expected role of "autobiographer," he does so in the role of a trickster figure telling tall tales and pulling our legs in way that demonstrate the foolishness of such self-privileging. In fact, when Left Handed singles out the son of Old Man Hat in his stories, he goes to great lengths to emphasize the boy's utter lack of worthiness and his complete unreliability as a narrator of facts. As Gerald Vizenor tells us, ANative American Indians are the storiers of presence, the chroniclers in the histories of this continent@ (*Fugitive Poses* 1). The challenge for us is to learn how to listen to those stories in order to really hear the stories that are being told. In Left Handed's stories, he tells us much about his times and about his interactions with his anthropologist Walter Dyk, but as this article shows, Left Handed relates symbolically complex stories that go far beyond the mere textual presumptions of autobiography.

A conversive approach can assist us to discern the extent to which *Son of Old Man Hat* and *Left Handed* (the two published volumes based on Left Handed's work with Dyk) tell us much if anything about the actual details of Left Handed's own life. Left Handed's voice is very definitely not the voice of an individual relating the events of his life. The story that Left Handed tells is an interwoven story that includes events that he experienced, observed, or heard of, stories that he fabricates, skews, or exaggerates, and, perhaps most importantly, stories that reflect his interaction with his German (but American educated) ethnographer Walter Dyk. The stories reinscribed through Dyk's mediation tell the very real story of Left Handed's objectification as the anthropologist's informant. And in this story, we see not only Dyk's intervention in his informant's telling, but also the very real control of Left Handed's conversive voice evident throughout his own telling and throughout the reinscribed and edited text. Rejecting the colonialist assumptions of utter Native

disempowerment, Craig Womack asserts,

I reject, in other words, the supremacist notion that assimilation can only go in one direction, that white culture always overpowers Indian culture, that white is inherently more powerful than red, that Indian resistance has never occurred in such a fashion that things European have been radically subverted by Indians. (12)

Malcolm Crick raises this very point in his discussion of actual ethnographic fieldwork relationships. He suggests, "The relations between ethnographer and informant are more accurately seen, perhaps, as mutual exploitation. . . . While the ethnographer clearly has the accomplishment of professional work as a central motivation, in the case of informants a range of motivations is possible" (176-7). We can see Left Handed's own repeated efforts to subvert Dyk's intended goal of "A Navaho Autobiography" through a range of stories that are either blatant fabrications, exaggerations of actual events, tales that only include the son of Old Man Hat as a minor or even absent character, and stories that never actually include a character named Left Handed.

Any thorough reading of *Son of Old Man Hat* must take into account, not only the discursive effects of the anthropological encounter as they are evidenced in the textual production of an ostensive ethnographic autobiography of a Native informant, but even more importantly, one must consider deeply the inevitable communications clash between conversive and discursive worlds. A modernist approach to the text as autobiographical monologue might read the text as a "Navaho Autobiography" produced by Walter Dyk. A postmodern and postcolonial response might correct this reading through an interrogation into the anthropological encounter that colonized Left Handed's words and life. This discursive approach emphasizes the oppositional nature of the interaction between Dyk and his informant by means of privileging Dyk as the controlling subjective voice that disempowers Left Handed through his relegation as the Native informant. In such an approach, recognition of Dyk's subjective position at the expense of Left Handed's objectification as the son of Old Man Hat is part of the poststructural process that decenters Dyk's primacy and ruptures the control of Left Handed's ethnographical colonization. But even in such a reading, Left Handed is still hidden behind Dyk's objectification of Left Handed as the **son** of Old Man Hat.

Only through the recognition of the distinctive language games of conversive and discursive literary structures can a reader begin to find Left Handed and his stories and worlds (real and fictional) within the text of *Son of Old Man Hat*. This necessitates a conversive reading approach that interacts intersubjectively with the voices of Left Handed, the persons in his stories, and also Walter Dyk whose discursive voice is interwoven throughout Left Handed's telling and throughout the ethnographic text. As Michael M. J. Fischer emphasizes about such cross-cultural engagements, "This bifocality, or reciprocity of perspectives, has become increasingly important in a world of growing interdependence between societies:

members of cultures described are increasingly critical readers of ethnography" ("Ethnicity" 199). The intersubjectivity of conversive approaches can recognize and respond to the storytelling presence, voice, and power of Left Handed's telling, even though many of the connective links and rhetorical markers and emphases of the oral telling are lost due to Dyk's ignorance about their semiotic importance. As Clifford Geertz explains, "The whole point of a semiotic approach to culture is, as I have said, to aid us in gaining access to the conceptual world in which our subjects live so that we can in some extended sense of the term, converse with them" (*Interpretation of Cultures* 24). As this article clarifies, such an interactively conversive response is possible, not only in person-to-person communications, but also via the oral and written means of language. Through a conversive approach that reads **with**, and listens to, the text, new insights and understandings can be gleaned from the depths of the textualized storytelling.

In Left Handed's telling, the childhood of the son of Old Man Hat is a story of neglect, abandonment, and isolation--a situation that begins to explain the origins of a man who does not respect Navajo elders, who is ignorant of Navajo culture and language (evidenced in the main character's occasional confusion of appropriate kinship terms), who objectifies other people, who is an unfaithful husband, and who is a liar. We are told that the character referred to as the son of Old Man Hat (in all likelihood, not Left Handed) is a child who is raised by an old couple neither of whom are his biological parents nor grandparents and neither of whom take great pains to educate him in everyday skills nor in the songs and rituals important to the Navajo. Speaking in the person of the son of Old Man Hat, Left Handed relates, "My mother [an older clan sister of his real mother] and her husband were the only ones who took care of me" (4). Within the extended family and clan network common among the Navajo, the boy's relative isolation from other relatives is highly irregular, as is the lack of guidance given to him as he grows up. In one example, he is told to grind up the corn but is not shown how to do it. "My mother never did show me how to hold the rock, and how to use it. She'd just say, >Go ahead and grind up the corn, that was all, and then she'd go out with the herd" (9). Even though the son of Old Man Hat is a clan relative of Old Man Hat's wife, the boy is treated scarcely better than a slave. He works for the old people and in return is given food and shelter, but he is not treated as a son nor is he given the rudimentary education that would be expected for Navajo males of that time. It is crucial that we consider Left Handed's decision to portray the main character of his stories in such a manner. Elaine J. Lawless writes in a paper describing her work with/about Pentecostal women preachers, "The final phase of the hermeneutic circle, then, demands that we subject our interpretations to the interpretations of our subjects" (313). This is the ideal, providing an additional corrective measure, but even when it is impossible to speak directly with past informants/subjects to gain their responses to the scholarly presentation of their lives and words, we can discern the underlying directions inherent in fieldwork *Adata* through a conversive listening-reading response. As listener-readers of Left Handed's stories, our choices involve our respective responsibilities as participants of a conversive literary domain. We can choose to interact with Left Handed's stories in an intersubjectively relational manner, or we

can choose to respond to the stories in a discursively oppositional manner that keeps us outside those stories.

If we are interested in gleaning the range of meaningful connective links within and between Left Handed's stories, the close intersubjective listening skills of traditional oral storytelling can access story-meanings in ways that discursively based readings can only approach. The atypical life of the son of Old Man Hat as recounted in the published narrative is meaningful for what it tells us about Left Handed's times and also about his storytelling encounter with Walter Dyk. The atypicality also alerts listener-readers that more is going on in Left Handed's stories than a straightforwardly factual life history narrative. To read the narratives of *Son of Old Man Hat* and *Left Handed* as the story of Left Handed is to read a lie. This text is not about Left Handed, regardless of his first person narration as the son of Old Man Hat. Within traditional Native cultures, even when individuals do share experiences from their own lives, the stories are not really autobiographical in the romantic sense of privileging the storyteller. In a discussion of American Indian autobiography, David H. Brumble explains, ". . . the preliterate autobiographies especially put before us conceptions of the self that are foreign to modern, individualistic societies" (3). Clyde Kluckhohn ran into this very problem in his early ethnographic work with the old Navajo man Mr. Moustache. Kluckhohn later reported his frustration with the utter lack of personal life history referents in the old man's stories:

The first thing we notice, I think, in this story is that it is hardly even a meager autobiography in our sense. He [Mr. Moustache] mentions very few particular events and no persons except his father enter more than casually into history. What he says constitutes much more a kind of philosophic homily than a proper life history. In part, this is to be understood in the context that the man had been a chief for many years and was accustomed to have people come to him for advice of a general nature. It may be also that to another person or under other circumstances he might have given a more chronologically ordered account of particular happenings in his life. All of my experience, however, gives me grounds to doubt this. (273)

Perhaps Clyde Kluckhohn's personal experience having summered near the Navajo during his early years helped him to pick up on Mr. Moustache's personally evasive storytelling. This was not the case for all who did ethnographic work on the Navajo. Walter Dyk's unfamiliarity with and apparent objectification of the Navajo (and other Native peoples) prevented him from recognizing the degree to which his informants protected themselves through their largely non-self-referential stories. In contrast to Dyk's work back in the 1930's, the newer generations of ethnographers are, in many cases, working more collaboratively with their Ainformants@ to insure more reliable Adata.@ One such example can be found in Harold Courlander's edited ethnography of Albert Yava (Tewa/Hopi). As Yava points out in his own ethnographic stories, his recounting of his times is not about himself, but more accurately about particular events and situations that he has lived or heard about. He

relates these stories to his editor and ethnographer Harold Courlander because they are those stories that strike him as significant to retell. As Yava explicitly explains,

I am going to recall some of the things I know, the way I say them or heard them, or the way they were taught to me. Maybe our young people will get an inkling of what Life was like on this mesa when I was a boy, or how it was in the time of our fathers and grandfathers. If I seem to say a lot about myself, it is really my times that I am thinking about. I am merely the person who happened to be there at a particular time." (4)

Unlike Dyk's encounter with Left Handed, Harold Courlander worked collaboratively with Albert Yava enabling Yava to tell his stories in his own way, not reconstructing them into a forced autobiographical narrative. Nevertheless, Yava's collected stories is entitled *Big Falling Snow: A Tewa-Hopi Indians's Life and the History and Traditions of His People*. A more accurate title in line with Yava's aforementioned statement might be "The History and Traditions of the Tewa and Hopi People as Recounted by Albert Yava." Nevertheless Courlander's volume enables Yava to speak his own stories and words with minimal external editorial intrusiveness. In contrast, Dyk's earlier work with Left Handed (and other Navajos) produced much more difficult texts to read by virtue of Dyk's various editorial alterations (deletions, additions, and reorganization) that obscure Left Handed's stories behind the presented textual narrative.

Regarding *Son of Old Man Hat*, a conversive approach is so much the more necessary in order to cut through Dyk's editorial layers. The reader must read slowly, bit by bit, breaking up the autobiographical narrative into the small stories of Left Handed's to try to read Left Handed's stories in their own right. This involves breaking up Dyk's "chronology" and reading Left Handed's stories behind, through, and within the mediative layers of Dyk's editorial control. And, perhaps most importantly, this means reading the stories, not as autobiographical vignettes, but rather as stories told by Left Handed because, for whatever reasons, the stories struck him as significant, as worthy of telling during the moments of his interactions with his ethnographer. Like Albert Yava's telling, Left Handed's telling is not about himself in the sense of a self-privileging autobiographical narrative. But unlike Yava's explicit presence in many of his stories, Left Handed never explicitly identifies himself as the son of Old Man Hat, nor for that matter as any character in his stories. Were the text in any form or fashion about Left Handed, he would identify himself through his respective clan affiliations, as Yava does at the beginning of *Big Falling Snow*. But in *Son of Old Man Hat* we do not learn Left Handed's true parentage and lineage, nor his clan affiliations through his parents and his grandparents, all of which are considered among the Navajo to be among the most important information about a person.

Fortunately, we have other sources of information about Left Handed to help direct us away from the misinterpretation of Dyk's volumes as autobiographical narratives.

Left Handed worked with other anthropologists and scholars. For example, in the 1940's, he served as one of the Navajo informants for W. W. Hill. In Hill's article *ANavaho Trading and Trading Ritual: A Study of Cultural Dynamics*, he not only lists the names of his informants, but also includes the locations on the reservation where they lived: *The following informants were used. Their locations give indication of the territory covered in the work. Where important divergences occur in the accounts, the initials of the informants have been appended* (373). What is especially helpful in these choices is that throughout Hill's essay, certain pieces of information (including some actual quotations) are explicitly identified with particular informants. Additionally, Hill's footnote identification of his informants by name and location makes it easier for readers today to connect certain informants with some of their work with other anthropologists, such as Left Handed from the Round Rock/Lukachukai area. Since Hill's article focuses specifically on Navajo trading practices, he provides little other information about his informants beyond their names and home locations. Nevertheless, he does quote from several of his informants fairly extensively, including a number of very interesting statements from Left Handed. In some cases, Left Handed's comments seem to be fairly straightforward descriptions of Navajo/Pueblo trading relationships; in other cases, some of his comments appear to be less straightforward and deserving of greater interpretive understanding. Let me talk about two examples for what they show regarding Left Handed's directive intentionality in his work with various anthropologists.

In a discussion of intertribal trading relationships between the Navajo and their neighboring Ute and Pueblo tribes, Hill notes that such relationships often proved long lasting, with Navajo individuals and families continuing to trade with particular Ute or Pueblo people and families for many years. Hill writes that Left Handed of Round Rock and Kinipai of Mariano Lakes informed him that *Asuch >friendships, once established, continued until one or the other died, or in some cases relationship were maintained in the two families for several generations* (389, emphasis in original). This assertion is born out in many other sources. For a literary/historical example, in Leslie Marmon Silko's volume *Storyteller*, she includes a vignette from her grandfather's life. For many years, he worked in the local trading post/store near Laguna Pueblo. During certain special Feast Days at the Pueblo, one old Navajo man would always come and visit with her grandfather. They would give each other certain items, presents, trade goods. Silko writes that the Navajo man would come every year, but that one year when he came, her grandfather wasn't there. When the old Navajo man inquired after her grandfather, he was told that he had passed on. Silko writes that the Navajo man began to cry, and then he left. She relates that he never came back again. In Silko's family story, we learn about the enduring relationships that developed among the Navajo and Pueblo people and that these relationships went deeper than the mere economic encounter of the trade.

Even though many such relationships that include trade activities might appear to outsiders to be based on the material exchange of various items, in fact the items

(although valued in and of themselves) serve the larger purpose as sign of the developing relationships. On this specific aspect of the trade, Left Handed's and Kinipai's assertions of the enduring relationships are clearly substantiated. This does not mean, however, that there might be more going on surrounding their statements, as well. Might Left Handed's comment to the anthropologist Hill be a commentary on the outsider anthropologists who come into Navajo country, establish working relationships with certain Navajos, and then leave with no further contact? Several of Hill's informants expressly complained about relationships that were solely based on the economic exchange. Hill writes that the trade relations between the Navajo and the Pueblo people were notably Auncongenial@ and Aon a hard and fast commercial basis . . . resented and deplored by the Navaho@--this expressed by several Navajos to an anthropologist whose relationship with them was temporary and based on the exchange of money and information (389). Might these comments about the Auncongenial atmosphere pervading Navaho-Pueblo trade relations@ serve as metaphoric symbols of the ethnographic trade encounter? Regardless of our possible answers to this question, we do know that in Hill's reference to Left Handed's and Kinipai's comments about the relationships that develop through trade, Hill qualifies those relationships by referring to them as Afriendships@ in quotes. Hill offers no explanation in the text of his article nor in a footnote (of which there are many) clarifying his choice in putting the word Afriendships@ in quotes. His emphasis on trade encounters indicates that he does not consider the relationships that developed to be true friendships. While these relationships may not take the form that Hill might recognize as Afriendship@ in his own culture, for many Navajo, Pueblo and other Native peoples, such intertribal friendships may have been taken very seriously indeed. Certainly the old Navajo man who stopped by Silko's grandfather's store considered their friendship pretty seriously. The old Navajo man's tears clearly indicate the depth of his caring for Silko's Laguna Pueblo grandfather. Regardless of why Left Handed might have emphasized his point about such relationships with Hill, his statements about the importance of trade relationships are certainly substantiated elsewhere, including Silko's story about her grandfather and his Navajo friend. On one other aspect of what Hill refers to as the Atrading ritual,@ Left Handed's statements may require deeper consideration, especially in what they reveal about the intentionality and deliberation of Left Handed's work with his various anthropologists.

In Hill's article, he delineates a range of activities that he presents as typical practices involved in Navajo trading journeys. Some of these seem fairly representative of similar practices between other orally informed indigenous cultures--namely the establishment of relationships upon the trade activity is based (388-390), the greater frequency of trade among peoples in closer geographic proximity to each other (374-375), and the variability of Atrading parties@ based on the reasons for the journeys (382-383). Left Handed emphasizes one of the most intriguing parts of the trading Aritual@ that none of Hill's other informants mention. I leave to my own readers to consider why it might be that no other Navajo mentioned what Left Handed describes as a crucial element of Navajo trading expeditions. . . . Might it be that Left Handed made up elements of his stories?

Within a conversive storytelling framework, what is important is the larger unfolding story, that meanings we can derive therefrom. The specific facts, details, and information (whether persons, places, times, events, the who, what, when, and where) are largely inconsequential to the greater importance of the underlying story-meanings. In Hill's paper, we are given what he has gleaned to be Adata@ from the range of responses and stories told him by his informants. Without more complete accounts of his informants' comments, it is much harder to get a sense of the directions of their words. In this respect, the larger ethnographic monographs like *Son of Old Man Hat* offer listener-readers far greater opportunities to bring to bear corrective conversive understandings of various storytellers' (informants') words. With this in mind, Hill notes that one of his informants, Left Handed, told him about traditional Navajo trading ritual practices.

Left Handed told Hill that when Navajo people travel to trade with other people, when the Navajos sleep at night during the journey, they all sleep in the same direction with Amembers lying with their heads toward the home, their feet in the direction they were travelling@ (387). Hill writes that Left Handed explained this ritual, telling Hill that AThis was to insure the success of your trip@ (387). It is interesting that Left Handed's words direct this practice in the second person Ayour trip.@ Might Left Handed have been relating this questionably factual ritual in the second person as a means of suggesting this practice for Hill and Hill's success in his own travels? I wonder if Hill shifted his sleeping directions that night? In any case, Left Handed then expands on this Aritual.@ He then tells Hill that one must also urinate in the same direction as sleeping. Hill writes, AA somewhat similar observance was associated with urinating; the individual always faced toward home@ (387). I sincerely hope that Hill did not try this himself outdoors when the wind was against him. In any case, Hill identifies Left Handed as the only informant who described these required parts of what Hill refers to as the Navajo trading ritual. A conversive listening-reading response to Left Handed's comments indicates that there might be some very good reasons why Left Handed was the only person who related these Atraditional@ practices. Might the other informants have been too shy to mention these Afacts@? Or might it just be that Left Handed made up these stories in relation to the specific questions asked by Hill? Might Left Handed have become tired of Hill's objectification of Indian people, of Hill's perspective that Navajo people were somehow fundamentally different from other people, of Hill's exoticization of the Navajo, their lives, and culture--all of which is evidenced in the portrayal of the Navajo and their trade interactions with others?

These bits and pieces from Left Handed's work with Hill shows us that much more is going on in Left Handed's storytelling than purely factual information. When Left Handed tells stories, what is required is a conversive story-listening response and the recognition of the complexities, symbolism, and depth in those stories. As Arnold Krupat advocates for our understandings of the Abicultural composite composition@ of ethnographically produced autobiographies, our Areading [of these works] must be centrally a *literaryreading*@ (*For Those Who Come After* 31, xxvii). Krupat clearly points us in the crucial conversive direction, moving our

interpretations of these constructed texts beyond the more simplistic and reductive surface readings of historical data, cultural facticity, and personal information. Left Handed (and many of the other indigenous Ainformants@ of the past hundred plus years) were intentional subjects in control of their own storytelling deliberations, in some cases relating historically factual events and in other cases relating true **stories** whose truth is evident at deeper symbolic levels. We see both strategies in Left Handed's storytelling. His *modus operandi* clearly varied based on his relationships and work with different anthropologists. Throughout Left Handed's work with various anthropologists, his craft as a storyteller is evident, even in work that is primarily reportorial and factual.

Just a few years after his work with Hill, Left Handed and two other Navajo men worked with the anthropologist William Morgan and the linguist Robert W. Young (compiler of the first extensive Navajo/English dictionary). This work involved relating the historical events of 1892-1894 specifically leading up to and including a serious altercation that occurred between the Navajo and the Indian Affairs agent of the time in Navajo country. The difficulties in the Round Rock area of the reservation centered around the requirement for Navajo children's compulsory boarding school attendance. In other parts of the Navajo reservation, many of the children were already being sent to the Indian boarding schools; however, in Round Rock and other areas that were supposed to send their children to the boarding school at Ft. Defiance, the Navajos were defiant and refused to send their children to the school. It was not until 1893 when Lt. Edwin H. Plummer took over as the Indian agent for the Navajo agency that change occurred. Plummer assessed the hesitancy on the part of the Navajo in the remote northern and northwestern parts of the reservation regarding the boarding school at Ft. Defiance. Thinking that the Navajo in this area didn't understand how quickly the United States was changing and how important it would be for their children to receive Western style education, Plummer decided to get funding to bring a number of the Navajo to Chicago and the World's Columbian Exposition. AThere were eleven men, one school girl, and two school boys in the group. . . . They visited all the exhibits, and everything they saw was carefully explained to them. They were also shown about the city and visited many large industries there. . . . Two of the Navajo leaders were said to have spoken out strongly urging the people to place their children in school@ (Young and Morgan 20). Subsequent to this visit and during Agent Plummer's tenure, more Navajo children were sent to the schools which, at the time, were overcrowded, disease ridden, understaffed, underfunded, and in disrepair.

The event that precipitated the Navajo trip to Chicago and Lt. Plummer's arrival as the Navajo Indian Agent was an attack by a number of Navajos against the previous Indian Agent in 1892. Briefly, the Navajos had been complaining about the treatment of their children in the regional boarding school in Ft. Defiance. There were reports of boys being handcuffed and locked in the cellar and others confined for days without food. The Agent for the Navajo in 1892 was Dana L. Shipley. He served in that post for only a year and half before he resigned. The stories recorded by Left Handed, Howard Gorman, and the nephew of Former Big Man focus on a

fight that occurred between the Navajo and Agent Shipley. In Shipley's brief tenure on the Navajo reservation, his strong-armed tactics created such animosity among the Navajo that he resigned out of fear. Young and Morgan write that "Almost as soon as he became the Agent he began to have trouble with the Navajos because he tried to force them to put their children in school. He would take policemen to get the children . . ." (1). One man Black Horse spoke out strongly against the schools. "The Agent, Mr. Shipley, insisted on taking the children, so Black Horse attacked him" (1). Young and Morgan wanted to record the events of that time from close relatives of some of those who had been present and involved in the altercation. One old Navajo man (Left Handed) had actually been present at the time.

Unlike the objectifying work of Hill on Navajo trading and trade rituals or Dyk in recording a typical Navajo life history narrative, Young (fluent in Navajo) and Morgan were simply interested in documented the events of that time. They had the report presented to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs and letters of the Navajo Agents from those years. As Young and Morgan assert at the end of their own introduction that presents the past written record of those times, "Now we will present the stories of three Navajos, one of whom [Left Handed] was present at Round Rock when the fight with Black Horse occurred. You have read the white man's account of what happened. Now to make the story complete you should also read the Navajo account. In that way you can learn both sides of the story" (22). *The Trouble At Round Rock* includes three first person accounts of the events that led up to and transpired when Agent Shipley was beaten up by Black Horse and the others, then rescued by one large Navajo who carried the wounded Agent into the flour storage room of the trading post where he and few others stayed blockaded in and later "defecated all around in the flour" (29). Of the three accounts, Left Handed's is by far the longest and most developed. The other two men, Howard Gorman and the nephew of Former Big Man, were not personally present during the events, but they heard the story from relatives who were involved. Both of these men briefly (12 pages each) relate the stories as they heard them. All three of the accounts faithfully relate the same events, including comments about the trader's ignorant behavior and how the flour got dirtied (29, 34).

Left Handed, who was a young man at the time, tells a longer and more embellished account that further demonstrates his storytelling craft. In the tradition of Navajo storytelling, Left Handed begins by introducing himself, identifying his clan membership and how his family came to live in the Lukachukai area. Left Handed explicitly states that he remembers little about his early childhood (23), which contrasts substantially with the extensively detailed childhood stories that he related to Walter Dyk. He also notes that after his birth, his grandfather and others held a feast "with great joy" celebrating the baby's birth and the people's return from Ft. Sumner. Left Handed relates other specifics from his childhood and young adult years, such as the care given to him by his grandfather, the chores he learned as a teenager working for an uncle, the epidemic of 1887 ("the time when the throat killed many" [23-24]). It is telling that most of his comments about his own early

years diverge significantly from the detailed events in the stories that appear in the volumes *Son of Old Man Hat* and *Left Handed*. The ethnographic works recorded and edited by Dyk are not life history narratives about Left Handed's personal life, even though there is much in those volumes that do give a faithful sense of the world and times in which Left Handed lived. First and foremost, it is crucial that we remember that Left Handed is a gifted storyteller. His craft and his enjoyment as a storyteller is evident even in his retelling of the factual events regarding the difficulties at Round Rock and his intriguing scatological comments about supposed Navajo trading rituals.

In *The Trouble At Round Rock*, Left Handed draws on a number of traditional conversive storytelling strategies, including voice shifts, repetition and pauses for emphasis and reflection, episodic and associational narrative, intersubjective relationality, first person storytelling beginning and ending frame, and humor throughout. For example, Left Handed relates the actual events of the attack by first explaining the origins of the trading post at Round Rock where the altercation occurred. In so doing, he mentions the two men who founded the trading post, one white man name Aldrich and a Navajo interpreter Chee Dodge. In his chronicle, Left Handed refers to the Navajo interpreter by his name, but when he refers to the white man, he only refers to him by the descriptive name that some of the Navajos used for Aldrich: ABig Lump Setting Up@ (24). Left Handed clearly seems to enjoy the white trader's descriptive name (which I doubt was the name people used in his presence). Left Handed certainly could have referred to the trader simply as the white trader, much as he references one Navajo policeman who he refers to simply as Athe policeman@ in his narrative (28), but instead, the individual references to the white trader at Round Rock refer to him by the very funny, if rather rude descriptive name: ABig Lump Setting Up@ (24). An additional pejorative joke is levied in the direction of another trader that the Navajos called AThe Bat@ (31). We are told that this man used to brag about his bravery on the soldier's side at Round Rock.

The white man called The Bat used to say that he was on the soldier's side.

AI too had my gun ready like this,@ he used to say.

People would laugh at him when he told about this. He was a trader.

(31)

Left Handed's final descriptive comment here is telling, including the pauses before and after that comment indicated by the separate sentence and the extra spacing given in the printed text after that sentence with a line break to the next paragraph and a change of direction in the narrative. The first pause provides emphatic space for the listener (listener-reader) to consider the statement about how the Navajos would laugh at The Bat when he would brag about his bravery. The pause punctuates the extent to which the Navajos did not believe Bat's bravado. To underscore their disbelief even further, Left Handed then adds his final (seemingly digressive) comment about The Bat, clarifying that he was not a fighter: AHe was a

trader@ (31). Throughout Left Handed's storytelling, regardless of the degree of facticity and reliability, he spices up his stories with humor, both direct and indirect (e.g., wry asides, funny vignettes, wild descriptions and events).

In his version of *The Trouble at Round Rock*@ (23-31), Left Handed refers to the other characters by their descriptive Navajo names. In those cases where he does not remember the name, he states that explicitly: *There were three Navajo policemen there in that connection. One of them turned out to be Bead Clan Gambler, one was Singed Man from Fort Defiance . . . Another . . . was killed recently at St. Michaels at a rodeo. . . . I can't think what his name was--I merely knew him by sight. He was merely called Interpreter's [brother]-in-law@ (26). The text of *The Trouble at Round Rock* initially refers to the third Navajo policeman as *Interpreter's* (i.e. Chee Dodge's) brother-in-law@ (26). The later reference contradicts this slightly: *He was merely called Interpreter's Father-in-law (?)@ (26). The question mark indicates Young's and Morgan's question regarding the second referencing that identifies the third policeman as Chee Dodge's father-in-law. Since Left Handed (who was a young man during the Round Rock altercation) relates his story as an old man (over eighty years old), it is unlikely that the policeman who we are told died recently would be a generation or two older than Left Handed. Perhaps Left Handed accidentally misspoke in the second reference. The initial reference that Young and Morgan do not question identifies the third Navajo policeman as Chee's brother-in-law. Here Left Handed communicates to us that he might not remember a person's name if it was someone he did not know well. Instead of giving the name by which Chee's brother-in-law was commonly known, Left Handed merely refers to him by telling us how he was related to Chee Dodge. This offers an additional interesting parallel to Left Handed's storytelling with Walter Dyk. In all of the stories he related to Dyk, he never named the main character, and unlike his work with Young and Morgan, in the published volumes *Son of Old Man Hat* and *Left Handed*, we are given no explanation for the main character's namelessness throughout weeks and months of storytelling work with Dyk. The fact that the main character is unnamed is especially significant within a cultural framework (Navajo) in which great attention is given to naming (whether that be of a sacred or secular orientation, serious, whimsical, or humorous). In one of James Welch's novels, the main character is never named. In an interview, Welch related that after thirty or so pages into the novel, he realized that he hadn't yet named the young male protagonist. Over the course of the novel, Welch noted that his main character really hadn't done anything sufficiently significant to merit a name, so he left the young man nameless. It is interesting that even in a character's namelessness, Welch demonstrates the importance of naming--here pointing to a serious deficiency in the young man's character.**

Left Handed also emphasizes the importance of a person's name by its absence. While this strategy may signify a person's inherent deficiencies, the lack of naming may also serve as a protective form of coding. *In This Glittering World: A Navajo Novel* by Irvin Morris (Navajo), Morris includes a cryptic story *Meat and the Man*@ that centers around a bumbling overweight white male obsessed with all

things and persons Navajo. Like Left Handed's stories with Dyk, in this story, Morris never names his main Anglo character, however he intersperses the story with others who repeatedly ask, "What was that man's name?" This signals Morris's listener-readers that the name is important for them to consider and possibly even call to mind. Regarding Morris's story, I did not initially pick up on the character's identity until a Native colleague at another university mentioned the story and asked me, "Do you know who that unnamed white man is in that story?" His oral cue positioned me into the role of an interactive storylistener, and I immediately realized who that character was. But when I had read the story initially as a reader, rather than as a conversive listener-reader, I completely overlooked the signaling question, "What was that man's name?" Morris's protective character coding parallels Left Handed's stories about another bumbling man in Navajo country.

The unnamed main character and the utter absence of Left Handed as an actual character in both *Son of Old Man Hat* and *Left Handed* further point to the unlikely identity of Left Handed as an autobiographical storyteller in his work with Dyk. Without any substantive information about the man Left Handed in these narratives, we can never really approach Left Handed in these volumes, but merely circle around him as the absent center of an elusive and illusory autobiographical narrative whose subject matter is never really the teller and whose teller absents himself from the telling like a trickster figure telling first person voiced stories that may not be about him at all. Not only does the absence of the real Left Handed in his telling alert his readers to the fact that we should in no way approach his stories as autobiography, but this absence also raises very real questions about our readings of the text and specifically about the identities of the son of Old Man Hat and of Old Man Hat, as well. These two characters puzzled me. Over the course of researching Left Handed's work with Dyk, I had the nagging sense that I should know who Old Man Hat and his son are. By means of a conversive approach to the text, I found it easy to demonstrate the absence of Left Handed as either of these two main characters. It's also readily apparent that Left Handed's stories do not constitute an autobiographical narrative in the sense of a telling explicitly about oneself (being largely bereft of particular familial, clan, and geographic markers that would reference the stories in Left Handed's personal world). And a conversive method that emphasizes the stories and their telling rather than the textualized narrative opens up the stories to their reader-listeners in ways otherwise inaccessible to the textually trained critic. However, even though I had studied *Son of Old Man Hat* in graduate school and had taught and researched the volume for a number of years, I still felt that I did not have a solid handle on the characters of Old Man Hat and his son, and there still was this nagging feeling that I was supposed to know who they are. If the main character of the stories, the son of Old Man Hat, is not Left Handed, then discerning the identity of the main character seemed important in opening up the stories even further. In my process of discovery, I began with the primary named character Old Man Hat.

In thinking about the old man named Old Man Hat, I remembered from my Navajo

studies and my time living in Gallup that the Navajo were traditionally given names invested with semiotic significance that bespoke something memorable about the person. In other words, a man wouldn't be named Old Man Hat unless there was a good reason for that. The name would signify something relevant about him. To be named Old Man Hat, he would have to have been distinguished by his hat, perhaps by having a really big or strange hat, or by being odd and wearing his hat at all times, perhaps even sleeping with his hat on. The more I thought about it, I couldn't imagine a mid-to-late nineteenth century Navajo man standing out because of a hat. We are told that Old Man Hat takes the boy in shortly after the return of the Navajo from their internment at Ft. Sumner in the 1860's. By that time, Old Man Hat already had been given this name. I tried to imagine a situation in which a person (Navajo or otherwise) would be so named. Perhaps a man's hat might be significant by being hit by a bullet aimed at him, but then the name would be something like Man with the Brave Hat or Man Protected by His Hat, but this is different from a man being expressly designated by a hat. I wondered why the hat would be so privileged. I also pondered the sort of subjective self-privileging that the Romantics valorized and which is a part of a growing global inheritance of colonial modernity and postcolonial postmodernity. Although the late nineteenth century certainly produced many individuals who self-consciously distinguished themselves by a certain attire and look (such as Oscar Wilde or Romaine Brooks), this was hardly the experience of most Native peoples of the time who still lived remotely on their traditional tribal lands and/or on governmentally designated reservations.

As I considered the very idea of a man named Old Man Hat, I simply couldn't imagine a nineteenth century Navajo standing out because of a hat! Nowadays, we can find individuals on the Navajo reservation who might distinguish themselves by their choice in hats or other attire, but this was not the case among the Navajo one hundred forty years ago. Survival was an accomplishment during those difficult times before, during, and after the Long Walk. The name Old Man Hat didn't make sense for a Navajo of that time. Even though the possession of a hat did have the status value accorded to it as a significant element of white men's and military attire, the hats worn by the few Navajo men of the time (as evidenced in photographs taken by the U. S. Signal Corps in the 1860's) were fairly inconspicuous, often woven straw hats in the Western or Mexican styles. Prior to the Long Walk, certain Navajo males might wear a special cap on occasion, as during one early meeting with white military men in the late 1840's where the Navajos were described as A>dressed in splendid Indian attire, having fine figured blankets and panther-skin caps, plumed with eagle feathers' @ (qtd. in Trafzer 12). Regardless of the type of hat or cap worn, the hats were certainly not such that would draw especial attention to the wearer simply by virtue of the hat in order to merit precedence in his naming. I finally realized that Old Man Hat couldn't have been a Navajo, even though Left Handed's stories center around a Navajo world. Old Man Hat! Hastiin Ch'ah! Old Man Hat! Hastiin Ch'ah! I repeated the old man's name over and over again, considering the implications of this name. Why might Left Handed have chosen this specific name for one of the primary named character in his stories? And why is the main character

never named, only referred to as the son of Hastiin Ch'ah?

Finally, once I opened myself up to considering the possibility of Old Man Hat metaphorically being based on a non-Navajo, Left Handed's stories began to open up entirely new possibilities. In my own fieldwork in the Tsaile/Lukachukai area (the region where Left Handed had lived several generations ago), I subsequently learned that one of the descriptive names used for Abraham Lincoln was Hastiin Ch'ah (Old Man Hat): Abraham Lincoln, the man who was President of the United States when the Navajo were sent on the Long Walk in 1864. And the symbolic son of Old Man Hat, the metaphoric son of Hastiin Ch'ah: a young white man in Navajo country who had a dark beard--the young anthropologist Walter Dyk. Left Handed repeatedly held up a mirror for his young ethnographer, telling him stories upon stories about the objectification of Native peoples by young outsiders disrespectful of the knowledge and wisdom of his elders. In the number of weeks and months that Left Handed worked with Walter Dyk, there really is the sense that he came to care for the young ethnographer. Even though he did not maintain contact with his informant beyond their working relationship, Dyk does refer to Left Handed as his friend. And unlike the other Navajos who worked with Walter Dyk for brief periods, in a number of cases breaking off the working relationships abruptly, Left Handed returned to his work with Dyk over and over again. Perhaps he hoped that at some point Dyk would stop perceiving the old man's stories as little more than ethnographic facts and life history data. Perhaps if the stories became recent enough in their reflectivity and increasingly more specific, perhaps then Dyk might begin to listen to Left Handed's stories as complexly crafted stories, rich in meaning and invaluable in their insights into the ethnographic process.

In Left Handed's stories, we are continually presented, essentially, with a bildungsroman about the childhood and young adulthood of a young man. Left Handed's stories never show the son of Old Man Hat beyond young adulthood. We never see the son of Old Man Hat as an older man. Left Handed's stories primarily focus on the son of Old Man Hat as a grown but still a young man. There are relatively few stories about the main character's early years. In fact, as Dyk explains in the notes to his volume *A Navaho Autobiography* (ostensibly about the Navajo man named Old Mexican), Left Handed resisted telling stories from his childhood and youth, preferring to only tell stories about the young adulthood of his main character (6). When Walter Dyk conducted his research on the Navajo reservation, he was in his early thirties, certainly a young man in Left Handed's eyes. The son of Old Man Hat who is never named, who from early childhood is obsessed with sexual matters, who is portrayed as ignorant of Navajo culture, who is repeatedly shown objectifying "other" Indian people (even his own mother), who refuses to learn from his elders, thinking he knows better, who falls asleep in a ceremony shortly after arriving and who leaves another ceremony prematurely. *Son of Old Man Hat* is not Left Handed's autobiography at all. It does not even consist of stories about a young Navajo man's life, even though the context for the stories is the Navajo world familiar to Left Handed. *Son of Old Man Hat* tells us Left Handed's made-up stories about the formative years of the sort of person who would become his

psychoanalytically trained anthropologist Walter Dyk! Like Gertrude Stein's *Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas*, Left Handed steps into the role of the metaphoric son of Old Man Hat and tells us the autobiographical stories (imagined and real) of Walter Dyk. By freeing up Left Handed's stories from the textually constraining life history narrative into which they were forced, we are also freed to engage directly with the told stories. In such manner, we can see how Left Handed's stories really fit together, stories that reflected his interactions with Walter Dyk, stories specifically told for his immediate audience, stories that scholars (and other readers, myself included) have grossly misread for almost sixty years.

It is absolutely crucial for listener-readers to bring conversive reading skills to Left Handed's stories in order to read *with* Left Handed's transcribed telling as a means of finding the telling behind the text. Only through conversive reading strategies that read the tellings behind and within the text can the readers of *Son of Old Man Hat* even begin to approach the stories otherwise obscured by the textualized narrative. This means working to listen to the stories rather than simply reading the text, regardless of whether one is reading with the text (in a modernist approach) or reading against the text (in a postmodern revisionist approach). A conversive approach de-emphasizes the text and instead emphasizes the telling.

This alternative approach can be seen throughout the stories that make up the textual narrative. By not privileging the text as such, the text is no longer ostensibly read as the autobiographical narrative it purports to be, and Left Handed is no longer foregrounded in a way that distracts our attention from the range of issues and concerns that are at the heart of his telling. In a conversive strategy, the stories are foregrounded through the interaction between reader-listener and teller. Neither text, nor writer, nor reader are privileged. If there is any privileging involved, precedence is given to the story, but this is a precedence understood within the oral storytelling tradition in which the story is not an abstracted text distinct from teller or listener, but is an interwoven telling that inextricably involves and contains teller and listener. Conversive reading strategies, albeit apparently simplistic, are actually far more sophisticated than the range of western literary reading and critical strategies. One not only reads the text, but one co-creates the story through an interactive reading strategy that brings the range of one's own background and knowledge to bear on the teller's words.

Two final examples can help to shed light on the symbolic person of the son of Old Man Hat. The first comes from Left Handed's story about the boy's visit with his father to Oraibi. Here Left Handed offers a story that communicates much about diverse ways of interacting with people. We see the old man (Old Man Hat) interacting intersubjectively and relationally with the Hopi people. In contrast, we see his son reacting to the Hopi in an oppositionally distancing manner. The boy's/young man's behavior is reflective of colonial encounters in which outsiders enter a different community and grossly misperceive the others as somehow fundamentally different from themselves and, therefore, as less. This is what McGrane describes as that egocentric tendency of our Western mind to identify

itself as separate from what it perceives as external to itself@ (5). Especially problematic is such a preconceived interpretive response to a conversively informed storytelling in which understanding requires actively becoming a part of the unfolding story. James Clifford defines ethnographic work as a dialogical enterprise in which both researchers and natives are active creators or, to stretch a term, authors of cultural representations@ (*The Predicament of Culture* 84). A distanced stance of objectivity precludes such interactive entry into the world of story and permits factually erroneous readings, such as the interpretation of Left Handed's stories as life history narratives. In relation to the story about the old man, his son, and the Hopi, a textually objective reading that merely skims the surface of the story seeking out details, facts, and data might note the boy's naive and obstinate misperceptions about the Hopi . Such a reading could unveil much about the the conflictual encounters between different peoples. In a conversive reading in which teller and listener-reader are both part of the story, readers must bring to their reading an intersubjectively interactive listening-reading approach in which the reader (as listener-reader) engages with the story from within. In such manner, when I read Left Handed's story about the son of Old Man Hat asking his father, "Have these Indians horns?" (50), as a woman of Jewish ancestry, I immediately took a deep breath, followed by a knowing sigh. At that point, I was very definitely living a part in Left Handed's story. By putting this particular image into the mind and words of the boy, Left Handed very clearly presents the boy as the colonialist outsider misjudging Native peoples as different, alien, and even demonic.

One of the more well known racist comments made about non-Christians (Jews and others varyingly defined as pagan, including American Indian people) by European and Euroamerican Christians has been the assertion that they have horns--an image that defines particular peoples as more akin to animals than to humans (within an Eurocentric reading, such a connection is definitely understood pejoratively) and, more significantly, a comparison of human persons to the demonic (with the reference being to a Christian belief in a horned devil or Satan figure). In reading Left Handed's story, I imagined a medieval Christian young man meeting a Jew for the first time and asking his father, "Do these Jews have horns?" And I remembered reading early accounts of the Spaniard conquistadors and missionaries in which they pejoratively described Indian people as Jews. And I remembered watching an older white rancher looking at some Navajo jewelry that was being shown to me and an older white trader (female). The man looked at the trader (not at the Navajo craftswoman standing right next to him) and asked, "Is this good work? They're not like those Jewish Navajos, are they?" And as he asked his question, he ran a finger along his nose to demonstrate his point about shifty and untrustworthy people with hooked noses. We all three (Navajo, Jew, and Anglo trader) got his point loud and clear, a point that resonated as clearly to me as when the son of Old Man Hat asked his father, "Do these Indians have horns?" One day I mentioned this vignette from Left Handed's stories about Athose Indians having horns@ to an older Navajo woman. She immediately responded, AAnd pointy tails!@ The Satanic imagery in the reference was clearly apparent to her, as well. Even bracketing out whether or not Left Handed is explicitly referring to the tradition of racist Christian imagery of

the demonic, the image nevertheless bespeaks the various biases inherent in the colonizing encounters with the "other."

Both my experiences in Indian country (living in Gallup, NM prior to my doctoral studies at the University of New Mexico) and my experiences as a Bahá'í woman of mixed Jewish/Appalachian ancestry inform my own conversive readings of Left Handed's stories--a reading strategy that enables me to read with and into Left Handed's stories and worlds in ways that the textualized narrative works against. Conversive reading strategies in no wise deny the especial strengths and background of the listener-reader. Stories are not told to indeterminate audiences. While writing can be a largely self-referential endeavor with little or no audience beyond the writer (hence the efforts of phenomenological critics to find a place for the critic/reader through identification with the voice in the text), storytellings definitionally presume the presence of listeners as part and parcel of the co-creative act. Readers do not enter the worlds of texts, in fact. But a conversive listening-reading approach involves a much greater responsibility on the part of the "reader" to become part of the unfolding story both in imagination and in fact. Through the process of listener-reader involvement with and in the stories, the listener-reader can only do so by means of a direct and personal engagement. As Gary Witherspoon explains in *Language and Art in the Navajo Universe*, "Insights into another culture do not come from idle contemplation or superficial fieldwork based on question *about* and observations *of* it; they come from intensive and extensive, serious and humorous, involvement *in it*" (6).

Let me share one final example that demonstrates the very powerful presence of Left Handed's own conversive telling within the delimiting bounds of Dyk's textualized narratives. Both *Son of Old Man Hat* and *Left Handed* present to their readers chronological autobiographies ostensibly about Left Handed (the son of Old Man Hat). In order to read Left Handed's stories, we have to move away from our initial preconceived expectations of a "Navaho autobiography." The importance of such a strategy can be seen in the extent to which Left Handed deemphasizes even his character (the son of Old Man Hat) when he (Left Handed) has larger points to make in his telling--a fact that is evident at the very outset of *Son of Old Man Hat*. The narrative begins with what appears to be the brief recounting of the boy's birth. As such, the first few paragraphs are given a textual primacy as the beginning of the narrative, but the ostensive focus on the boy minimizes the larger reality behind the telling that reveals the profound and enduring effects of the Long Walk on the Navajo people. Walter Dyk has placed these comments first as a fairly standard autobiographical beginning that, in this case, notes the boy's time and place of birth and his early struggle to survive. As Dyk notes in his introduction to the volume, "Likewise it seemed advisable to rearrange the episodes of early childhood into what would appear to be a more exact chronological order from that in which they were originally given" (xii). While the birth story does give us important early information about this newborn child, we are actually told much more about the historicity surrounding that birth and early life. Left Handed tells us that the child was born at Ft. Sumner and that he was a sickly baby born prematurely--an aberrant

and dangerous situation that immediately alerts his reader-listeners to the horrors of that period for the Navajo. As Left Handed explains,

Something had happened to my mother, she'd hurt herself, that was why I was born before my time. I was just a tiny baby, and my feet and fingers weren't strong, they were like water. My mother thought I wasn't going to live. (3)

Even in these few lines, we see the boy as less the primary topic and, instead, as a conversive sign pointing outward to other persons and events. Instead of telling us specifically about the baby, Left Handed goes on to tell us extensively about the boy's mother, both in her presence and in her later absence. This story is especially intriguing in light of Walter Dyk's psychoanalytic orientation. As a very capable storyteller, an ability that includes an astute awareness of one's listeners' reactions, Left Handed might very well have developed stories that might fit interestingly into psychoanalytic theories (such as an Oedipal relationship between the son of Old Man Hat and his mother or a castration complex). This does not mean that Left Handed was familiar with these theories, but rather that he was telling stories that build upon Dyk's responses, emphasizing those elements that would have particularly interested Dyk. Here we read about the mother's untimely delivery, her hurt condition, and her fears about her premature baby.

Immediately after noting her concerns ("My mother thought I wasn't going to live"), Left Handed continues the story centering around the boy's mother who "had no milk" (3), her older sister who struggles to find women who could nurse the baby, and the very evident silence surrounding the identity of the baby's real father. Even bracketing off the question of whether or not this a true story about Left Handed's birth, it certainly tells the story of very real conditions at Ft. Sumner. Babies were born sickly. Mothers were hurt, often due to the violent rapes by the U.S. army soldiers. In his short story "The Blood Stone," Morris tells about a red haired great grandfather who was conceived through such a rape and of a great, great grandmother who was raped even when she was far along in her pregnancy.

In the spring of the fourth year, [the boy's] mother's belly begins to grow, but there is no joy. At night, she thrashes and moans. He covers his ears not to hear, but he does anyway. "*Dooda! Dooda!*" ["No! No!"] she pleads with the hairy face looming over her, straining red, breathing liquor in her face. (in Walters, *Neon Powwow* 23)

When Left Handed tells us that "something had happened to my mother," volumes of the history of that time period echo throughout his words. The stories from Hwééldi have been passed down from generation to generation of Navajo families. The story Left Handed tells of his birth is the story of Hwééldi, the story of horrifically oppressive conditions, of a hurt woman, a sickly child, a sick mother incapable of nursing her own baby because of an absence of milk, and of a mother who inexplicably rejects her child and who is almost completely absent in his child

rearing. Left Handed only offers us a very brief glance of those times in the first paragraphs of Dyk's text, and yet in those few lines, much is communicated about the unimaginable atrocity that was Hwééldi.

And in Left Handed's stories, he also shows us the resilience of the Navajo to survive. An older clan relative of the sickly baby's mother finds women to nurse the baby to life and health, and the child survives into adulthood. A people decimated and impoverished by the effects of United States government policy against them survive their internment at Ft. Sumner and the destruction of their crops and livestock. As Left Handed relates, "This was the year after we returned from Fort Sumner. There were no sheep, and we had nothing to live on. My mother had gone to Black Mountain, but when she got there it was the same" (4). Here, Left Handed communicates the widespread impoverishment of the Navajo people during this time. Not only was Old Man Hat impoverished, but when his wife went over to Black Mountain she found the same hard times over there as well. In reading Left Handed's telling ("when she got there it was the same"), I imagined that he might have paused here to let this information sink in, to give his listener the time to reflect on the significance of this part in the story, but in Dyk's edited narrative, there is no break here, no space for the listener-reader to respond. The narrative immediately moves to discuss Old Man Hat's Paiute slave without even a paragraph break between the different topics. In Left Handed's comment on Old Man Hat's slave, he tells us that the year after the Navajo returned from Ft. Sumner, Old Man Hat gets rid of his slave in return for some sheep. In light of the identification of Old Man Hat with Abraham Lincoln, I wonder about this specific trade of a slave for sheep. Might it point to a shift in United States policy away from slavery and instead to the economic impoverishment of Indian peoples and the federal appropriations of Indian lands, as well as a direct comment on the assignment of so many sheep per Navajo family? I raise this as an additional question for future work on Left Handed's stories and Walter Dyk's texts, but future researchers will need to overcome the limitations presented by the published texts. Although the paragraphing and chapter divisions within *Son of Old Man Hat* fit the constraints of the literary text, in that process, we lose important punctuating elements of the oral telling. The pauses, silences, repetitions that would have been invested with substantive semiotic significance within the domain of Left Handed's oral telling are lost in the translation from telling to text.

As conversive readers, only through a slow reading of Left Handed's stories can we begin to listen to his telling rather than to Dyk's mediated text. The skills of painstaking close analysis developed by the formalist critics both in Europe and in the United States are skills that could be usefully brought to bear in opening up many of the early ethnographic works of Indian people from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, the close reading that is needed is not the modernist imposition of preconceived interpretive categories upon the text, but, instead, a conversive reading approach that combines a slow and close reading with the listening strategies of the oral tradition. Otherwise we will continue to perpetuate misinterpretations such as the categorization of Left Handed's stories as

autobiographical when, in fact, they are about Walter Dyk, the colonial anthropological encounter, and more generally about the colonization of the Navajo people, their lives, their cultures, their traditions, and their stories. It is possible through a conversive approach to open up the stories behind the ethnographically constructed texts thereby hearing stories that diverge substantially from the presumptions of an autobiographical life history narrative. Left Handed tells us important stories about his times and about the continuing colonization (racist, governmental, academic) of his people. In many ways, his stories related to various anthropologists are his manner of resistance. From beyond the grave, Left Handed's stories speak loud and clear to us if we are willing to make the effort to hear them. As Don and Terry Allen point out about Navajo linguistic resistance back during the days of Ft. Sumner, AAs a body, the Navajos refused to collaborate with the enemy. . . .Why should they even speak to the enemy? When communication became essential, they'd subject understanding to the vagaries of two interpreters--Navaho to Spanish to English. Insisting on a Spanish-speaking go-between was a way of expressing scorn for the language of >Wah-sheen-don' @ (5, 8).

Let me conclude this article with a brief interrogation into Left Handed's own name. Left Handed is not the only early Navajo informant who was called Left Handed or Lefty. One of the early informants who worked with Father Berard Haile, O.F.M. (a priest who was assigned to the Catholic Navajo Missions in 1900 and who remained at his post there until his stroke in 1954) was also called Left Handed or Lefty. It was Father Haile's informant Lefty who told him about a traditional Navajo Fire Dance ceremony that included a smoking owl. @ The smoking owl involved a dead owl propped up with a cigarette in its mouth and tubing that ran from the owl's mouth, then underground to where Lefty sat smoking a cigarette and sending the cigarette smoke through the tubing so it appeared that the owl was smoking its cigarette. Father Berard writes about this ceremony @ as follows: APerhaps Lefty and other singers could explain the purpose of this exhibit and its connection with Upward-reachingway ceremonial. But natives are not over-anxious to speak about this ceremonial, because it is concerned too much with ghosts of deceased natives and nobody likes to dream or think of even deceased relatives . . . @ (*The Navaho Fire Dance* 51). Of course, as Father Haile continues to explain, the other Navajos with whom he spoke did not confirm this smoking owl presentation as part of the larger ceremony: Athe exhibit is named after Lefty and is not connected directly with Upward-reachingway, at least not among the rank in file @ (51). Perhaps Father Haile's informant Lefty was named solely because of a left-handed proficiency. After all, this is how he explained his name to Father Haile, but in light of his smoking owl display, I wonder if his name might have some other import. While the names Left Handed and Lefty can certainly refer to a person's greater dexterity with his or her left hand than with the right, in Navajo country this name also carries significant connotative meaning. Several years ago, I was speaking with a Navajo friend of mine about my work on *Son of Old Man Hat*. In our conversation, I said nothing about my concerns regarding Left Handed's name. Rather I was speaking about the storytelling behind the presumed straightforward facticity of the autobiographical text. At one point, I looked at my friend and I could tell that she

was deep in thought. After awhile, she turned to me and said, "You know, back home [we were in Eugene, Oregon at a conference on Native American Literatures], when someone is called Lefty or Left Handed, that often means that he is tricky. You know, someone who tends to tell stories, a liar." Well, throughout Left Handed's stories, he repeatedly reminds us that the son of Old Man Hat is a liar who tells stories that are not true. While this is probably Left Handed's coded way of alerting us to the fact that we should not take the stories related to Dyk as historical fact, Left Handed's own name may be the Navajo way of alerting us to his own trickster manner of stretching the truth and telling stories.

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