



**GORETTI
DAS NEVES
MOREIRA**

**O NOVO GUERREIRO EM *THE LIGHT PEOPLE*
(GORDON HENRY JR)**

**THE NEW WARRIOR IN GORDON HENRY'S *THE
LIGHT PEOPLE***



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Dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Ingleses, realizada sob a orientação científica do Prof. Dr. David Callahan, Professor Associado do Departamento de Línguas e Literaturas da Universidade de Aveiro

Para **Old Eagle** (*kete ginew*), em memória de **Eagleheart** (Francis Cree) e Louis Cree, contadores de histórias.

Megwetch.

o júri

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palavras-chave

literatura ameríndia, romance ameríndio, história, cultura, eurocentrismo, estereótipos,

resumo

O presente trabalho propõe-se estabelecer o romance ameríndio como género por si só, diferente do romance pós-modernista, categoria que lhe é frequentemente atribuída. A dissertação é composta por uma contextualização teórica da problemática e uma introdução à obra em questão (Parte I), pela análise da obra à luz do pressuposto teórico (Parte II) e pela conclusão (Parte III). *The Light People* de Gordon Henry Jr destaca-se pela intersecção do passado e do presente do povo Anishinabe em particular e dos povos ameríndios em geral, naquilo que constitui uma visão de um futuro activo e interactivo em termos de construção de identidades e destruição de estereótipos num contexto de adaptação a, e equilíbrio com, as contextualizações social, cultural e histórica existentes.

keywords

Native American literature, Native American novel, history, culture.
Eurocentrism, stereotypes

abstract

This dissertation aims at establishing the Native American novel as a genre of its own, different from the postmodernist novel, as which it is frequently categorized. The dissertation includes the theoretical contextualization of the theme and an introduction to the novel (Part I), the analysis of the novel according to this contextualization (Part II) and the conclusion (Part III). Gordon Henry's *The Light People* stands out for the intersection of the past and present of the Anishinabe people in particular, and Native American peoples in general, in what becomes a vision of an active and interactive future in terms of the construction of identity and destruction of stereotypes within a context of adaptation to, and balance with, the existing social, cultural and historical contextualization.

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SWEET GRASS AND SUN

Burn sweet grass
rinse your face
with smoke

Eat the moon
slowly, then spit
the pieces out

Eat it again
spit it out

Burn sweet grass
wash your hands
with smoke

Speak the wind
angrily, then cover
sky with hand

Speak again
cover sky dark

Burn sweet grass
bath your bodyface
smoke, smoke

Lick the earth
sun, don't let
it melt

Smoldering sweet grass
cleanses my face
with smoke

Patrick Russel LeBeau
Stands Alone, Faces and Other Poems

Part I

Introduction

The contemporary Native American novel was born in 1968, the year of the publication of N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize-winning *House Made of Dawn*, which stimulated a new line of approach to literature in general, and the novel in particular. Catherine Rainwater sums up the situation when she says that "a new generation of Native American storytellers has chosen writing over the oral storytelling tradition" (xiii), and among this generation we can find Gordon Henry Jr, whose novel *The Light People* constitutes the subject of this dissertation. Much has been written and debated about this flow of literary production; much has been avoided. There seems to be a generalised understanding amongst Europeans and defenders of the Canons that the only place which Native American peoples may occupy is the realm of "Euro-Fantasy". In the words of Devon Mihesuah:

No other ethnic group in the United States has endured greater and more varied distortions of its cultural identity than American Indians. Distorted images of Indian culture are found in every possible medium – from scholarly publications and textbooks, movies, TV shows, literature, cartoons, commercials, comic books, and fanciful paintings, to the gamut of commercial logos, insignia, and imagery that pervade tourist locales throughout the Southwest and elsewhere (...) Not only Euro-Americans, but also Europeans, Africans, and Asians appear to have definite expectations of what Indians should look like. Indian men are to be tall and copper-colored, with braided hair, clothed in buckskin and moccasins, and adorned with headdresses, beadwork and/or turquoise. Women are expected to look like models for the "Learnin' Tree" greeting cards. (*American Indians*, 9)

Over the centuries Native American peoples have been deprived of that which constitutes one of the most important aspects of Native American representations – Place – in each of the significances this concept may be subjected to. Ranging from the early settlers to Hollywood businessmen, from explorers to scholars, the history of the appropriation of Native American representations and the idealization of the "Noble Savage" or the Disney Pocahontas stereotypes are illustrative of the loss of places which has marked the histories of all Native (American) peoples. Furthermore, Devon Mihesuah tells us that "the problem

with many books and articles about Indians is not with what is included but with what is omitted” (*Natives and Academics*, 4), as the construction of stereotypes does not allow space for contradiction or the realization that identity is multiple and dynamic.

Being deprived of place in Native American terms is to be deprived of one of the most important elements underlying the construction of Native American identity. In *Native Science*, Gregory Cajete comments on the fact that “the first Europeans saw America as wilderness, an obstacle to be overcome through settlement and the use of living and non-living resources. The land was a material object, a commodity, something from which they could gain economically” (179), whereas:

For the indigenous people the land and the place in which they lived were in a perfect state. The real test of living was to be able to establish a harmonious relationship with that perfect nature – to understand it, to see it as the source of one’s life and livelihood, and the source of one’s essential spiritual being. But in the minds of many Europeans, Natives were “the other” – either savage and heathen, or noble and good. The people indigenous to this land were never truly understood for who they were and are: a people who, in a variety of ways and with all their heart and being, tried to establish a direct relationship with nature, which they understood as the essence of the Great Mystery that guides and breathes life into all things. (179-180)

The struggle for the geographical/physical place that was unleashed by the arrival of the early settlers has spread, over the centuries, to other confrontations in almost all aspects of Native American life. Having difficulties in asserting their place on geographic, social, economic, educational, historical and cultural levels, Native Americans, writers and scholars in particular, also face the problematic of asserting themselves in the various fields of academic and literary production. Euro-American cultural imperialism is perpetuated at precisely those locations which ought to be promoting healthy unbiased debates. Devon Mihesuah acknowledges that:

Conversations with my Indian peers at other schools reveal that while it is the norm for many non-Indians to speculate on the academic abilities and cultural affiliations of their Indian colleagues, when Indians attempt to challenge the ways their tribes have been portrayed in works of history, anthropology, and literature, or to question the way Indians are perceived as scholars, our concerns are often

overlooked. (*Natives and Academics*, 16)

These are concerns not only of Native American scholarship, but also of its contemporary literature. For instance, in *The Empire Writes Back – Theory and practice in post-colonial literatures*, the authors (Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin) largely reference examples of postcolonial literatures (including “Fourth World” literatures), but fail to acknowledge the existence of a Native American literature, including only a brief mention of the literary production of the Inuit (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *Empire*, 142), along with more detailed acknowledgement of the literature produced by the Maori and Australian Aborigines. Oddly enough, according to this work the “Second World” literatures, particularly that of the United States of America, in trying to break free from the “First World”, suddenly become the role model for the “Third” and “Fourth World” literatures, all being supposedly postcolonial, and yet Native American literature is still omitted from the picture. As the definition goes in *The Empire Writes Back*:

The literatures of African countries, Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, Caribbean countries, India, Malaysia, Malta, New Zealand, Pakistan, Singapore, South Pacific Island countries, and Sri Lanka are all post-colonial literatures. The literature of the USA should also be placed in this category. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *Empire*, 2)

And, as is stated further on, “in many ways the American experience and its attempts to produce a new kind of literature can be seen to be the model for all later post-colonial writing” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *Empire*, 15). The question remains: Where do Native Americans fit in? What is their place in this view of postcolonial literature, in which the literature of the nation that colonized and colonizes them is their putative model?

In general the answer has to be that Native Americans’ representations have been undervalued as opposed to European (and, on a more general level, Western) representations, that they have suffered from Eurocentrism. As defined in *Post-Colonial Studies – The Key Concepts*, Eurocentrism is “the conscious or unconscious process by which Europe and European cultural assumptions are constructed as, or assumed to be, the natural or the universal” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, 90-91) and, in this sense:

European colonization of the rest of the globe, which accelerated in the eighteenth century and reached its apogee in the nineteenth, actively promoted or facilitated Euro-centrism through exploration, conquest and trade. Imperial displays of power, both in the metropolitan centres and at the colonial peripheries, and assertions of intellectual authority in colonialist institutions such as schools and universities, and through the civil service and legal codes, established European systems and values as inherently superior to indigenous ones. (Ashcroft, Griffins, Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, 91)

One could add here the novelistic tradition as well, with its Eurocentric connotations, since it has contributed to the devaluing of other cultural representations. As Elleke Boehmer indicates in her work *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*:

To colonize the world, British writers both in the field and at home projected their images, like the lantern's plate of coloured glass, on lands they claimed as new. The same images did for different places. Projection was a mode of cognition and of exerting influence across different colonial possessions. The context might change but the show itself was not adapted to suit local conditions. (59)

Moreover, Catherine Rainwater, referring to "the Eurocentric 'spell' that dictates a way of seeing and interpreting the world" (31) explains that "after all, the ultimate colonial act is to appropriate the intellectual, psychological, and emotional space of the Other – to alter his or her sense of reality" (31). As stated previously, this has been the case for Native Americans, who, in a sense, have not yet lost their status of colonized people; a minority within a Western oriented (and orienting) country. But what the colonizers (past and present) rarely considered was the fact that "glass churches could crack and magic lanterns fail. And, most disruptively, the 'savages' who stepped out of the background to show their interest in the white man's artefacts might begin to offer their own representations in return" (Boehmer, 59). And that is precisely what Native American authors have been doing. Over the past decades there have been many who, stepping out of the Native American background, have taken up the task of rearranging perspectives, destroying stereotypes, of creating a new literary space within world literature, as can be noted in Rainwater's statement that "over the past three decades, an ever-increasing number of American Indian authors have written themselves into the discourse of the dominant

society and encoded it with alternative notions of what it means to inhabit the earth as human beings” (ix). Writers such as N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich, Gerald Vizenor, Paula Gunn Allen, James Welch, Sherman Alexie and Gordon Henry Jr have distinguished themselves through the reinvention of both Native American and Euro-American discourse, intertwining Native American oral traditions with the Western tradition of novelist writing, thus rewriting the colonialist discourse of power. However, “the empire” tends either to disregard the existence of a Native American literature (as in *The Empire Writes Back*) or to acknowledge its existence, but within a Eurocentric context (most commonly as a poor relative of Postmodernist Literature). Wendy Rose, in *The State of Native America*, comments on the fact that “always and everywhere, the inclusion of non-European intellectual content in the academy is absolutely predicated upon its conformity to sets of ‘standards’ conceived and administered by those adhering to the basic precepts of Euro-derivation” (407). The latter are:

“citizens of the world”, holders of “the big picture”, having inherent rights to impose themselves and their “insights” everywhere and at all times, with military force if need be. The rest of us are consigned by the same definition to our “parochialism” and “provinciality”, perceived as “barriers to progress” in many instances, “helped” by our intellectual “betters” to overcome our “conceptual deficiencies” in others. The phenomenon is integral to Euroamerican culture, transcending all ideological boundaries demarcating conservatism and progressivism (...). (Rose, 407)

And thus, as Kathryn Shanley points out: “somewhere in the timeless zone between the playful *post-* of postmodernism and the dispossessed *post-* of postcolonialism, Indians are – like Simon Ortiz’s ‘handy’ prisoners – being shuffled between the jail and the uranium mines, as their lands are being stripped and stripped away” (28). The present discussion must then focus on at least a general comparative/contrastive analysis of Western and Native American representations and philosophies, in order to demonstrate that Native American literature might, in fact, possess postcolonial aspects (or should that be “colonial” or “neo-colonial”?), and not simply be subsumed under western postmodernism. Native American literature, inherently interrogating, even defying, practices of Eurocentrism, has no tidy place in the Western “-isms”. It exists within Native, not

Western, philosophy. It is postcolonial because it has suffered from, as defined in *Post-Colonial Studies*, “the effects of colonization on cultures and societies” (Ashcroft, Griffins, Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, 186), with the imposition of Western systems and values on Native American peoples through institutions like the Church and Boarding schools, among other strategies. It is colonial since, unlike many other communities throughout the world, Native Americans did not achieve a state of geo-political independence either from the colonizing powers (France and Great Britain) or from the present government of the United States of America. As such, Native American communities, including writers and other artists, still find themselves under the control of a colonizing power. And it is neo-colonial because, although presently established reservations account for a certain degree of independence not shared by other communities (as in some legislative matters for example), it is a fact that while on stage Native American literature articulates a postcolonial awareness of issues, the whispers of neo-colonialism can be perceived backstage, in the voice of economic dependence on the colonial power. The truth is that whether colonial, postcolonial or neo-colonial, all paths are darkened by the shadows cast by the Eurocentrically-rooted “Establishment”.

Traced back to Greek civilization and also closely related to the Jewish and Christian religions, Western systems and values rely, in generalizing terms, upon three basic assumptions: deductive reasoning, the rule of law and monotheism. Western philosophy, with its foundations in the philosophers of Athens (such as Solon and Socrates), has gone through a wide range of “-isms”, and currently participates in a debate on postmodernism(s). In Fredric Jameson’s words,

The last few years have been marked by an inverted millenarianism in which premonitions of the future, catastrophic or redemptive, have been replaced by senses of the end of this or that (the end of ideology, art, or social class; the “crisis” of Leninism, social democracy, or the welfare state, etc., etc.); taken together, all of these perhaps constitute what is increasingly called postmodernism. (1)

If limited to considering those which seem to be the main generalizing features of postmodernism – namely the notion of emphasizing how seeing takes place rather than what is being seen, the rejection of fixed narrative points of view, a blurring of distinctions

between genres, the emphasis on fragmentation, discontinuity and collage, reflexivity about the production of the work of art or the rejection of the distinction between high class and popular culture (Mary Klages) – then one might indeed be tempted to simply include Native American literature within the postmodernist movement, categorizing, for instance, circular narratives (characteristic of many Native American novels) as an application of the strategy of non-linearity in narrative. However, the analysis of Gordon Henry's *The Light People* will show that the novel in question (as a representative example of the Native American novel) seems to, on a superficial analysis, “appropriate” some postmodernist literary techniques. Nonetheless, although the author is contemporary – prone to be included in the timeline of the postmodern period – many of the techniques used by him (and others) may be traced back to Native American oral traditions and representations, which existed long before postmodernism (or other “-isms”, for that matter) came along, in the same way that there existed a Native American history before Columbus. As David Callahan explains:

Henry's use of multiple trickster figures (including himself) along with frequent recourse to the narrative surprises generated by his interlocking narratives, places what might have looked like postmodern devices firmly in the domain of Native American resources. Moreover, Henry radically relocates one of the validating sources of those stories, in the realm of visions and dreams, and makes the links that need to be followed between them a matter of moral good practice rather than narrative (de)construction. (187)

The influence of postmodernism on some Native American authors is not denied, as is, for instance, explained by Hartwig Isernhagen when referring to the “self-declaredly postmodernist turn that we find in Vizenor and others” (82-183), but Native American literature cannot be analysed only in terms of postmodernism. One cannot disregard the fact that, as Frederick Jameson explains, “in post-modern culture, ‘culture’ has become a product in its own right; the market has become a substitute for itself” (x), so much so that Jameson views postmodernism as the “consumption of sheer commodification as a process” (x), with the result that “what has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally” (Jameson, 4). The idea that the modern age is characterised by “the extinction of the sacred and the ‘spiritual’” (Jameson,

68) overlaps with Cajete's view that:

The blindness of modern perception with regard to nature prevails throughout post-modern technocratic society. Western science and society continue to deny the spirit and intelligence of nature. Enclosed in a technologically mediated world, people rarely encounter nature in any significant or creative way. Nature may be the topic of the latest *National Geographic* special or the focus of the newest Walt Disney theme park, but direct experiences with non-human nature, if they happen at all, are limited to pets, zoos, parks, and farms. While moderns may have technological knowledge of nature, few have knowledge of the non-human world gained directly from personal experience. (22-23)

What is to be understood of these and other readings is that Native American perceptions differ from the Western system of values; on the one hand in that they do not perceive land, nature, art or ceremonial imagery as mere commodities and on the other in that the past is not something to be broken with, but rather to be recaptured – not because it is beautifully wrapped or suits some nostalgic or nationalistic purpose, but because it is the foundation of Native American philosophy. These two aspects are, among others, fundamental to the understanding of the writings of Native American novelists, and so, “while their works necessarily observe many of the conventions of the novel as developed in Anglo-European cultures, Native American written narrative is also profoundly different, even from the postmodern novel with which it has most profitably been compared” (Rainwater, xii-xiii).

In fact, postmodernism has brought about great changes to the way in which a novel was traditionally apt to be analysed. Dating back to Aristotle's *Poetics*, written in 350 BC, it has, since then, generally been understood and accepted that there were certain “universal” aspects to be taken into consideration when studying Tragedy and, later, although adapted, any work of fiction. Thus, for example, Aristotle argued that “every Tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality – namely, Plot, Character, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, Song”. These “parts”, as Aristotle called them, underwent some changes and became plot, character, setting, style, mood and narrative point of view, among others. Until the advent of modernism plot was usually understood as a linear narrative with beginning, middle and end, whereas modernism formally applied disrupting techniques and strategies, such as discontinuous narrative, which can be

observed best in English in writers such as Virginia Woolf and James Joyce and their streams of consciousness. Whereas stories in nineteenth century literature were mainly told from a supposedly objective and omnipresent narrative point of view, modernism (and later on postmodernism as well) emphasised subjectivity and fragmentation in narrative and character construction (although in different ways). Both modernism and postmodernism represent a break from the past, but the latter also represents a certain degree of break from modernism in that popular culture becomes a valid form of art. As pointed out before, art becomes aware of itself as a commodity and any expression of art becomes validated within the movement itself, within the sense that, especially with the advent of the Internet, anybody can produce a work that anyone else may view as a work of art. Popular culture goes beyond the boundaries of museums, galleries and editors, but, more than that, it has the ability to disregard the boundaries of academic restrictions. As Jameson argues:

It has often been said that every age is dominated by a privileged form, or genre, which seems by its structure the fittest to express its secret truth; or perhaps, if you prefer a more contemporary way of thinking about it, which seems to offer the richest symptom of what Sartre would have called the “objective neurosis” of that particular time and place. Today, however, I think we would no longer look for such characteristic or symptomatic objects in the world and the language of forms or genres. (68)

In this sense, it would be more accurate to say that postmodernist literary criticism opened the way for a better understanding of Native American writings than stating that the Native American novel is postmodernist, since while there seems to exist a similarity in techniques and approaches, most Native American techniques and approaches are not rooted in postmodernism but in Native American oral traditions. This may be further exemplified by briefly looking at aspects such as plot, setting and narrative viewpoint. The postmodernist plot is fragmented and non-linear. So is the plot in the Native American novel. It is generally so in (post)modernism, because it is a technique that allows for subjectivity, self-questioning and rupture with a linear tradition, but it is so in the Native American novel because that is the structure of traditional storytelling. Fragmentation springs from the need of, when telling one story, telling other stories to contextualize,

explain or develop the first, as no story exists by itself. Traditional storytelling relies on circularity rather than on linearity, because, as Irene Moser tells us:

many Native peoples traditionally have used the circle to represent the underlying unity of life and death and of the interrelations of the extraordinary forces that create life. Circular forms appear frequently as design motifs in architecture, jewelry, basketry, pottery, and other cultural items.

In contemporary Native American literature, one can see a unifying circularity emerging in the narrative structures and imageries of stories. (286)

Circularity within the stories relates essentially to the perception Native Americans have of the universe. In *The Sacred Hoop* Paula Gunn Allen comments on

the tendency of the American Indian to view space as spherical and time as cyclical, whereas the non-Indian tends to view space as linear and time as sequential. The circular concept requires all 'points' that make up the sphere of being to have a significant identity and function, while the linear model assumes that some 'points' are more significant than others. (59)

As for setting, in Western terms, it is the place (physical or psychological) where the plot develops. It exists as a background for the plot and the characters. Characters and setting share a connection, but remain in some sense separate aspects within the work. The place or landscape may be personified, but only to emphasise certain aspects of the protagonists' dramas, capture the beauty of nature or improve the quality of the text. Thus, this technique is known as personification, attributing human qualities to a non-human being or inanimate object. In Native American terms, the place, landscape or nature tend to assume a different role in almost all works. The relationship between the character and the setting is one of "ensoulment" (Cajete, 186). Thus, for example, when a Native American author uses the pronouns he or she to refer to a tree, an animal or a rock, it is not a simple matter of using a figure of speech; it is the recognition that "people make a place as much as a place makes them. Native people interacted with the places in which they lived for such a long time that their landscapes became reflections of their very souls" (Cajete, 187). In this sense, in the Native American novel the setting is the character and the character is the setting, in which Native Americans "experienced nature as a part of themselves and themselves as a part of

nature” (Cajete, 186), an idea which is further argued by Carol Miller: “Place and person are inextricably bound. The elements constituting place are as much character as setting, participants in complex and unifying systems of kinship that help to define how civilization itself is constructed and maintained” (34). Both in Western and Native American novels stories are told by narrators. In Western novels the preferred are the first-person or third-person (omnipresent) narrators, although there are also many stories told by several narrators, in order to provide different points of view. In the Native American novel/story, several narrators are privileged, to provide not only different perspectives, but also complements, explanations or comments on the starting story. Once again, the same technique may be observed in Euro-American writing, but the roots diverge. In *The Native American Oral Tradition - Voices of the Spirit and Soul*, Lois J. Einhorn analyses differences in the practice of speaking between Native American and Western discourse. Whereas “the rhetoric of Western thought deals with finite movements with beginnings and endings, causes and effects” (109) and “changes exist, but they are completed changes” (109),

Listeners of Native American discourse do not assume completion or expect an ending. Rather than answering questions, Native speakers believe in letting people contemplate answers. Native Americans purposefully avoid being directive to allow receivers to glean the meanings and implications of messages. This is why many of their stories provide no definite ending. In Native American rhetoric, roles of speakers and audience coalesce at times since both play active roles. (109-110).

Thus, even a brief, superficial glance at notions such as plot, setting, character and the way a story is delivered is indicative of the difference between the Western (even the postmodernist) and the Native American novel, distinguishing one from the other in terms of aim, strategy and the reader’s (especially the Western) perception.

The Native American novel must then be analysed in terms different from the postmodern novel. It cannot be read outside the context of Native American cultures or philosophy. It cannot be grasped without some understanding of ceremonial imagery and, above all, Native symbolism. As such, the narrative structure of Gordon Henry’s *The Light People* defies the Western/non-Indian reader in a manner already observed in the works of

another groundbreaking Native American writer, Gerald Vizenor, whose stories, according to Kimberly Blaeser,

seldom progress in smooth plot lines. His characters often speak in puzzling and convoluted ways. Very little is resolved in the works of Vizenor. He refuses to grant his reader certain satisfactions in the text because they would close off other possibilities he deems more essential: the possibilities of reader participation and discovery, the possibility that the story has life beyond the page, the possibility of a new kind of 'survivance'. (13)

As Blaeser argues, "at the most fundamental level, Vizenor's writing is invitation" (14) asking his readers "to become a party to discovery" (14), which makes it clear that Gordon Henry was probably much influenced by Gerald Vizenor's understanding of Native American literature and the revival of its oral traditions through writing.

At this point it must be made clear that not all Native American authors share the same view of what the Native American novel stands or should stand for or for whose eyes it is intended. Although it is obvious that, once published, a novel is in the grasp of any reader, the access to its contents is an entirely different matter. Some authors, such as Paula Gunn Allen, claim that not everything should be made known and that certain ceremonial rituals, for instance, should be kept private, within the boundaries of each Native people. However, in certain works, the reader's lack of knowledge will also represent the reader's difficulty in grasping the whole of the story being told. Allen acknowledges this when she addresses the problematic of teaching Native American poems and novels in *Natives and Academics*:

My tendency is to feel ambivalent about the whole thing. I believe that to illuminate the works I must say something about the spiritual matters, the beliefs, practices, and ceremonialism the text is alluding to. On the other hand, I shy away from answering many particular questions because I find them offensive. It's not a reaction I plan ahead of time (Allen, 60).

Obviously, Allen's reaction is one related to the problem of cultural appropriation of Native cultures, which have been turned into circus attractions and commodities by the West. In this sense, the problem for these authors lies within writing about Native

American cultures without disclosing too much. Other authors, trying to escape Western influence on Native American peoples, use their works as an attempt to return to the “untouched” past, before the White Man’s arrival, in what Louis Owens calls “acts of recovery” (128). However, Leslie Marmon Silko herself, as well as Gerald Vizenor, amongst others, portrays a more balanced and realistic view of the Native American novel, since, beyond embracing elements of the traditional Native American past, those elements are recontextualized, in what might well be tradition revisited and redefined. For these authors, going back to the past is not an option. Native American identity must derive from equilibrium: equilibrium with nature, with the past, but, most importantly, with the present. The “new” Native American people cannot ignore the new places; rather they must find their harmony within them, as they have found their harmony in the past. The idea that Native American identity is not, and cannot be, static and that it can not survive by solely hanging on to a history before the White Man’s arrival is what Gordon Henry proposes in *The Light People*. Change, interchange and adaptation (chaos and order) are key words for reading the novel as much as they are key words in Native American philosophy, as Gregory Cajete explains in *Native Science*:

Chaos theory offers insight into human creativity. Chaos is embodied in the human mind and body, allowing humans the ability to creatively respond to constant changes in the environment. Our instinctual ability to “flow” with the stream of chaos and creativity leads us metaphorically to the “vortices” of individual and collective truth. (...) This moment when a truth comes to be intuitively known is like the still point in the eye of a hurricane; it is that point when a connection is made to a natural principle manifesting itself in the unfolding of a natural process. Like the birth of a child or a bolt of lightning connecting sky and Earth for a moment in time, these are the infinite moments of both chaos and order. This is a precept of Native science, for truth is not a fixed point, but rather an ever-evolving point of balance, perpetually created and perpetually new. (19)

Although chaos theory has also been developed as a theory in Western science, mainly in the areas of physics and cosmology, it is hardly an active principle in daily life or organisational philosophies. For instance, as far as the educational system is concerned, and playing with Cajete’s words, truth is not “an ever-evolving point of balance”, but

rather “a fixed point”. Native Americans have experienced this first hand. One of their struggles has been the rewriting of American history as it is taught in American (and European) schools, that is, as beginning with Columbus’s arrival on the American continent. According to textbooks, there seems to have been no history worth mentioning before Columbus. The following episode, narrated by Laurie Anne Whitt in her essay “Cultural Imperialism and the Marketing of Native America”, clearly exemplifies the feelings of Native American communities on the subject:

In 1992, mainstream Euro-America demonstrated the short, selective, and sanitized character of both the national memory and the official history that sustains it by celebrating an anniversary: the Columbus Quincentenary, the “discovery” of the “New World”. The vast majority of activities generated by this event were festive and culturally self-congratulatory. Yet there were powerful sub-currents of protest, indigenous and otherwise, in wide evidence, contesting the sharply edited, profoundly revisionist nature of the commemoration. They drove home the moral and methodological implications of the fact that history is not only written from a particular standpoint, but that that standpoint has been of the colonizers, not the colonized. The response of Native America was also a determined assertion of presence and continuity, pointedly captured by the defiant counter spilling over with T-shirts, posters, and bumper stickers: “Still Here! Celebrating 49,500 years... before Columbus.” (139)

As such, it becomes obvious that one of the most important discussions in Native American literature does not necessarily refer to the prefixes “post-” or “neo-”, but to the prefix “re-“, as in *retelling*, *rewriting*, *rediscovering* and, who knows, as in “*recolonialist*”, in the sense that colonialist and Eurocentric discourses are being revisited and rearranged. This viewpoint is explained by Gordon Henry in an interview given to Carmen Flys:

History... well I think I was trying to come out against common notions of history in books. And part of it reflects current talk nowadays about revisionist history. My point of view, or my character’s point of view, in the book is that all history is revisionist. I mean even if you’re writing in the exact moment that events occur, then you’re reviewing them, reliving them in some way. And there are always particular perspectives involved in doing that, and that is what I was trying to get across in the novel. (Flys, 174)

Native American literature is about making people perceive things from a different point of view. As in the tradition of oral storytelling the reader is led to the notions of circularity and unity, but only after having fragmented his own notions and preconceptions. The reader is thrown into chaos to find order. Stories lead to stories within stories, but the connections between them are often obscure or apparently non-existent. It is up to the reader to create his/her own order and find the way only hinted upon throughout the reading. Reading the Native American novel is a question of unveiling the invisible trails left by the author. For instance, in Gordon Henry's circular narrative the only linear certainty is that, in terms of physical arrangement, the "Invisible Trails" will eventually lead to "We the People", respectively the first and last stories in *The Light People*, but how, or even if, the reader walks those trails is, intentionally, out of the author's control. Following the tradition of oral storytelling it is up to the reader/listener to ask the right questions, unveil and complete the stories or learn from them. That is to say that the stories exist within the reader's active participation. It is the reader's responsibility to deal with what he/she reads. In this sense, more than a book, Gordon Henry's *The Light People* is a seed planted in the mind of the experiencer, an invitation to participate in a mind game, particularly challenging for someone not familiar with Anishinabe culture.

In what the Western reader might relate to the Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*, Gordon Henry applies several techniques to estrange the non-Native (and often the Native) reader. Lack of knowledge concerning the Native American oral tradition, ceremonial imagery and symbolisms in general and Anishinabe culture in particular undoubtedly constitute a hindrance to an immediate grasping of the novel. The repetition of the number four in *The Light People*, for example, may be noticed, but its symbolism has to be looked up by the (non-Native) reader. Moreover, Gordon Henry does not present ceremonial imagery the way a Western reader would expect. There are no anthropological descriptions of ceremonies or rituals, but rather fragmentary glimpses within characters' dreams. Things are not explained, they are referred to. In the same way, Gordon Henry deals with the question of cultural appropriation not through explanation or description, but through illustration within a judicial dispute over a leg. These two examples lead to another factor of estrangement: the (postmodern) blending of genres. Besides being confronted with different realms (reality versus dreams) throughout the novel, by the third story of the novel the reader is ripped out of what seemed to be a somewhat linear narrative and

confronted with a monologue by a new character. By the sixth story the reader is reading a book within the novel and by the seventh being introduced to the metrics of Haiku (a Japanese poetic form). And so, besides having to deal with apparently different stories, narrators and points of view, the reader also has to deal with different types of text. As Catherine Rainwater explains “both traditional oral storytelling and postmodern literature demand active audience participation or ‘performance’” (xii). Thus, reading becomes acting upon what is read and the reader becomes agent and within this metamorphosis the Native American novel becomes socially interventionist.

The decade of the sixties has been the one most identified with the concept of social intervention with the rise of the Counterculture, the heightening of the Civil Rights Movement, the second wave of the Feminist movement, Anti-War Movements and Postcolonial theorists, as well as other movements driven by social, political or environmental concerns, among others. This decade also saw the growing up of what Deborah Davis Jackson calls the “urban-raised generation” of Native Americans in her essay “‘This Hole in Our Heart’ – The Urban-Raised Generation and the Legacy of Silence”, as that made up of “those whose parents grew up on reservations, but who themselves have grown up in the city” (189). Her study concentrates on the first generation of urban-raised Native Americans in Riverton, “the major city in a county I will call Birmingham” (190), and which she describes as:

An area that had traditionally been home to the Great Lakes area’s indigenous Chippewa (Ojibwa) people, but from which most Native people had been “removed” (in accordance with the U.S. government’s Indian policy) by the end of the 19th century. (Jackson, 190)

The urban-raised generation in this area, as well as in others throughout the country, sprang from the fact that:

It was only at mid-century, starting during the Second World War, that Indian people began returning to the area in large numbers from reservations and off-reservation rural communities around the Great Lakes (as well as from more distant regions). This was due both to the “push” of poverty and lack of job opportunities on reservations, combined with the threat of termination of Indian tribes by the federal government, and the “pull” of relatively good

wages and job security to be found, even for unskilled, uneducated people, in Riverton's auto factories, which were then booming. (Jackson, 190)

According to Jackson, it seems that members of this generation generally show pride in their Native American heritage, expressing "their Indian identity openly" (191), tending to be "verbal and vocal" (191) about it and talking "about being Indian in public settings, among themselves, and with their children" (191).

However, in the discourse of life-historical interviews with me, descriptions of their own childhood experiences have a very different tone. In that context, many in the second-generation Anishinaabe talk about an elusive American heritage that hovered around the margins of their childhood, not quite present, yet never completely absent. Furthermore, it is in descriptions of the past that their complex and difficult feelings come to the fore, as they express the pain, confusion, and shame that seem to have constituted an all-too-salient aspect of their "American Indian heritage" during their childhood years. (Jackson, 191)

As can be understood from the previous excerpt, this generation of Native Americans grew up in quite a confusing environment, as far as the construction of Native American identity is concerned. The almost complete withdrawal from life on the reservations, and thus from a far more intimate experience of the Native American community, while growing up in close contact with different, Eurocentric-based sets of values, certainly disrupted the sense of community, extremely important in the Native American way of life, and the harmonious construction of Native American individual and collective identity.

It is most likely not a coincidence that a strong connection between the urban-raised generation and the flow of literary production in the last few decades can be established. Gordon Henry may be said to belong to this generation, as he has only lived on the reservation for brief periods of time, mostly living in urban areas in a number of different places in the United States. In the Native American novel in general the feelings of confusion, loss and disruption are present in many ways. Usually there are one or more characters who experience a sense of loss or incompleteness at the beginning and whom the reader accompanies throughout their search for wholeness, identity and, above all, harmony, in what is usually called the healing process in Native American terms (and which is closely linked to the symbolism of the Medicine Wheel, which, among others,

will be explored later on). As will also be discussed further on, the healing process is one of the main themes of Gordon Henry's *The Light People* and constitutes the link between the several characters, both among themselves and with the Anishinabe Creation Story. In *The Light People* the healing process basically unfolds on three distinct levels: the author, the characters and the reader. For the author the writing process resembles a healing process, as there is a path to be walked towards a certain destination and with a certain purpose – the same purpose as that of oral storytelling: to transmit knowledge and to educate through the push towards self-discovery and the discovery of the Other. In *The Light People* the author's healing process is completed in that the novel itself represents his own path towards the discovery of his standpoint as a Native American, as Anishinabe and as a novelist, not necessarily in that order. As Gordon Henry states in an interview, "to be honest there's a lot I have to learn as a writer yet. So I was trying to learn something about writing as I was writing this, in my own process. (...) It was part of my own process of trying to understand how to write" (Flys, 172). Although coming from and moving towards different directions, all characters in *The Light People* undergo individual healing processes implied in each of the stories of the novel: Arthur Boozhoo encounters his harmony by leaving the white man's school and embracing magic as an apprentice to Jack Seed, Rose Meskwaa Geeshik adopts painting as a means of healing, the Four Bears family recovers Moses Four Bears' leg and Oskinaway finds himself, only to mention a few examples. These are mostly individual healing processes inserted in seemingly disconnected stories, but collectively they also symbolize the ongoing healing process of a people: of the Anishinabe in particular, of Native Americans in general and, ultimately, of all humankind. All come together within the story of Oskinaway and the bird, the Anishinabe Story of Creation and the prophetic myth of "The Seven Fires of the Anishinabe". This process ultimately includes the reader, who, while accompanying others through their stories and healing processes, consciously or not undergoes a healing process of his/her own, that being understood as the achievement of harmony. The committed reader (that is, the one who takes up the author's challenge) cannot avoid feeling touched by the novel and the awareness that the world is more unifying than it seems, as is the novel itself.

As explained previously, in *The Light People* the reading process is an active one and, in a sense, as active as the writing process; the technique of the writer being one of

concealing and the reader's one of unveiling. Dismissing the passive reader as one who will most likely not finish the novel or, if otherwise, wait until the novel is explained by someone, it is the active reader that must then be focused on, as it is she/he that will complete the circle of the novel. The active reader allows for the preservation of the tradition of oral storytelling. Moreover, "the current generation of Native American writers, like their oral storytelling predecessors, insist that humanity makes the world through the stories we tell" (Rainwater, xiii). As is the case in oral storytelling, the success of the story being told depends on the (re)action of the audience. In this sense the Native American novel targets the same audience as literature in general, that is, the audience that is willing to listen. Nonetheless, on a more specific level, it also targets the audience that is, consciously or unconsciously, willing to act and change.

Thus, having characterised it as being socially interventionist and considering its roots in the Native American oral tradition, it can then be argued that the Native American novel in general and *The Light People* in particular speak to the active readers within at least two different groups: the Native American and the non-Native readers. Within the first group a generalizing distinction between a conscious and a "pre-conscious" reader may be established. A general characterization of the conscious Native American reader would imply one who already possesses certain pre-requisites for understanding the Native American text, as far as ceremonial imagery, symbolism and literary criticism, among others, are concerned and one who has already reflected upon his/her own Indianness as well as upon the obstacles to the construction of a collective Indianness. This reader will most probably revisit many of his/her feelings, concerns, and standpoints in the novel and discover others throughout the reading, while consciously reflecting and acting upon what is read, relating it to personal or communal experience as far as the Native American struggle for "Place" is concerned. On the other hand, the "pre-conscious" Native American reader may be perceived as the one who starts the novel without having reflected (or who is initiating the process of reflection) on his/her Indian heritage or Indianness, probably urban-raised and having attended western-oriented public school, distanced from reservation or community life. Getting in touch with this novel (or others of this genre) may trigger the healing process mentioned earlier on and lead to the (re)discovery of the sense of Indianness and a clue to how it may be developed under circumstances very different from those in the past. One could say that the starting point for this reader and for

the non-Native reader might be similar, but that would only be true if the Native reader was completely out of touch with Native American issues. Furthermore, as pointed out earlier, for a non-Native reader to be in touch with Native American issues is, in many cases, not the same as being informed or educated in that area. The initial tendency for the non-Native is to read from a Western perspective, which, progressively, becomes an impossible task. Nonetheless, one of the main intentions behind the Native American novel is most certainly one of re-education, be it of the Native or non-Native readers. Hence the latter must react to and, therefore, act upon, the newly gained knowledge that there are representations of the world other than Western ones.

In this sense, Gordon Henry undoubtedly follows the call for agency as “the ability of post-colonial subjects to initiate action in engaging or resisting imperial power” (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, 8). As these authors proceed to explain in their work, “agency is particularly important in post-colonial theory (*Key Concepts*, 8) and:

The term has become an issue in recent times as a consequence of post-structuralist theories of **subjectivity**. Since human subjectivity is constructed by ideology (Althusser), language (Lacan) or discourse (Focault), the corollary is that any action performed by that subject must also be to some extent a consequence of those things. For the colonial discourse theory of Bhabba and Spivak, which concurs with much of the post-structuralist position on subjectivity, the question of agency has been a troublesome one. However, in many theories in which the importance of political action is paramount take agency for granted. They suggest that although it may be difficult for subjects to escape the effects of those forces that ‘construct’ them, it is not impossible. The very fact that such forces may be recognized suggests that they may also be countermanded. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, Tiffin, *Key Concepts*, 8-9)

That which has been called so far the healing process and the process of re-education of the reader is, then, what constitutes Gordon Henry’s agency, based on the recognition of the existence of a colonialist force, disguised as democracy, which has to be countermanded. Thus Gordon Henry takes up the role of a teacher, much in the sense of the storyteller who teaches his audience through his stories. Although within the context of African Postcolonial literature, the Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe had already referred to this (in

his opinion obligatory) role in 1965, in his famous essay “The Novelist as Teacher”:

The writer cannot be expected to be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact he should march right in front... I for one would not wish to be excused. I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past – with all its imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them. Perhaps what I write is applied art as distinct from pure art. But who cares? Art is important and so is education of the kind I have in mind. (45)

Obviously, the process of (re)education requires a teacher and a “student”. The circle will not be completed if the lesson of one is not taken in by the other. Taking into account that *The Light People* is not a novel read exclusively by Native Americans, Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin’s definition of agency, referred to earlier on, seems insufficient, since it lacks reference to the person who has not been subject to colonialism but who might engage in (re)action against it: the non-Native reader. In this way, socio-political responsibility in a postcolonial context is not exclusive of the Native American writer or his/her Native American audience alone. Gordon Henry, as many other Native American novelists, also delegates part of the responsibility of agency onto the non-Native reader. Agency may then be taken up by both the native and the non-Native within the healing process and the obtainment of harmony, that is, the recognition that the world is whole, leading them into subsequent action on and within the world in the direction of positive change. In Gordon Henry’s own words:

For me storytelling is important because it has the capacity to change, or turn, the consciousness of both the storyteller and the listener. That may not be the way “traditional” Native storytellers perceive it, but I’ve experienced those turns. And stories have ways of reaching out to people. Parts of a story-event, or image can attach to other parts of the story and to individual and community lives. So the storyteller sees this response in people and realizes that the story has a living ability to change the consciousness of people. (Flys, 167-168)

The Light People

Circularity

Gordon Henry's *The Light People* is a seed planted in the mind of the "experiencer", an invitation to participate in a puzzle. To experience *The Light People* is to start a journey, the choice of direction being left to the traveller. Several trails are hinted upon, but no matter which one is chosen it will be a circular one, inclusive of and included by others. It is circularity that underlines the stories within the story of Oskinaway as well as the (hi)story of the Anishinabe people. The Story of the Great Flood, the Medicine Wheel, the Seven Fires Prophecies (see Appendix 1) and the Story of Creation (Appendix 2), particular aspects of Anishinabe culture, intertwine in the unity of stories and Oskinaway seems to be the link between them, the past, the present and the future, as he and his twin brother appear to belong to the generation of the fulfillers of the Seventh Prophecy, thus constituting the closing of one circle and the beginning of another. The light people, of whom Oskinaway, Jake Seed and Arthur Boozhoo are representatives, are the "healers among us, men and women of gifts and visions. Some are relatives of light people. Sometimes their gifts can bring people back. Quite a few people have told us not to believe in those gifts, but with all the sickness around us and no cures by the white doctors, some people have returned to these descendants of the original teachers and bringers of light." (Henry, 15-16) They are the bringers of light, not of knowledge. Their task is to illuminate people's trails, not disclose them openly. Arthur Boozhoo and Jake Seed enlighten Oskinaway's trail, whereas Oskinaway enlightens the reader's.

In the first story of the novel each trail is constructed within the intersection with other trails eventually leading to "We the People", the last story in *The Light People*. "We the People" reveals a certain sense of unity and community, a recognition of existence and, therefore, of identity. In this sense, all those invisible trails to be discovered throughout the novel seem to be trails of healing, more specifically the healing of individuals, of a family, of a community, of a people.

Gordon Henry's novel will indeed work invisibly in the reader's mind and make him/her slowly aware that there are alternative representations to what the non-native reader thinks is her/his reality. According to Catherine Rainwater "contemporary Native American writers do, however, exploit the power relations inherent in western narrative as

part of their ‘invention’ of the Indian author” (9). Gordon Henry, following the trails of many Native American authors already mentioned, achieves a kind of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* through the use of literary techniques woven into the classical western understanding of the novel as a literary genre. Adapting the tradition of oral storytelling to the written form allows Gordon Henry to deconstruct the western concept of a linear story, usually connected to the structure of the novel. Just as N. Scott Momaday (*House Made of Dawn*) and Leslie Marmon Silko (*Ceremony*), he is thus able to “distance the non-Indian reader (unacquainted with these oral storytelling practices)” (Rainwater 9). As Catherine Rainwater further states:

Such a nuanced strategy is indeed a marker of power: the storyteller confronts the reader with “non-reciprocal” and “direct speech” that does not explain itself in deference to what the Other necessarily understands. The writer simply requires the reader as cultural outsider to find out or figure out what many Indian readers would already know. (9)

The deconstruction of western linear representation of the world is achieved through the adaptation of the circular structure of traditional storytelling. In her reference to Momaday’s *House Made of Dawn* Catherine Rainwater refers to the fact that “the circular relationship of the icons in the novel suggests that no matter where in Abel’s story the reader might initially enter (one might begin anywhere), he or she would ultimately end up completing the narrative circle to gain a complete impression” (80). The same notion of circularity applies to *The Light People* as to many other Native American works. In fact, Irene Moser, when discussing social spaces in her essay “Native American Imaginative Spaces”, states that:

many Native peoples traditionally have used the circle to represent the underlying unity of life and death and of the interrelations of the extraordinary forces that create life. Circular forms appear frequently as design motifs in architecture, jewelry, basketry, pottery, and other cultural items.

In contemporary Native American literature, one can see a unifying circularity emerging in the narrative structures and imageries of stories. (286)

It is obvious that Gordon Henry draws on the symbolism of the circle throughout his book

but, more than that, he explores circularity as its structural basis, thus defying non-Indian perceptions of the world and the traditional Western understanding of the novel. As Paula Gunn Allen discusses in *The Sacred Hoop*:

Another difference between these two ways of perceiving reality lies in the tendency of the American Indian to view space as spherical and time as cyclical, whereas the non-Indian tends to view space as linear and time as sequential. The circular concept requires all 'points' that make up the sphere of being to have a significant identity and function, while the linear model assumes that some 'points' are more significant than others. (59)

In this sense, questioning Eurocentrism is achieved by making the Euro-American reader question him/herself, as far as beliefs, values and representations are concerned.

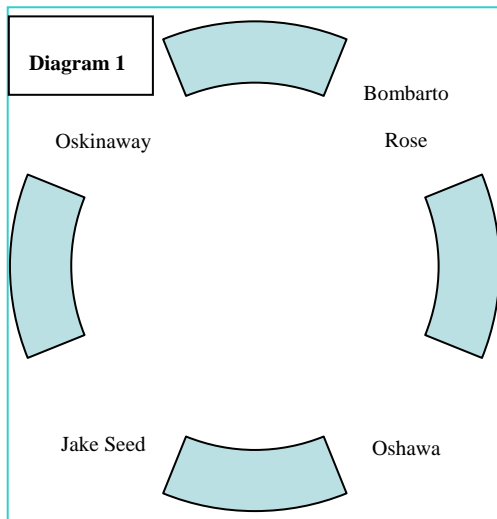
The narrative structure of *The Light People* puzzles and defies the Western/non-Indian reader in a manner already observed in the works of Gerald Vizenor, an author to whom Gordon Henry makes reference in the acknowledgements of his book (*ix-x*) and in an interview:

I admire Leslie Silko and Gerald Vizenor for their courage – Silko for a courage of conviction and for the ways her work reflects the wisdom of a larger vision of creation, Vizenor for his ability and willingness to take on rigid, unexamined convictions and turn them around. (Flys, 169)

In *Gerald Vizenor – Writing in the Oral Tradition*, Kimberly M. Blaeser argues that:

His stories seldom progress in smooth plot lines. His characters often speak in puzzling and convoluted ways. Very little is resolved in the works of Vizenor. He refuses to grant his reader certain satisfactions in the text because they would close off other possibilities he deems more essential: the possibilities of reader participation and discovery, the possibility that the story has life beyond the page, the possibility of a new kind of 'survivance'. (13)

Furthermore, Blaeser's view that "at the most fundamental level, Vizenor's writing is invitation" (14) asking his readers "to become a party to discovery" (14) suggests that Gordon Henry supports Gerald Vizenor's understanding of Native American literature and



the revival of its oral traditions through writing. However, to circulate through the stories obligatorily implies circulating through the family relationships. As Irene Moser points out “in addition to circularity in images and narrative movements, it is common for Native American writers to use the family members of protagonists as storytellers to unify the social spaces of their stories” (287), although it seems that Gordon Henry does not use storytelling by family

members as additional to circularity but rather supportive of it. In *The Light People* the family relationships between the various storytellers are not given away easily. There are hints and clues as to who is kin to whom and, once again, it is up to the reading traveller to follow those trails within the stories of each character, as will be made clear by diagram 1 and its further analysis. It seems that the most important linking elements within the novel are the characters of Oskinaway, Jake Seed, Oshawa and Bombarto Rose and the link between these four is the relationships among the members of the families of each character established through the stories told and the several healing processes which bring them together (a point to be further elaborated on).

Oskinaway lives with his grandparents, of which only the name of the grandfather is known: “his grandfather, old man Squandum, fished with him and gave him stories and songs” (Henry, 187). They had a daughter, Mary Squandum, and a son, Franklin Squandum, Oskinaway’s uncle. Mary meets Abetung, as narrated by Abetung in his story (Henry, 89-95) and Oskinaway and his older twin brother are conceived: “When I opened my eyes I saw Mary Squandum on top of me, her tears reflecting fire in the open door of the wood stove streaming down her face. Through her passion, at that moment I felt every part of myself again” (Henry, 95). Abetung, whose father and grandfather bear the same name, turns out to be the old man and sculptor, who lives in the cave with his son (Oskinaway’s twin brother) and who eventually reveals the truth to Jake Seed when stating “I know because my son here is one of them, and there is a boy you yourself know who has exactly the same face. I know because I was part of his making too” (Henry, 178). Thus Jake Seed becomes the bringer of light to Oskinaway, also assuming the role of a prophet.

In addition, Jake Seed hints on an eventual relationship with Oskinaway when he tells him that he should “look for Abetung, he who inhabits, like the X on a treaty document. This same X makes us related too. The man you are looking for is descended from a more distant Seed” (Henry, 174).

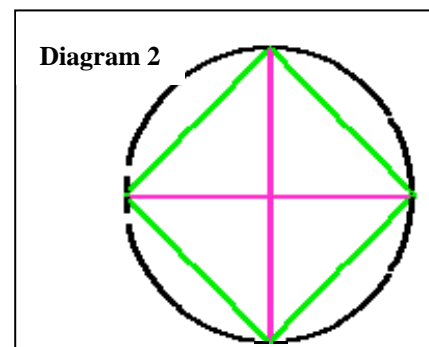
Having established the link between Oskinaway and Jake Seed, the novel further informs us that Jake Seed has a daughter called Rose Meskwaa Geeshik (the surname being held on to after the man she loved, Leon Meskwaa Geeshik, presumably died in the Vietnam War). The link with Oshawa is established through the stone which is eventually misused by Oshawa and ends up in Rose’s studio. When Oshawa goes to Rose’s house to recollect the stone, a new set of stories begins. The passing of the stone within Ottawa’s family is eventually linked to his grandfather, Old Man Kinew, who “claims that the stone has gifts” (Henry, 41). Old Man Kinew is the companion of Old Woman Cold Crow, who appears in connection with Bombarto Rose. As far as is revealed in the novel they had two sons: Elijah Cold Crow and Oshawanung; Oshawa being the son of Elijah and Oshawanung having a daughter, Goldie Oshawanung (Henry, 219) or Goldie Kinew, as she first appears in the story (Henry, 195). Ottawa’s grandmother, Old Woman Cold Crow, is the one who sheds some light on Betting’s past through the story she tells Bombarto Rose (Henry, 86-88). It becomes evident that Bombarto Rose knew Ottawa’s father, Elijah Cold Crow, to whom he refers to as the prisoner of Haiku and whose works (the dream songs) Bombarto Rose attempts to collect in a book, as he reveals in a conversation at the Strawberry Inn bar when addressing Elijah with the words “I’m here to see your writings, your drawings. I want to put them into a book” (Henry, 68). Another revealed relationship is that Bombarto Rose actually knows Ottawa’s uncle. In his conversation with Elijah he further states “I’ve talked to your brother, he said he would let you know that I was coming to see you” (Henry, 68). The connection between Oskinaway and Bombarto Rose is that the latter functions as a medium for the delivery of certain clues, as he becomes the recipient of certain stories, namely the story of Abetung, told by Ottawa’s grandmother, and Elijah Cold Crow’s dream songs, as exemplified by the passages “A boy painted himself / red and white and black and yellow” (Henry, 75) and “Abetung he who / inhabits his X mark / in the presence of _____” (Henry, 75).

All these relationships are disclosed throughout the novel, which, interestingly enough, consists of twenty-eight stories, the number resulting of the multiplication of

seven by four, seven being the number of prophecies referred to earlier and four being a sacred number in American Indian (more specifically in Anishinabe) culture. As L. Cooper refers to in “The Circle and the Square”, the circle as a geometrical shape can be traced back to the Egyptians:

The circle is a perfect, though mysterious, shape. It appears daily in the heavens as the sun; and monthly, as the moon. It can appear as an artifact of nature on the surface of the Earth as can be seen, for instance, in a perimeter made in grass by a tethered grazing animal. The ancient Egyptians had gained an awareness of the fact that there is always a constant relationship between the circumference (perimeter) of a circle and the diameter of that same circle. This is the relationship we now call Pi.”

Cooper goes on to argue that “a next logical shape to consider would have been the square. In fact, the evolution of the square from a circle is almost inevitable. The circle is halved, and then halved again, and the points at which the diameters intersect the circle are joined to form an interior square” (Cooper) as shown by diagram 2. The interesting aspect of this is



not necessarily the square but the fact that the points at which the diameters intersect the circle are four.

The number four is a sacred number for the Anishinabe (Anishinabe meaning “first men”) and a recurrent number in *The Light People*. The setting of “Invisible Trails” is in “Four Bears Village” (Henry, 3), Four Bears also being the name of the family that leads the dispute over the leg. Several living beings are enumerated in groups of four: there are four dogs when Oskinaway goes to Jack Seed’s house (8) and the reunion at Seed’s house is shared by four people: Oskinaway, his grandparents and Jack Seed (8); Moses Four Bears (the owner of the leg) had four children (42); there are four witnesses in the trial; the number of men who dig Squandrum’s grave is four. It takes Oskinaway four breaths to save another living being, a bird (224). The number four is also used in terms of indicating the time elapsed between events as demonstrated by the following excerpts of *The Light People*: “Four days later his grandparents took him to Jack Seed’s place with the boy’s

request.” (8-9); “I went to his place every day for about four years.” (16); “Four days later a boy came to my house.” (33); “As I examined the stone, felt its warmth, thought about its designs, I remembered back to the day I first held the stone four years before.” (40); “As for the Rose of my surname, that came from the people as well when they heard that on the day of my birth for the first four years of my life, someone left a rose at the tribal post office for my mother.” (60); “I know this: I slept in the ruins of the boarding school last December, waiting four nights for snow, and I heard the voice of the boy.” (62); “Four years after he was granted parole, I met him on the reservation, at the Strawberry Inn bar.” (67); “When they returned to Seed’s place, four days later ...” (173). Thrice the numbers from one to four make their appearance in the Anishinabe language: “beshig, neesh, nisway, neewin” (168 and 185) and when referring to the grandfathers and grandmothers in “Franklin Squandum’s Death Dream” as “Grandfather Beshig”, “Grandmother Neezh”, “Grandfather Nisway” and “Grandmother Neewin” (110-111).

Even stronger references appear in unities of four. As the character Bombarto Rose argues “A trinity without a woman denies the very earth beneath our feet” (55). The four directions are to be seen as related to ceremony and prayer. When Jack Seed went to Oskinaway’s grandparents’ house, at some point “he raised the cigarette up and pointed in four directions around the room” (Henry, 10). Another reference is “A Final Dreamsong” (81), whose content includes the following: “make a circle in the snow / a prayer offering of tobacco / make this place / a prayer place / to each of the four directions” (81). One other very important unity of four is the double reference to the four colours of man (red, yellow, white and black – the latter may sometimes be replaced by the colour blue, as will be mentioned further on). The first is implicit in the description of the stone in Rose Meskwaa Geshik’s studio: “On one half of the stone was an image of a blue man painted against a yellow background; on the other half a white bird rested on its back against a red background” (29). The second reference, equally implicit, is part of the dream songs of Elijah Cold Crow: “A boy painted himself / red and white and black and yellow” (75). Yet, the most interesting and profound invocation of the number four comes in the words of the character of Bombarto Rose in his “Mixed-blood Musings in Obscurity”, in which he establishes a four-pair relationship between the four elements and the human body, arguing that “blood conveys and infuses the basic elements of creation – mineral (earth), oxygen (air), impulse (fire), and liquid (water) – in its force and flow” (49).

At this point one can not help but wonder about the eventual relationship between all these units of four (directions, colours, elements and the human body). This journey of discovery has led to the image depicted below (figure 1), as displayed in “Ojibway Oral Traditions” on the website of Turtle Island Productions along with the following explanation:

For most North American Indian tribes the number four is sacred and figures prominently in their culture, religion, prophecies, and oral traditions or stories. Although there may be some variations from tribe to tribe, the four colors represent the four cardinal or sacred directions North, East, South and West. The four colors also represent the four colors of the human race, and the four elements, Earth, Water, Fire and Air. In addition to the four colors White, Yellow, Red, and Black, the color Green is often used to represent Mother Earth, and the color Blue is used in place of Black or to represent Water.



Each of the four directions holds a special meaning. Briefly, North represents strength, stamina and endurance; East marks the beginning of the life cycle for it is where the Sun first rises, it also symbolizes wisdom and knowledge; South represents change as the southern winds bring forth a seasonal renewal to the Earth; in the West lies the path of souls where the **Indian** must cross a large body of water or river in order for his or her soul to

enter the spirit world, leaving the human form behind to become one with the Earth, thus repeating the cycle of life and death and renewal.

In Anishinabe culture the animal represented in the figure above - the turtle – has double symbolism. On the one hand it refers to the Turtle Clan, one of the (later) groups included in the Anishinabe clan system. Karoline Schneider, in “The Culture and Language of the

Minnesota Ojibwe”, briefly describes the original clan system of the Ojibwe (another denomination used to refer to the Anishinabe):

Originally, the Ojibwe people were divided into seven clans, each of them having unique responsibilities. The Crane and Loon Clans shared the power of chieftainship, the people of the Fish Clan functioned as teachers, the Bear Clan operated as some sort of police, the Hoof clan ensured that housing and recreational needs were met, the Martin Clan produced hunters and warriors and the spiritual leaders of the Ojibwe came from the Bird clan.

All the clans worked together in caring for the Ojibwe people. Today however, the clan system has vanished almost entirely and only few people still carry out the duties of their clan.

It is interesting to note that in *The Light People* Bombarto Rose’s mother is “a descendant of a crane clan man” (59) and that “The song of Oskinaway” (180) appeals to the resurrection of the Crane Clan:

The song of Oskinaway

*Distant Seed,
out of light,
remember the last voice,
the voice of the people,
the force, and speak
of illumined faces,
a heart hungry for home calls,
through Squandum, beyond Abetung

cranes rise again*

The second symbolism of the turtle relates to the Anishinabe Story of the Great Flood, which, among other sources, is referred to in “An Introduction to Ojibway Culture and History”, in which Kevin L. Callahan states that “in the Ojibway Story of the Great Flood the turtle offered its back to Waynaboozhoo [original man] to bear the weight of the new earth. The new earth was formed from a piece of earth recovered by muskrat from the bottom of the water which covered the world”. The turtle from the Story of the Great Flood

is the theme of Rose Meskwaa Geeshik's first painting (and first theme period). As she describes:

My first painting came naturally, forming the earth, a turtle, the earth, a civilization on its back. Beyond, beneath, around the turtle, there is nothing but space and remote specks of light, though one great sun hovers above the turtle. People live on the back of that turtle, part of the earth on the turtle's back is on fire. Some of the people are running into the fire; some are running away. Another part of the turtle's back is ice. Some of the people on earth are sliding off the ice, out into space. Some of the people are freezing to death. Another part of the turtle includes a great forest. In the tallest trees, some people are reaching for the stars; some reach out too far and fall into a river that flows from where fire meets ice. Some people in the forest live inside hollowed-out trees and so they don't know light. The turtle itself has pulled in its legs and head. (Henry, 26)

Furthermore, according to Bobby Lake-Thom, "turtles of all kinds, both water and land turtles, are good signs and very good powers. The turtle is considered very sacred to most Native American tribal cultures. The turtle is a healer and protector" (155). Also closely

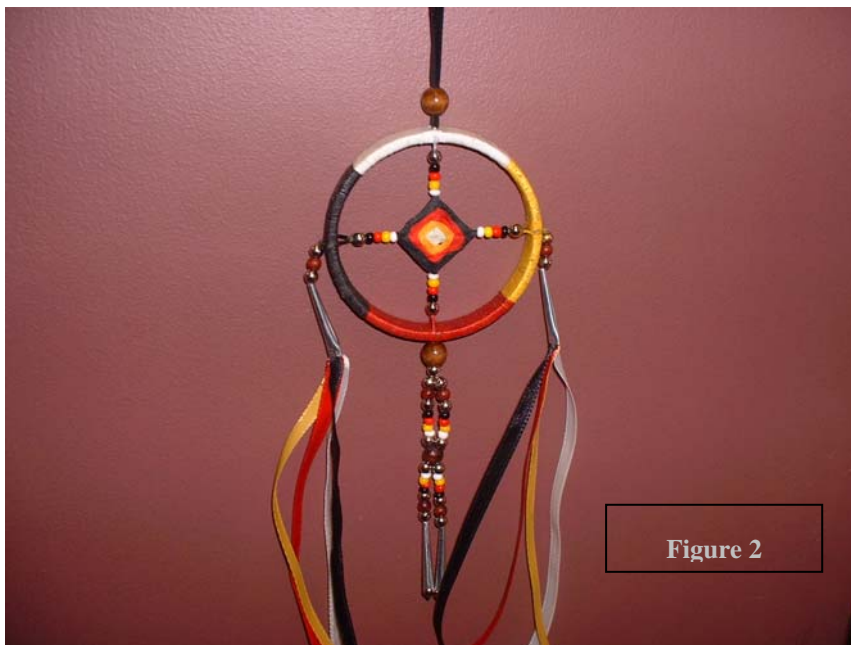


Figure 2

linked to the image of the four colors and the four directions is the Anishinabe Medicine Wheel which represents the wheel of life. The cross in the centre of the medicine wheel represents the four directions, the four colors of man (red,

black, white and yellow), and the four seasons. The medicine pouch in the centre contains the four sacred medicines (sweet grass, sage, tobacco and cedar). The importance of the medicine wheel in Native American culture is also discussed by Paula Gunn Allen:

Breath is life, and the intermingling of breaths is the purpose of good living. This is in essence the great principle on which all productive living must rest, for relationships among all the beings of the universe must be fulfilled; in this way each individual life may also be fulfilled.

This idea is apparent in the Plains tribes' idea of a medicine wheel or sacred hoop. The concept is one of singular unit that is dynamic and encompassing, including all that is contained in its most essential aspect, that of life. (56)

The notion of breath as life underlines the Anishinabe Story of Creation, retold by Gordon Henry at the end of *The Light People* ("We the People") and entangled in the character of Oskinaway, who, by using the same method as the Creator, breaths life into the suffocating bird by using a shell:

While inspecting the bird's eye he saw that the color hadn't completely returned to the ocular center, and he remembered the story of how the creator breathed through the megis shell after creating the original man from the earth, how the creator had breathed the breath of life into the first human, and so Oskinaway took the shell, held it between his fingers, and placed it against the bird's beak. Then he blew four sharp, even breaths through the shell into the bird. He saw then a new color come into the eyes of the bird. (224)

As in the case of the bird (which will be analyzed in detail further on), many of the characters throughout *The Light People* seem to undergo processes of healing, that is, the search for harmony. As Paula Gunn Allen states:

In American Indian thought, God is known as the All Spirit, and other beings are also spirit – more spirit than body, more spirit than intellect, more spirit than mind. The natural state of existence is whole. Thus healing chants and ceremonies emphasize restoration of wholeness, for disease is a condition of division and separation from the harmony of the whole. Beauty is wholeness. Health is wholeness. Goodness is wholeness. (60-61)

Throughout his novel Gordon Henry intertwines the stories, traditions and beliefs of the Anishinabe and the notion of healing with the stories of the characters. The real puzzle for the reader is to find out how and, most importantly, why.

The circular and multiply focused structure of the novel exerts strong pressure on

the ways in which it might be analysed. Categorization into topics seems inappropriate in view of the complexity, variety and structurally divided nature of the themes presented. Accordingly, the critical approach selected reflects the structure of the novel itself, dealing with the stories as they are presented and as they slowly disclose the book's themes. Homogenising the book's issues into analytic categories also seemed disrespectful to the deliberately constructed temporal relationship between the book's sections, which is not just a narrative device but articulates a moral relationship with the reader as well. As David Callahan explains in his essay "Narrative and Moral Intelligence in Gordon Henry Jr's *The Light People*":

For one thing, the book does not proceed by means of linear cause and effect, but rather by means of story units that are intertwined with each other, gaining their coherence through their relationship with other stories. This accords with the general movement of Native American explanatory manoeuvres. This means that the apparent fragmentation does not correspond to a validation of the fragment and is not even fragmentariness at all but, rather, a type of inclusiveness which attempts to pay heed to the many-sidedness and multiply-connected nature of people's lives. Inclusiveness is the key term here, so that in order for one person's story to be told, many people's stories need to be told. Indeed, one person's story can never be simply their story, for we are all so multiply-connected that our story is always already other people's stories and only in the telling of all of them can our story become clearer. (188)

Part II

“Invisible Trails”

Reading in-between the lines

“Invisible Trails”, the first story of *The Light People*, lifts the reader into an unknown world. The concept of a trail instead of a road points to a path not yet paved, only walked upon by some, hence not (yet) integrating the mainstream. Considering the use of the plural, it may also be inferred that there is no such thing as one unique trail, but that there are different possible trails for different people and that each individual has to unveil his/her own, the same way in which the reader is invited to pursue the trails within the several stories of the novel. They may be the trails of a people, of a community, of a family or of individuals. In this story, for instance, we are presented with the beginnings of Oskinaway’s trails and Oskinaway, in turn, is presented as pursuing his mother’s trails in order to find her, since she had “vanished on the powwow trail” (Henry 3). At the end, however, he will find himself on his own trail again. In this sense, the notion of a trail might be perceived as something simultaneously communal and individual. Being “invisible”, these trails also point to a non-physical realm or at least to one not obvious at first. However, upon finishing the novel, as it turns out, the first story holds all the keys and hints needed to find one’s way to the last story. The first sentence of “Invisible Trails” establishes a link between the “invisible trails” and a higher realm of “blinking constellations” (Henry, 3). Thus, the trail of this story implicitly prepares the reader to move beyond his/her immediate environment and contemplate other realms like the stars, constellations and, ultimately, the universe. In addition, providing the non-native reader, who is also invisible in the sense that “unlike storytelling, written storytelling is directed to an absent audience” (Rainwater 22), has followed the signs, there may be, beyond the end of the novel, a sense of literary healing for the reader herself/himself from the oppressive force of Western canons. As Gordon Henry explains, stories “engender kernels or seeds of truth potential, which will develop in accordance with the remembrance of the story and the story act” (Flys, 168). The connection between earth and the constellations (or universe) is furthermore established by “the man as a fierce wind who cast stones upon the living world and through the force of the wind blew the stones whole into the bodies of living beings” (Henry, 3), a hidden reference to the Anishinabe Story of Creation (and its link to the Megis Shell), which again links to “We the People”, the last story of the novel.

On the other hand the man “who blew so hard, so wildly that he worked the stones on the exterior, sculpting the living form, until leaving the interior life to itself” (Henry, 3) presents the character of Abetung, as will be noticed in “Abetung’s story”, pointing to a different kind of creation, since Abetung will turn out to be Oskinaway’s father. Once these connections are established the trails gradually become visible, as Abetung’s creation (Oskinaway) becomes the recreation of the Anishinabe Creation Story. In this sense the first part of the first story establishes the beginning of one possible trail using sequenced markers (constellation – creation – father – mother), all of which seem to have vanished. The implications are deep if we understand these markers as representations of traditions, creation stories, rituals, the Native American concepts of family and community, all of which are also somewhat missing in the life of many contemporary Native American families, (re-)educated within western values, mostly American Indian by blood, but not by soul, belief or practice.

The disappearance of and search for his mother establish a new trail for Oskinaway, firmly set in the realm of nature, as “on the day his mother ran away, he ran toward the river” (Henry, 5). Falling back on the already presented discussion of nature and character being intrinsically bound and connected in Native American culture the above mentioned realm of nature, represented by the river, becomes a realm of introspection. Peering into the river Oskinaway peers into his own mind where “everything rushed past then, the sky, the earth beneath the layer of reflecting brown skin, green and yellow leaves, broken limbs of dead trees, dragonflies and skimmers” (Henry, 5). Within the turmoil of his mind Oskinaway attempts to hold on to the only thing that seems to be stable and safe as “he reached into the water to pick up a flat smooth stone, the only thing he could see that did not move in the river’s flow (Henry, 5). But the stone is not meant to be picked up, the river holds on to Oskinaway, leaving him no alternative but to “study his face, the river, his river face” (Henry, 5). Eventually his river face acknowledges the presence of a boy laughing at him. As the reader will later find out the boy is Oskinaway’s twin brother, son of Abetung, raised in the ways of the old ones. Thus he laughs at Oskinaway who is trapped by his own mind. The markers of the trail develop: constellation – creation – father – mother – river – brother – the old ones and “so he remained with the old ones, his grandparents” (Henry, 6).

While living with his grandparents Oskinaway is exposed to differing sets of

values. At the mission school “he learned history, the manipulation of numbers, to read and write” (Henry, 6) and “from his grandparents he learned plants, medicines, the seasons’ movements, and changes in animal behaviour and sources of survival” (Henry, 6). Interestingly enough, the mission school is portrayed as teaching manipulation and does not seem to contribute much to Oskinaway’s growth as a person, for “he started on the same path every morning” (Henry, 6). In the same manner, “the old ones took him to church on Sundays and sent him to his room when the jessakid jugglers and sucking doctors came to the house late at night to divine truths and render healings to people in the village” (Henry, 6) but “as he grew, Oskinaway questioned the old people about diviners and healers” (Henry, 7). Instead of contacting a police department or hiring a private detective, Oskinaway chooses his trail by turning to the old ones, his grandparents, for help to find his mother. The seed of Oskinaway’s healing trail is finally planted and its name is Jake Seed. The word “seeds” on its own sets a renewed connection to nature and the need of nourishing and taking care of it in order to make it grow. Jake Seed, “smoke rising around him, the smell of cedar and tobacco in the air” (Henry, 7), is a healer and one who respects the old ways, which is implicit in the reference to cedar and tobacco, two of the four sacred plants, and the repetition of the sacred number four in relation to Jake Seed.

As the reader will (or not) later discover, Jake Seed belongs to the light people, the bringers of light, those who carry the memory of the old ways. The function of this character within the novel is to assist Oskinaway on his healing journey, establishing connections between Oskinaway and the old ways. This is hinted upon when “through the doorway Oskinaway saw Seeds of the past, resting in black-and-white photos on the wall, enshrined in human articles of remembrance” (Henry, 8). Thus towards the end of the story it becomes clear that Oskinaway’s journey goes beyond the search for his mother. It is the search for himself and, as disclosed by the story itself, it will not be a physical one, but a spiritual one. As Seed points out:

Sometimes memory runs away from us and even the spirit can’t find the trail. In some cases people leave things in a particular place and wander further and further away from that place with the false knowledge that what they left will always be there. Sometimes, then, the lost must want to return, before their knowledge makes them forget what they left. Still, I go by what I am given. I never know how these things will turn out. Sometimes the people who come to

me already know the answer. Sometimes they don't know what they really want.
(Henry, 9-10)

Somehow Oskinaway realizes that in whatever he is looking for he will not be helped by the mission school teachers or any other institution, but by his grandparents (the old ones), Jake Seed (the bringer of light) and Arthur Boozhoo, Seed's messenger (the link to the next story).

“Arthur Boozhoo on the Nature of Magic”

Tricksters, magic and social criticism

In the first story, “Invisible Trails”, the reader is introduced to Seed's messenger, Arthur Boozhoo. Although only appearing in three stories of the novel, Arthur Boozhoo is certainly one of the most puzzling characters, whether in terms of physical description or in terms of significance. It is this particular character that bears the first reference to the eagle in the novel, since “he wore a black suitcoat with a white eagle appliqué on the back (Henry, 11)”, so a connection is drawn between Arthur Boozhoo, the animal and its link to the world of magic. Keeping in mind that the spiritual leaders of the Anishinabe belonged to the bird clan, one recognizes the importance of the eagle for this people. In fact, in a text entitled “The Prayer Carrier”, Martin French describes it as follows:

The graceful bird of the skies, the eagle, is the prayer carrier and messenger of the Anishinabe people. As the eagle soars arose the skies, one knows he is carrying the prayers to the Creator.

The eagle has great significance for the Anishinabe people when it comes to healing ceremonies and ceremonies honouring and respecting other people.

In this sense Arthur Boozhoo, as Seed's messenger and, in a certain sense, as the eagle carrier, impersonates the link between earth, people and their creator. The character of Arthur Boozhoo himself will only return in one of the stories as such. As it seems, he is the eagle (the messenger) and much more. In the first story he is presented as “a young man, different in inflections and mannerisms. He carried himself differently, with a dissonance

of gestures gathered in faraway places and circumstances outside the reservation. He spoke with different intonations” (Henry, 10). He carries the colours of man: white for strength, stamina and endurance, red for change and black for the path of souls. He is a storyteller, as implied by the slogan on his T-shirt, which “read, ‘Save a tree / tell a story’” (Henry, 11). Ultimately Boozhoo is Nana Bush or Nana Boozhoo, the trickster figure of Anishinabe oral tradition. According to Franchot Ballinger:

Trickster is the derelict of codified and conventionalized experience. For tricksters there can never be a resolution, no matter how many scholars put their shoulders to the wheel. Like subatomic particles, tricksters never allow a final definition of time, place, and character. They never settle or shape themselves as to allow closure, either fictional or moral. (...) Tricksters elude all attempts to place them within the categories of definition and classification, especially in “either/or” or “both” terms. At most we can say only that tricksters are, in fact, neither/nor, either/and, and both. (29-30)

By the end of the second story the reader is still convinced that Arthur Boozhoo will eventually help Oskinaway to find his mother. But “all” Boozhoo does is to tell Oskinaway his story, which will lead to another story and the reader will never encounter Arthur Boozhoo again until the end of the novel. The question is why. On the one hand, the character of Arthur Boozhoo, if taken as the trickster in the novel, is meant to, in the least, puzzle the non-native reader. From the latter’s perspective a character comes by, tells a story and then vanishes. The outcome of his conversation with Oskinaway is known only towards the end of the novel, meaning it remains unresolved for the non-native reader for quite a long time. Only by the time the reader reaches “Arthur Boozhoo: Two Dogs Stuck Together” will he find his trail again, as the stories endings circle towards their beginnings. Thus Gordon Henry cleverly accomplishes a major estrangement factor, of which the reader will only be aware by the end of the novel. The reader has encountered the trickster. On the other hand Arthur Boozhoo is Jake Seed’s messenger, which allows the reader to perceive the stories “Arthur Boozhoo on the Nature of Magic” and “Arthur Boozhoo: Two Dogs Stuck Together” as messages from Jake Seed, which would also make it safe to say that within oral tradition what is told and the way it is told are more important than who tells it. As Ballinger states:

Some writers continue to describe formal characteristics of trickster stories in terms of content with some observations regarding style. Andrew Wiget categorizes trickster stories into two types by subject matter. One type criticizes social structure by focusing on cultural experience and suggests human's inability to live up to their social roles and positions. The second dramatizes humanity's innate imperfection. (11)

Arthur Boozhoo introduces himself as being "different, you may have noticed" (Henry, 13), a statement half explained by the fact that he "was raised far away in a city" (Henry, 13). Thus, within these two simple statements, Gordon Henry presents the problematic of the urban-raised generation, whose parents grew up on reservations, but moved to cities to look for better job opportunities and living conditions. The city brought Arthur death, as his father "was electrocuted on the spot" (Henry, 13), insecurity, since they "moved around quite a bit after that" (Henry, 13), and the loss of his mother, who remarried and "so they sent all the kids away to live with our grandparents" (Henry, 13). Nevertheless, Arthur chooses to remain in the city, being only missed by his grandparents, who want him to live with them. Similarly to Oskinaway, it seems the grandparents' (or the old ones') role is to look out for the children and try to lead them towards the path of the old ways. Arthur kept receiving letters from his relatives because, as he says, "they all wanted me to return to this place, the place of my grandparents, of my ancestors" (Henry, 14). Still Arthur chooses the city and proceeds with his studies. Of an inquisitive nature, since initially he "wanted to study everything" (Henry, 14), Arthur eventually chooses drama. This particular choice establishes an introduction to a recurrent theme in contemporary Native American literature: the search for identity, the feeling of incompleteness. Arthur's intention is to reinvent himself through the appropriation of a role. As he remembers, "I felt I could act, and that if I chose many different roles maybe I'd find the one I was closest to and live it" (Henry, 14). The problem is that Arthur cannot find his role or himself. Being only sure of his love for magic he left school and "went around the city seeking out magicians and gathering an assortment of tricks and teachings from each one" (Henry, 14).

Besides the two functions of this character pointed out previously, Gordon Henry also uses Arthur Boozhoo to convey social criticism. On the one hand the same way the American government has failed to understand and respect Native American peoples is the

same way the American school system fails to provide for Arthur's educational needs within the context of his culture, or, for that matter, for the needs of entire generations of Native Americans. In fact, as Jorge Noriega comments, "the 'formal education' of the indigenous people of North America began at virtually the moment in which the European drive to colonize the continent began in earnest" (371). The American school system tends to offer its own set of values, disregarding or altering others. The fact is, how could Native American children learn their history when they were (are) taught in American schools that the country's history started with the arrival of Columbus and "meanwhile, their traditional languages and cultures, religions and world views were systematically denigrated and suppressed" (Noriega, 371). Furthermore, "the system by which Native Americans are purportedly 'educated' by Euroamerica has from the onset been little more than a means by which to supplant indigenous cultures" (Noriega, 373). In the long run, school and the city are unable to satisfy Arthur in his search for magic and for his identity. He eventually ends up in his grandparents' house upon the news that his little sister was ill, suffering from trachoma. The choice of this particular infectious disease in the novel seems to lead us to another implicit social criticism, regarding health care for Native Americans, since according to the CDC (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) "blindness due to trachoma has become eliminated from the United States. The last cases were found among American Indian populations and in Appalachia". Shortly before his sister's death Arthur realizes that the magic he had learned in the city is useless. It is an exterior magic, only capable of being appreciated by people with sight. Thus, although his sister asks him to, he can not perform magic for her because she is blinded by the disease. As Arthur catches the disease as well and is thus unable to see, he is forced to turn to his inner self. It is the time at which he lets go of his Western education. He comments that "I could feel my sight going, but it was like the going had nothing to do with what I saw or what lived outside me. My sight was going from the inside, almost backward, like the memory of the operation of the eyes left out particulars and details, like my head was shovelling the inner light I needed to see into a great mound of expanding and hungry shadows" (Henry, 15) and so "I asked my grandfather about magic" (Henry, 15). This is the start of Arthur's healing process. His grandfather tells him about the light people, "the descendants of the original teachers and bringers of light" (Henry, 16) and then takes him to Jake Seed, who heals Arthur of his disease. This is the healing magic Arthur has searched for and he asks

Jake Seed to teach him. In a certain way Arthur's past points towards Oskinaway's future. Before Oskinaway finds his way he will also search for fulfilment in the American education system, but, just as Arthur, he will not find it and so turn to the old ways.

In this second story the reader is introduced to the old ways through Arthur Boozhoo's initiation in the world of Jake Seed's magic. The way magic and ceremonial imagery are introduced by Gordon Henry is probably not the way the reader would expect. The non-native reader will not be presented with or have explained anthropological descriptions of ceremonies or rituals. First of all, most ceremonial references/presentations are kept in italics throughout the novel, visually distinguishing them from the rest of the text, as if spoken by someone else or belonging to another realm. Second, ceremonial imagery and ceremonies are presented through songs, dramatizations and other types of texts, different from the rest of the novel. In the case of "Arthur Boozhoo on the Nature of Magic", ceremonial imagery is presented through a story within Arthur's story. Although the narrator is the same, the reference to ceremonial imagery is written in italics. On the other hand, the language used in what makes up the first reference to ceremonies/rituals completely undermines the traditionally Western mystic and romantic view of Native American ceremonies/visions, as this passage indicates:

Then the little man stopped, turned his back to me, and he wheeled back around. He held his enormous penis in his hands and pissed on the ground in front of me, close enough that I could see steam rising from the earth and smell and feel the sprinkle of his spray as he snickered. When he finished he abused me with gruff, untranslatable language, and he kicked dirt in my face. (Henry, 17)

The reference to ceremonies and rituals is never a direct one. It is not explained which ceremony or ritual the reader is dealing with. Nevertheless there are hints. As Jake Seed tells Arthur "let the eyes drink for you. Let the eyes eat for you" (Henry, 19). This reference indicates that Jake Seed made Arthur Boozhoo undergo a fasting period, which precedes the appearance of visions/messages from the creator. Arthur's vision appears under the form of a woodpecker.

Light streamed out of each place the woodpecker struck, as if the tree held its own sun inside and the bird conducted the light of that sun out. (...) Then the bird reached into the tree with its beak and extracted the light in a long bending

waving string that followed the course of its flight to where it circled me. Then the woodpecker flew down over the hill out of my sight, with the long string of golden light trailing behind it. From there I saw Seed approaching, and after he dug me out I left the hole and the hill. By the next spring it was clear that Seed had accepted me as his helper. (Henry, 20)

As David Callahan points out:

Although we don't get an exposition of what this vision might signify for Arthur, we see that he has passed a barrier and, significantly, the vision of light in a tree emanated by a woodpecker is the last thing to carry Arthur through his experience and somehow to meld his experience of the disturbing things he has undergone. (192)

However, Arthur continues practicing the magic he learned in the cities and, at one of the sessions at a birthday party, he sings a song while performing one of his tricks. This particular song establishes a new connection to the last story, "We the People", visible only after finishing the novel. Expressions from the song, such as "a northern ornithologist" and "to slice the union onion with a sword of words" (Henry, 21), at this stage seemingly out of place, are direct references to events from the last story. By telling his story, Arthur may not be giving Oskinaway the whereabouts of his mother, but he is giving him a hint of the future. As it seems, Arthur was already familiar with the name of Oskinaway from an episode in which Jake Seed was sick, as Arthur is told by Rose Meskwaa Geeshik, Jake Seed's daughter. "She had come to see him after a violent disturbing dream and found him sweating, fevered and weak. 'He's been reciting names,' she said. 'Oskinaway, Minogeshig, Broken Tooth, Kubbemubbe, Shagonawshee, Bwanequay, Nawawzhee, Yellowhead, Abetung, Aishkonance – he repeats the names and shivers'" (Henry, 21). Seed's feverish state implies a vision in which the names of Abetung and Oskinaway, father and son, appear together. The other names are not repeated again, but they are linked the same way. The link is for the reader to discover. Another ceremonial reference is presented through Rose's prayer to the creator, asking for Seed's survival. Her father does indeed survive and Rose, although exhausted, does not seem able to have some rest, because, as Rose tells Arthur, "I keep hearing the voices out here, I keep thinking of my father, this whole place. You know, where we all come from" (Henry, 24).

“Rose Meskwaa Geeshik’s Monologue on Images”

Destroying images with images: The Turtle, the Eagle and the Stone

Rose’s last words at the end of the previous story, especially the interrogation on “where we all come from” (Henry, 24), opens an invitation to reflect upon the origin of humankind. These words are thus a perfect way of, implicitly, introducing the Anishinabe Story of the Great Flood to the reader. Obviously the narrator of the third story is Rose Meeskwa Geeshik, Jake Seed’s daughter, the new character introduced in the previous story, the same way as Arthur, introduced in the first story, became the narrator of the second. Her first words, nonetheless, establish a very explicit criticism of the non-native/Euroamerican tendency to feel superior to other cultures; a criticism that seems especially directed towards the field of anthropology:

Everybody on the outside – at the colleges I’ve been to, in the white churches, on the street, in the stores, superstores, and movies – they claim to know us, to know where we came from, how we lived, what we ate, what we produced, even what we believed, but how many of us are there now? And what do they know, or care to know, about what we believe or how we live today? (Henry, 25)

Rose’s words are strong and she cleverly fights irony with irony: “For a long time, I saw the irony in these American vistas from a long way off, in the so-called first ship coming to discover what was already here” (Henry, 25). In a few lines Rose brings up the question of an American history before the arrival of Columbus and the misuse of Native American imagery, as she refers to “the images, the cowboy killings, the product faces” (Henry, 25). Duane Champagne argues that:

Over the past five hundred years, Native American communities have been subjected to the drastic effects of Western colonial intrusion. While Native cultures were transforming even before the arrival of European colonists, the post-Columbian period has been one of greatly accelerated change caused by newly introduced diseases, colonial political competition and – ultimately – domination. Incorporation into the increasingly globalized world economy, and changes introduced by cultural interrelations with Western education, religious conversion, language loss, and the borrowing of Western values and concepts. As a result, the

contemporary state of Native cultures is very complex and diverse. Nevertheless, if one wanted to make a single statement about Native Americans, it might be that they have sought to retain their cultures and communities despite colonial domination. (7)

Almost all characters in the novel undergo their own healing process. Rose's healing process is to overcome the anger and disgust brought about by those images. Once again, Jake Seed plays an important role, since "it was the old man inside there sleeping and his companion, my mother, who washed those angry faces off. They taught me different, greater things about images, about the imagination, and growing toward healing" (Henry, 25). Just as previously Rose fought irony with irony, she will fight images with images. Rose becomes a painter.

As an artist, Rose becomes, in the novel, the means of conveying sacred symbolism and Anishinabe mythology. Rose's first painting marks the beginning of her turtle period. Within the description she makes of that painting, she presents the Anishinabe Story of the Great Flood. Once again, Gordon Henry uses a strategy of estrangement. He could have inserted the story in a linear way, but he did not. He inserts obstacles for the non-native reader, who must go beyond the mere description of a painting and wander into the unknown world of Native American oral tradition (its myths and stories). "I know it sounds like a simple painting, but I felt good about it, I had done something" (Henry, 25). After that, Rose underwent "a great eagle period" (Henry, 26), having even won a State Arts Award for the painting "The Nest and the Mind". As she says, "after that painting, I made good money selling paintings" (Henry, 27). Rose's eagle period is the strategy used by Gordon Henry to reintroduce this sacred animal figure in the novel. The first time it appeared was in relation to Arthur Boozhoo, that is, in relation to magic, and is now associated with mind and art. It can be stated that, as was Arthur's case, Rose also symbolizes the eagle, in the sense of being a messenger. In Anishinabe culture the eagle establishes the link between the people and the Creator. It carries prayers and messages. The same is the case with Rose's paintings, which carry messages and symbolisms for those who are willing to decipher them, whether within the novel (those who view or buy her paintings) or outside the novel (those who read about them). Rose's painting "The Nest and the Mind" is a reflection of and on the state of (Native) American culture in the 50s and early 60s. Technology and consumerism rise above other values as "the eggs of the

eagle were hatching, but they weren't hatching eagles, they were hatching glowing signs, advertisements" (Henry, 26) while "at the bottom of the (dead) tree there were heaps and heaps of dead eagles" (Henry, 27) or, for that matter, heaps of dead messengers or unheard messages. The dead tree may reflect the consequences of World War II and consumerism, namely lack of respect for nature and all it implies, both in Western and in Native terms. The West drops the A-Bomb; the Native Americans turn their backs on nature and move to the city looking for better living conditions. Rose's art completes a circle from the turtle (birth) to the fallen eagles (death) and becomes her means of making a living in the city, overlapping with the renewed interest of the West in all things exotic.

It is in this story that the reader has access to the very first reference to a specific setting in time, which turns it into a very relevant one:

I stayed in the Twin Cities at the time, to sell art. Then I met a man from another reservation. His name was Leon Meskwaa Geeshik, and I still go by his name. He treated me well. We talked about all the good things we could do. We talked of returning to the reservation, of creating new political and economic worlds there. In 1969 he was drafted. (Henry, 27)

The reference to 1969 constitutes a very specific time reference, which by itself gives the reader something concrete to work with: historical and cultural context. The Western reader will relate to the Counterculture, the Vietnam War and social protest. The Native reader will relate to that and more. Social awareness over civil rights was not only limited to Afro-Americans. Other minorities accompanied the process of returning to their roots. 1968 saw the publishing of Scott Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, a landmark in the timeline of both postcolonial literature and Native American awakening, as Scott Vickers points out:

Perhaps one of the most beautifully written works of American fiction of this century, *House Made of Dawn* attracted worldwide attention to the social realities of Indians during and after the crude governmental policies of relocation and termination, as a result of which they were faced with tribal dissolution, disenfranchisement, dispersion into the urban diaspora, and exposure to the wholesale social evils of ruthless capitalism and world war. (133-134)

Rose and Leon discuss returning to the reservation and making a change, within the innocent, positive spirit of the 60s, violently shaken by the Vietnam War to which Leon is drafted and in which he disappears. Nevertheless, Leon has found his way home. The letters he wrote Rose “weren’t about war or death. They were honouring letters of love to the earth, to the reservation, to me, to the memory of Indian people” (Henry, 27). When Leon’s letters stop, Rose feels lost. She stopped writing during the period of Leon was drafted and disappeared. But, deep inside, she remains true to the projects they had discussed together and makes plans to “set up a studio on the reservation – a place of inspiration” (Henry, 28). Thus, Rose’s trail leads back to the reservation and the old ones. As foreseen in “The Nest and the Mind” there is still hope for the eagle and the message through a cleansing process, in which the reference to steam and an upside down nest points to the Sweat Lodge ritual:

A white-headed old man sits on a log, watching the eagles fall, he too is painting, an X-ray picture of a fallen nest, upside down on the ground. In his picture, eagles fly, in a bright blue sky above the nest, rising from the heap of dead eagles, circling, as humans inside the upside down nest are engulfed in steam. (Henry, 27)

Metaphorically speaking, returning to the reservation means returning to one’s origins. In Rose’s case, her being a painter, that means getting in touch with the art of the old ones: Stone painting. It is not a conscious process, because Rose’s link or return to the old ones is not established by research on her part, but by a stone which someone throws against her studio window:

At first I didn’t know the origin of the stone. And that bothered me since the stone was different, almost perfectly round and painted. The stone felt different in my hands too, like someone had touched it many times before, like it had a human purpose attached to it. Part of that purpose rested, I believed, in the symbols painted on the surface of the stone. A thin band of green paint divided the stone in half. On one half of the stone was an image of a blue man painted against a yellow background; on the other half a white bird rested on its back against a red background. (Henry, 29)

With the stone, both the reader and Rose are presented with the notion of circularity, as it is almost perfectly round. Similarly, the colours used to paint the stone are the colours of man, closely linked to the sacred number four and the four directions (as referred to previously) and consequently to other circles: the circle of the sun and the circle of life and death. The smashing of the window coincides with Rose's first attempt to return to painting and "some of the broken pieces scattered out onto the incomplete face of the old woman I was sketching. Those pieces magnified parts of her face" (Henry, 29). The stone obviously holds a sacred significance, through its shape, through its colours and through the visions it reveals to Rose in her dreams. It turns out to be a creation stone, "a stone from the beginning of time" (Henry, 30), which Rose will be allowed to use "to create" (Henry, 30). A gift is answered with a gift and Rose must receive a stranger within her house. Still in the realms of dreams and visions, Rose is visited by "a little man, about three and a half feet tall" (Henry, 31), covered in deerskin and whom she offers food and tobacco. Immediately after, Rose receives inspiration and finds herself in her studio sketching endlessly in what seems to be her stone period. However, all her sketches are destroyed by the little man. Rose's inspiration is filled with Western and colonial references and does not seem to be worthy, at that time of the gift of the stone, as she sketched "stone rain falling on a city", "Mount Rushmore", "cathedrals and the domes of state capitols", "a stone bust of every American president" (Henry, 31), among others. The man's reaction is violent. He destroys the stone with an axe until it becomes sand. All sketches float out the window and her dream ends with eagles, vultures and crows flying over the little man, "some even singing with human voices a death song I remember and will carry with me to the end of my life" (Henry, 33). David Callahan points out that "as enigmatic and intense as Arthur's vision, Rose's dream seems to be centred on creation and destruction. Nonetheless, like Oskinaway and Boozhoo, Rose has to go through layers of story before being able to use her vision usefully" (194). The sacred number appears once again, as "four days later" (Henry, 33) Rose is visited by the boy who threw the stone through her window. The boy's name is Oshawa and he tells her the story of the stone, which will give the reader the understanding that the little man of Rose's dreams seems to be the little man painted on the stone and one of the old ones:

My uncle, his name is Oshawanung, said the stone was passed down from his father to him, and from his father's father before that, but no one knows how far

back the stone goes. As for the painting, I believe some little people gave the stone to our family so many generations ago that even the white man can't understand who the inhabitants of this land were then. That's why the little man is painted on one half. As for the other half of the painting, I can't say. (Henry, 33-34)

“Oshawa’s Story”

Ceramic and stone

By the fifth story of the novel, the circling pattern of oral storytelling becomes evident. The stories are handed from person to person, one picking up the trail where the other left it. Oshawa's story is one common to many young boys: he likes a girl in his class, he is teased by his classmates, he publicly embarrasses himself, he gets teased further and so he plans revenge. So, attention has to be paid to details, because, even when telling the simplest story, Gordon Henry interweaves lessons, criticisms and information. In this sense the emphasis may not rely so much on whether Oshawa likes the girl or manages to get a date with her (which would make for a truly all-American story) but on where and how he manages to embarrass himself and why he plans revenge. Again, one simple expression allows the interested reader insight into another historical and cultural contextualization. Oshawa attends a mission school, a fact which allows for the construction of a never-ending mind map concerned with colonization, education (or brainwashing), appropriation or Catholicism, among others, the mission school constituting the ultimate tool for successful colonization. Attending a mission school is being impregnated with Western and Catholic values and guidelines. Oshawa's story evolves around a Catholic ritual: the Assumption of the Virgin. Unlike Native American ceremonial references in the novel, the rehearsal of the Catholic ritual is described in almost technical detail. It involves Oshawa carrying the Virgin Mary's crown for the coronation ceremony. The choice of this particular ceremony is interesting, since it plays with words, cleverly relating Catholicism and the British Empire through the idea of a coronation ceremony and a crown, for the British monarch is also the Head of a Church, although not the Roman Catholic one. The detailed description of the ceremony may remind some readers of the anthropological descriptions of Native American ceremonies.

Oshawa does not seem particularly thrilled with the ceremony in itself, his concerns being of a more earthly nature: being chosen to carry the crown, liking a girl and the classmates teasing him for it. So far the reader has managed not to get lost in this story but when the ceremony is about to begin, the reader is once again pushed into the realm of dreams, Oshawa's dreams, in this case. While standing behind the curtain Oshawa has a vision of an old couple, of a tree and a bird, whose ending intertwines with Rose's painting "The Nest and the Mind": "When I looked back up to the top of the tree, the man was gone, and a giant bird hovered just above his place on a limb as a nest fell end over from the tree." (Henry, 38) The falling of a nest in his dream is closely followed by the falling of the statue of the Blessed Virgin during the ceremony as Oshawa slips and falls on the stage. The fact that "the Virgin Mother's nose lay separated from her face" (Henry, 39) somehow recalls the Egyptian Sphinx, symbol of another colonizing civilization of the past. The fragile "pieces of ceramic" strongly contrast with the item that brought about this story: the creation stone. (Henry, 39) This episode leads to renewed and stronger teasing by his classmates and Oshawa lets anger take control and plans revenge on a boy named Two Birds. His plan involves the stone which was thrown into Rose's studio and while he steals it from his uncle he remembers a story his uncle told him four years before, the first time Oshawa held the stone.

"Oshawa's Uncle's Story"

Stones and Books

The beginning of Oshawa's uncle's story provides the reader with background on the creation stone. It is seen as a very important and sacred asset, passed down from generation to generation. Oshawa's uncle has just received the stone from Oshawa's grandfather. This family tradition seems to be closely linked to the responsibility and experience that come with age, as Oshawa learns from his uncle: "When you are older then you can hold the stone for your generation" (Henry, 41). The creation stone carries experiences of its own, "gifts" as Oshawa's grandfather calls them:

Some stones carry earth histories, stories, songs, prayers, so their stone faces hold

memories of the existences of other eras; other beings of the earth, air, fire, and water live on, embedded in shapes, in esoteric formations of strata and substrata, in scopic design and microscopic elementals we can only imagine in our limited view of the exterior stone. Beyond the life inside, the stone was also used to kill. So some stones transport memories of death. (Henry, 41)

The creation stone seems to work as a means to pass on information and knowledge and each particular creation story has its own stories to tell. Once again, similar to the oral storytelling tradition, the important factor is not the information or knowledge in itself, but what the listener/reader will do with it: “As you see, this stone in my hand has those two sides painted on it. Each side tells its story. A person can use this stone to remember, or turn it over and use it as a weapon” (Henry, 41). In this sense, it is never an object in itself that is safe or dangerous, but the person that manipulates it. And if that object turns out to be knowledge, the question becomes what do people do with knowledge, how do they deal with it, manipulate it, pass it on or not and receive it or not. As Oshawa’s uncle states: “Thus your safety will reside in your willingness to understand the story of the stone and use the story in the stone to understand and create your own story as you remember the stories of our family, our people” (Henry, 41). Oshawa’s uncle has understood the story in the stone, as it tells him “we can’t be killed. We can be hurt; we can be changed; we can be consumed by the desires and passions of ourselves and other people: and we can be buried. But as a people we can’t be killed” (Henry, 41-42).

The story of the stone leads Oshawa’s uncle to the story of Moses Four Bears’ leg. Moses was found in “that ditch where sweetgrass grows, around the bend from the liquor store” (Henry, 43), particularly well-achieved imagery, considering the choice between alcohol and the old ways. Moses’s wife explains that “the foot was frozen, part of the leg too. (...) We gave him more alcohol and they cut it off at the clinic in Fineday” (Henry, 43). Moses Four Bears has, to a certain extent, lost his wholeness with the amputation and due to the ingestion of alcohol. The problems Indian communities have had with alcohol from its arrival with the colonizers are well-known, many times enabling the creation of a relationship of dependence on the colonizers. Thus Moses decides to give his leg a proper burial and tells Oshawa’s uncle to “take the leg out and bury it. But go beyond the cemetery, close to the big river. Just before you get to the riverbank, find a big tree near the bank. Bury the leg there” (Henry, 44). The problem is that the storm and the icy ground do

not allow him to do as he was asked, so he leaves the wooden box with Moses's leg on the high part of a tree, with the intention of returning and burying it another day. On his way home Oshawa's uncle is unable to find his way and tries to seek refuge in the church by the cemetery but he can't get in. He ends up breaking a window to the church library, where he finds a wood stove and matches. He starts burning books from the library in order to keep himself warm. He does not seem to have any problems in burning books. Stories live outside the books; they can not be imprisoned within the limits of a page or a chapter:

I stacked up volumes of books there next to me and kept feeding the stove. Some of the books burned for a long time, and a few of those long-burning books together gave me some time to break chairs for wood, and then I had time to sleep and read through the storm. (Henry, 47)

What the reader does not expect is that she/he will read along with Oshawa's uncle and venture into the musings of Bombarto Rose.

“Bombarto Rose: Mixed-Blood Musings in Obscurity”

Blood in Two Worlds

Until now the reader has slowly been confronted with different types of texts, such as prose, song or prayer, probably without giving much importance to this fact. However, if Gordon Henry's strategy was implicit in the first five stories, now it becomes explicitly obvious. In the first place the reader is presented with a book within a book, not through a quote or literary discussion, but through the transcription of long excerpts, which echoes the structure of the several stories of the novel. Moreover, it is not an existing bibliographical reference. The book within the book is of Gordon Henry's authorship. Within the oral tradition of storytelling, stories do not belong to people, but people belong to stories.

The link between the previous story and the present one is established by Oshawa's uncle, who chooses this particular book to read and which the reader will follow through Oshawa's uncle's eyes. The reader can almost feel the magic of the book through the description provided: “The first book I picked up drew me in with its cover. It looked like

birch bark, but it felt like leather. And in the center of the simulated tree bark, there was a black-and-white portrait of an evidently mixed-blood man in an oval frame” (Henry, 48). With Bombarto Rose’s words, the reader is presented with musings, preface, prose and drama, all of which successfully intertwine in presenting the problematic of mixed-blood Indians, as the title of the story had already indicated. Mixed blood obviously refers to those of both Euro-American and Native American descent and the implications this has on a person’s life. Being mixed-blood means to belong genetically to two worlds without really belonging to either of them. As has been pointed out before, the search for identity makes up a major issue in Native American culture and literature and when one particular identity finds itself divided between two differing worlds, the search becomes even more confusing and complicated. Taken to a higher level, the same problematic situation may present itself in other contexts: Indian children adopted by non-native families or the situation of urban Indians, among others. In these cases the question relies not so much on mixed-blood origins, but on the need to acquire spiritual balance within the two worlds. One particular example is given by Mary Black Bonnet:

I live in two worlds. I was born an American Indian but removed from my birth mother when I was eighteen months old and placed in a non-native home, where I was raised within an entirely different culture. (...) So, I grew up in that life that was “so much better” than the poverty I came from, the “savageness” I had been saved from. (13)

Another approach is presented by Wiley Steve Thornton:

We have to live in two worlds. In the Native American world, our relatives surround us. We are related to everything. We walk upon our Grandmother Earth, the “Sacred One” and we address the sun as “Grandfather”. We live where we bless ourselves every day. Where everything we do has a meaning. We listen to our elders and sing the old songs. Our ceremonies take place throughout the year. Everything we do begins with a prayer to the Creator. We are always on Indian time and there is plenty of joking and good Indian food to eat.

But we also have to exist in the non-Native world. A place where we have to dress in a certain way, go by clock time, and always are serious at work. A place where money is all that counts with how much we earn and how we earn it. (36)

Thus, Bombarto Rose's musings are to be taken literally within the context of different genetic origins, but may also be transposed to the problematic of simultaneous or sequenced exposure to two differing cultures.

In literal terms, the question of mixed-bloodedness resides in the mixture of Native American and non-Native blood. Given this, Bombarto Rose's musings concentrate on the question of blood itself. As he explains:

I've metaphorically cut myself to study such blood under the microscope of human relations in human communities. To understand that study one must first understand that blood is both red and white. These interactive cells fight off disease, coagulate at the skin's surface, oxygenate the physical aspect, and frequent the mineral marrow of the same aspect (Henry, 48-49)

Although Bombarto Rose seems to speak in scientific terms, referring to the red and white blood cells, the metaphorical significance of his words is evident. The blood of a mixed-blood is both red (Indian) and white (non-Native), indicating that Native and White origins are inescapably present. Acceptance and adaptation are key words to this novel. Furthermore, through Bombarto Rose, Gordon Henry also establishes the idea that two different cultural sets do not necessarily exclude each other. In what becomes the most interesting and profound invocation of the number four in the novel, Bombarto Rose establishes a four-pair relationship between the four elements and the human body, arguing that "blood conveys and infuses the basic elements of creation – mineral (earth), oxygen (air), impulse (fire), and liquid (water) – in its force and flow" (Henry, 49). In his musings he develops the idea further:

If the admixture of earth, air, fire, and water in human form is receptive to the admixture of blood in the resonances of the admixture of animal and human brain, then what happens to the impulse? Does the human receptor in its mineral density conduct the electrical flash so completely in the brain that the whole impulse is swallowed up by the physical form at the time the human thought is transmitted? Or is the conductor weak, and thus only a small portion of the impulse arrives at the point of thought – like a train with more seats than passengers, or like a luminous stone white canoe with an infant orphan passenger who has no language for arrival or departure? Or is there another ground, an external ground which accepts and holds the message outside of the body of

thought which produced the impulse? (...) No such luck. I promptly abandoned the project and returned to the reservation mission where my illegitimate father still lived among other religious fathers. (Henry, 49-50)

Abandoning the project and meeting his father constitutes Bombarto Rose's impulse, the very one he was not able to explain. The mere reference to an "illegitimate father" (Henry, 50), who was also a "Father" (Henry, 51) opens the way to the discussion on the hypocrisy of Western/Christian sets of values. As Bombarto Rose's father says, when narrating how he met Bombarto's mother, "passion flowered between us; love carried me into the abyss no holy father must enter" (Henry, 51), but he did.

This meeting with his father moves Bombarto forward to a new intention: "to quit philosophizing on blood and human nature and thought (Henry, 51-52). He decides to examine himself "in a variety of forms" (Henry 52), considering his father as "a natural source for the information and ideas" (Henry, 52) he needed. So, Bombarto meets with his father for a second time, which does not exactly turn out as he expected:

"Listen," I said as I approached, "you can hear the earth changing. The memory of an old seed [Jake Seed] sings in these gray winds, coveting a spring of anticipations, quieting a summer recollection."

"Ah, but the heart of the wintering bird still beats at the same place in the same land," he said.

Then I knew the war was on. I came to the man for information and he engaged me in philosophical dialogues, in poetic musings with all of the eastern and western syncopations, juxtapositions, trophy-hunting tropes two word-wielding angles could muster in the necessary competitive encounters between father and son. (Henry, 52)

Gordon Henry's strategy of continuously crossing the boundaries of literary form meets one of its high points in Bombarto's explanation that "the following poems, aphorisms, metaphors, and discourse fragments represent in language and simulated thought personal recollections and manipulated results of the encounter" (Henry, 52).

The encounter itself is physically arranged within the dramatic text, divided into seven parts: "Father's Prologue", "Son's Prologue", "The Father's First Response", "The Son's First Response", "The Father's Response to the Son's First Response", "The Son's

Response to the Father's Second Response" and "The Father's Final Response". The number seven constitutes, along with the sacred number four, a recurring numeric reference, as has been also pointed out before regarding the number of stories in the novel ($28 = 4 \times 7$), and keeps appearing in hidden references, as if to prepare the reader for some important event related to it. The seven parts referred to make up a very interesting juxtaposition of two differing views of the world, the father representing the non-Native view and the son representing the Native one. Curiously, the final response is the father's, but there is nothing final about it. It is the lack of a response, the choice to discuss no further and ignore:

Let us argue of such form
in a form neither of us knows so well.
Let us argue in each other's absence.

Then the old father rose and entered the back door of the mission church, to prepare for another mass. And I was on my own again to begin again. (Henry, 58)

The search for identity implies knowing where one comes from in order to discover where to go. That is Bombarto Rose's trail.

"The Autobiographical Profile of Bombarto Rose: An Essay on Personal Origins"

Another kind of seed

Bombarto Rose's new beginning materializes within an autobiographical essay; "An Essay on Personal Origins". The starting words of the essay "I am" (Henry, 59) indicate that he has come to terms with at least some aspects of his identity: "I am of two names of two people" (Henry, 59), meaning that Bombarto has accepted that the blood in his veins is both red and white. As the reader has already learned, Bombarto's father was a missionary, "who set forth on the land of the reservation to lead Native people to accept and adhere to the teachings of his particular Christian orientation" (Henry, 59). His mother was Anishinabe of the Crane clan. To a certain extent, Bombarto's parents represent the spiritual orientation of both cultures/worlds, which becomes even more interesting and

intriguing with the fact that “the union of these two people occurred outside the force and the sway of the culture systems their lives engendered to that point (Henry, 59). Similarly to the previous story, Bombarto appears linked to the word “seed” and “from seed, people saw me as a secret, but they treated me as a rumor” (Henry, 59).

Bombarto moves on to the analysis of other factual and graspable information, such as the year of his birth and his name. He indicates 1944 as being the year of his birth. While he was in the process of taking his first breath “a military aircraft passing overhead, on its way to a South Dakota bombing range, accidentally dropped a bomb on the reservation. Fortunately, the bomb did not detonate. Still, the shell embedded into the earth, where it remains to this day unexploded” (Henry, 59). This event accounts for the word “bomb” in Bombarto. “The *-arto* part of that name stands for ‘are too’ (...) I am what happened on that day as well” (Henry 59-60). On a metaphorical level Bombarto, a representative of the mixed-blood, is a bomb waiting to explode any day. The manner in which mixed-bloods are perceived by Native and non-Native communities alike must change. This may be Gordon Henry’s way of stating that certain aspects have not yet been dealt with by Natives and non-Natives alike. Not dealing with issues may lead to a kind of apocalypse, if the reader perceives 1944 as the year preceding the dropping of the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. There are few references to dates and years throughout the novel, which increases their significance when they do appear. “As for the rose of my surname, that came from the people as well when they heard that on the day of my birth for the first four years of my life, someone left a rose at the tribal post office for my mother” (Henry, 60). Indirectly, Bombarto carries the name of his father, as he believed “the rose came from the mission – the only place where people grew flowers” (Henry, 60).

Upon his mother’s death Bombarto leaves the reservation for the cities, where he spends some days “in mourning, in dreaming, on Franklin Street, in bars, drunk in a corral of flying faces, in housing projects” (Henry, 60). One of the few recollections he has of that time is the story of a “prisoner” passed on to him “in an urban Native village by an Anishinabe recruitment officer from a substantial university” (Henry, 60). The closing part of this story, as strange as it may seem, may be an indication of how things that are apparently paradoxes can exist together, as there can exist “an urban Native village” (Henry, 60).

“The Prisoner of Haiku”

The artistic warrior

In the work *Native American Studies* Clara Sue Kidwell and Alan Velie state that:

American Indian identity is based primarily in families, and the assault on Native families in the twentieth century has been a major policy issue for tribes. The historical assault on Indian families was explicit in the nineteenth-century federal policy of sending children to boarding schools, where they were to be stripped of their tribal identity, forbidden to speak their tribal languages, and changed into models of American citizens. The boarding school policy had significant implications for Indian identity. Native languages declined as English became the common language of couples who met in boarding schools and married. Students indoctrinated in the assimilationist policy of the boarding school chose not to teach their languages to their children. (77-78)

This is the problematic that Gordon Henry addresses in this particular story. The Prisoner of Haiku is Oshawa’s father. He is a non-conformist, who would not let himself be tamed by white people. The Prisoner of Haiku further introduces the problematic of boarding schools as a means of repression and extermination of all things native. Although the prisoner “never saw himself as a prisoner” (Henry, 61), the boarding school was his first prison in the Western sense. The same set of values based on the ideals of freedom for all repressed the prisoner in his use of native language, which can be seen in the fact that “a few teachers in the school didn’t like the way he continuously spoke his own native language in school, so they punished him” (Henry, 61). Forcing the boy to use the colonizer’s language was an attempt to subdue him to a whole different set of values, rules and cultural references, so that he would deny his own. The punishment seems to be successful:

Two strong men with the force of God and Jesus, who knows what else, dragged him outside on a bitter wind-chilled Minnesota day and tied him to an iron post. They left him then without food, without water, through the night. Somehow the men believed that the force of the cold, the ice hand of winter, would reach out and take the boy by the throat and silence his native language. (...) The screaming

went on all night, and in the morning, on a bright winter day, when the school fathers went out to untie him, the boy could speak no more. No matter how fiercely or how often they beat him, the boy would not, could not speak. (Henry, 61-62)

Nevertheless, the teachers' victory is only an apparent one, since "the boy couldn't speak English either" (Henry, 62). The long winter night leaves its mark on the boy:

When he opened his mouth to try, less than a whisper stirred air in an inaudible act of diminished physical volition. Boys who were close to him then said that though they heard nothing, they felt something: a coolness floated out of his mouth and went directly to their ears to the point where – the boys claimed – their hearing was frozen in time. (...) Moreover, boys who went to the same boarding school, years later, testified to hearing Native words whirling up with every snow from sundown to sunrise in their winters at that place. (Henry, 62)

To some extent the childhood story of the prisoner is the story of Native American peoples, subjected to all kinds of repression and oppression techniques and also a specific criticism of the boarding-school system, used from the 19th century well into the 20th century as a means of deculturating Indian children. Thus, the boarding school teachers applied the same strategy to the boy that the American government applied to Native Americans: they sent him to the reservation. In the Western sense the reservation would constitute the boy's second prison, as he was not considered fit for the civilized world, but, in the Native sense, he is now free from oppression. In the reservation "he became a silent man of hands, a sculptor, then a political artist, an invidious communicator of visual forms" (Henry, 62). The prisoner further extends his art to sabotage which "was never performed without the grace and idealism of an artist" (Henry, 63).

In all, the prisoner sets seven fires, which constitutes a renewed reference to the number seven in the novel. Only this time its meaning is somewhat disclosed to the reader: seven are the fires and the prophecies of the Anishinabe people. On the night of his seventh fire, "on the night in which the flames reached up, exploding bottles, licking the dark with colors and room cracklings, on the night people gathered to see in the flames an old lodge, ancestors within the lodge" (Henry, 63), Oshawa's father is arrested by the FBI:

What could he do? Speak in his own defense? Nod his head with his hand on the Bible and convey the truth in a series of still life's, or antlered sculptures, for a jury who didn't understand his artistic aims? For a jury who had been selected by two lawyers, one of whom would represent him without knowing what he could say? He resorted to one last symbolic act. (Henry, 63)

Just as the prisoner, for a long time Native American people had no voice in Western courts. He goes to prison after a one-week trial. Still not being able to speak, the prisoner continues to engage in other means of communication and “for years prison meant a series of drawings to this artistic warrior” (Henry, 64). Oshawa's father represents the new Indian. Adaptation is the word, and Gordon Henry suggests that the new Native American weapon is art and the new Native American warrior is “the artistic warrior” (Henry, 64). That is the generation of the Seventh Fire.

Later, within the process of inmate education, the prisoner becomes familiar with Oriental poetry, namely Haiku. The professor forwards his works and tries to free him from prison, but, once again, the reader watches the system in action:

“The unusual nature of the man's crime,” she was informed by the prison board, “stems from his unusual methods of producing forms which illustrate his personal conceptions of beauty, and to release him on the basis of his ability to produce beautiful words might reinforce his use of art to commit philosophically grounded crime.” (Henry, 64-65)

Nevertheless, the prisoner has achieved his ultimate means of communication, for the professor had been able to establish a connection in which “he could write haiku and they could be like dream songs for him; a culturally, politically appropriate act could be generated in a foreign form, from language to language, image to form” (Henry, 65), which is precisely what Gordon Henry achieves with this novel. Some time later, “through a cultural coup, a group of Native advocates for religious freedom convinced state prison authorities to allow Native spiritual leaders to come into the prison and conduct traditional ceremonies” (Henry, 65-66). The prisoner attends all ceremonies, although his prayers are silent. Throughout the ceremonies the prisoner expresses the wish to speak again and so a circle of healing ceremonies begins. In fact, “after three more ceremonies he spoke, but the words were brief and breath soft” (Henry, 66), although “apparently, the healing wasn't

complete” (Henry, 66). Though the prisoner spoke, he did so “only in haiku and dream songs” (Henry, 67).

Bombarto Rose sets out to find the prisoner and eventually meets him on the reservation, after he was given parole. Bombarto tells him he wants to collect his writings in a book, to which the prisoner replies:

When the Church bells ring
the road to Rush Lake breaks off
one cold crow calls there. (Henry, 68)

On the next day the prisoner gave Bombarto “a birchbark bundle and walked away on the road to the old grave houses” (Henry, 68). The birchbark bundle is significant in the sense that, as Clara Sue Kidwell and Alan Velie point out, “incised birchbark scrolls helped Midewiwin practitioners among the Ojibwa to remember the sequence of the origin stories that were recited during their ceremonies.” (91). As Bombarto Rose mentions at the beginning of this story, the prisoner “carries another name” (Henry, 61) and that name is Elijah Cold Crow, the one who calls “when the church bells ring” (Henry, 68) and the one whose haiku recalls the origin stories.

“Haiku and Dream Songs of Elijah Cold Crow”

Dreams and visions

The ninth story is told by Elijah Cold Crow, through Bombarto Rose, in the only manner he is able to communicate: haiku and dream songs. According to The Haiku Society of America, the official definition for Haiku (established in 1973 and revised in 2004) is “a short poem that uses imagistic language to convey the essence of an experience of nature or the season intuitively linked to the human condition.” Gordon Henry believes that:

It gives you a form and a structure to work with, but at the same time it’s geared toward the type of poem I like to write anyway. Even my other poetry, which is not haiku, still has this feel for imagery and short, very brief passages

of images. You know they're sometimes packed together. And so that's a particular form I like because it makes you look at a particular space and moment and try somehow to apply that to a larger universal feeling, if that's the right way of saying it. That's why I like haiku. It's something brief and arresting, without conscious commentary, with less mind, that you have to look at. It's a kind of little art form in its own way. (Flys, 171)

As for the similarities between haiku and some Native American traditions or dreamsongs, which Gordon Henry joins together in the title of the story, he acknowledges that:

A personal vision or a particular moment you carry with you lives there. Sometimes you don't write the haiku down right away. And many of the ones that I've written in *The Light People* have been inside for a long time and so I just needed a form or I found a form to put them all in. So they are very much like dreamsongs, but they may not have the same spiritual significance. (Flys, 173)

This story's aim is to transmit the essence of the artistic warrior's experience. The images that are created by Elijah's dream songs mean to speak not to the rational mind, but to the metaphorical one, which will find, throughout the dream songs, references to stories past and yet to come. Among them, the reader may be able to recognize references to Elijah's life, such as the "ice face at dawn", "moon songs in a cell" or flammables in air sculptured moment to moment" (Henry, 69). Further references may be related to Elijah's parents: his mother, "an old woman cries son" and his father, who "slept with crow once" (Henry, 70). The "uncle [who] returns from Vietnam" (Henry, 71) is a reference to Franklin Squandum, Mary Squandum's brother, that is, Oskinaway's uncle. Elijah also mentions facts related to Native American history when mentioning the signing of the treaties with

Signatures, names, the
undersigned, with marks and lines
anglicized in print.

Clan leaders, head men
scripted identities so
many with an x. (Henry 73)

Elijah further recalls the memory of Arthur Boozhoo's sister, while the "smell of autumn smoke / trachoma drags away a child / in a fevered village" (Henry, 74), and of Moses Four Bears' leg, when "winter lasts and kills / and graves can't be dug / by ordinary hands / with ordinary shovels" (Henry, 74). The final haikus establish a direct reference to Oskinaway:

A boy painted himself
white and ran into a river

A boy painted himself black
and fasted out in the sun

A boy painted himself
yellow and rolled in the mud

A boy painted himself
red and white and black and yellow

Crossing Wind's stick is
invisible at the Megis Lake drum

Abetung he who
Inhabits his X mark
In the presence of _____. (Henry, 75)

Furthermore, the above haiku presents another perspective Gordon Henry has on this poetic form:

We have to keep remembering the people of our families who have passed away – since they may have dreamed us. And that's where I see the haiku too, going back to that; it remembers those moments in time, to bring them back and give them another kind of force. (Flys, 173-174)

“Bombarto Rose: Essay on Parameters of Residence”

X marks the spot

Elijah’s dream songs finish with a reference to Abetung (Oskinaway’s father) “who inhabits his X mark” (Henry, 75). To inhabit the X mark means inhabiting the land of the ancestors, stolen with treaties by the colonizers and sometimes restored by those same treaties. These treaties, or “parameters of residence” (Henry, 75), are the subject of Bombarto Rose’s present reflections. According to Bombarto “the signature X signifies a validating name or the validation of the document” (Henry, 75), especially for those not familiar with the written (English) language, as was the case for most Native American treaty signers. Bombarto proceeds to define a treaty as “parameters governing behaviour and space” (Henry, 76), which leads to the apparent conclusion “that the X represents an agreement to the proposed parameters” (Henry, 76). The keyword is “apparent” as Bombarto will demonstrate in his further analysis. What seems to be indicated through this story is that the American government never had any intention of respecting the treaties it signed with Native American peoples. Wondering on the artificial notion of time, Bombarto concludes that “a known event marked in a historical moment must validate an unknown future based on an incomplete, open-ended (at most), multifaceted (at least) continuum known as time” (Henry, 76). Consequently, it is this particular notion of time which allows for the non-compliance with the treaties by the American government:

Moreover, articles of the document specify behavior on the part of one validating party. Yet in many cases this behavior is subject to invalidation at some unknown point by some future unknown personality who represents a possible end to that behavior, “subject to the discretion of the president.” In addition, outside the scope of additional possibilities for invalidation of the document, other parties have gathered an implicit presence in the document in that the representatives of the validating authority, on one hand, in fact represent a legal appendage of the highest initiators of law for the validating authority. The time continuum, then, can be cut through by the power of one validating party and thus deny the continuance of specified behavior delineated by the articles of the document. (Henry, 76-77)

In this way Bombarto finishes his analysis of one validating party of the treaties,

the American government, and proceeds to that of the other, the Native Americans, for whom “behavior is most apparently limited to refusal to fight and residence in designated space or parameters of residence” (Henry, 77), that means, reservations. Confining Native Americans to one designated place means that “the artificial residential parameters set out by the document create a boxlike effect” (Henry, 78). Nevertheless,

The validating party represented by the X signators may reside in the box of words for a while, but their resourcefulness and their refusal to be limited by the box space will probably generate deeper, more expansive interpretations of the articles of the document. Some of the words were not confinable to the parameters of residence; the box could not hold in words or behavior. Yet many of the residents of the box are identified according to the space of the validating document. This leads to the concept of the artificial parameters of a metaphorical residence. (Henry, 78-79)

What Bombarto is trying to convey is that the Native American concept of space or place is not a physical or geographical one. Space becomes holy not through its boundaries but because it carries memories and experiences of generations, “since each generation understands and learns to live off the natural and metaphysical bounty of the space” (Henry, 79). Thus Bombarto considers a treaty to be “abstract, a function of the language, of a historical moment which is rarely referred to except to retain rights to holy space or identification with the space” (Henry, 79). Bombarto’s conclusion indicates that Native American peoples have used and will continue to use the treaties for one purpose only: to regain their rights to the land in the territory of the colonizer - the court room.

“Bombarto Rose: A Note to Hold the Eyes”

Circling the X

Somehow Oshawa’s uncle’s statement from the fifth story that “as a people we can’t be killed” (Henry, 42) now becomes clear in this story. Native American peoples cannot be killed because they are constantly being pushed forward by what Bombarto calls “the dream X” (Henry, 80), the dream of residence on the land that once was theirs, the

dream of identity. That is Bombarto's vision of the truth he has been searching for and which he intends to pass on, as he promises Elijah Cold Crow:

“Cold Crow,” I said to the dead body, “I understand now your name. I understand the dream songs, the haiku attempts. I understand this frozen road; the words will come back. They will return from the air and re-form on distant lips.” (Henry, 80)

And although Elijah Cold Crow no longer has lips nor eyes, as “he was the subject of his own name, covered with winter crows feasting on his body” (Henry, 80) he still has his hands, which indicate Bombarto Rose the way to “A Final Dreamsong”, written on yellow notepaper. Cold Crow urges Native Americans to “make an x in the snow” (Henry, 81) on the place he died, “run down by a vehicle out of control” (Henry, 80). He was on that road to the town “to find a gun for my lips” (Henry, 81), but once again was silenced in the process. Nevertheless, Cold Crow manages a final wake-up call from the old ones to return to the old ways:

make a circle in the snow
a prayer offering of tobacco
make this place
a prayer place
to each of the four directions (Henry, 81)

As Elijah's mother explains in the next story, that particular place “rests on a high hill overlooking Megis Lake” (Henry, 85). Megis Lake is closely linked to the Anishinabe Story of Creation, in which the Creator breathed life into forms using a shell, which is called the Megis Shell, a sacred object in many of the Anishinabe rituals and ceremonies. The Story of Creation will again be brought to the reader's attention in “We the People”, the last story of the novel.

“Bombarto Rose: Winter Song”

Returning to the old ones and old ways

The Winter Song is the seventh of the stories in which Bombarto Rose is the narrator. As he states, “winter’s movement is the music of the sleepers” (Henry, 82) and the number seven is mild spring that will wake the sleepers, if understood within the Anishinabe Story of the Seven Fires. Thus Bombarto decides to take Cold Crow’s body, along with his own, out of the winter. Upon returning Cold Crow’s body to his mother, one of the old ones, Bombarto finds “a house of stories, a shelter from ice and wind” (Henry, 82), the same way Oshawa’s uncle had found shelter in the library, another house of stories. Although the Winter Song makes up for the smallest story of the novel, it is one of the most significant, as it discloses the formerly invisible trails for the Native American peoples, which require a renewed approach to Oshawa’s uncle’s failure. The winter ice is to be broken not with shovels but with stories. Stories are the keepers of collective memory and so Bombarto Rose sits “in a weak wooden chair near the wood stove” (Henry, 82) and rests his eyes as Cold Crow’s mother tells him a story.

“Old Woman Cold Crow’s Monologue on the Death of Her Son”

The gift of a story

Old Woman Cold Crow’s words are a monologue only because she speaks them without being interrupted by Bombarto Rose. In fact, she addresses Bombarto directly in the second part of the monologue. The first part is dedicated to her son, whose death does not seem to come as a surprise, as is further on confirmed by her statement that she knew her son “might come to this death” (Henry, 83). Although her son could not speak, in the sense previously explained, she calls him a storyteller, as if reminding herself and others that a story consists not only of words, but that it requires a whole set of conditions in order to be properly told. Thus, for some people strength does not come from words, but “from shapes, dead forms on windblown hills, dead forms in white ditches, descended upon by wild birds” (Henry, 83).

The reader learns that a stranger took Elijah away and realizes that another stranger

brought him back. Elijah was taken away by a white missionary “to the mission school” (Henry, 84) with the purpose of re-educating him within the Western and Catholic ways. Elijah was brought back by the mixed-blood son of a missionary, in search for his path. Old Woman Cold Crow informs Bombarto that he is searching at the wrong place and in the wrong way, as she says “I have nothing to give you” (Henry, 84) and that “in this man who lost his voice, in this man who turned silence to beauty, beauty to human action, you’ve found nothing but a form for your own search for some intellectual truth” (Henry, 84). In this sense, the search for identity does not reside in the intellectual or academic realm as “perhaps like him you have entered one too many schools (...) and you came out of such places looking for yourself or looking for a road to take you home” (Henry, 84-85).

Old Woman Cold Crow asks Bombarto for assistance in the burial of her son and the prayer offering on “a high hill overlooking Megis Lake” (Henry, 85). Although Old Woman Cold Crow stated before that she had nothing to give Bombarto, she offers him a payment for her request: “Take a story with you then. Consider it payment on a request” (Henry, 85). The introduction of the concept of a story as a payment for a task is simultaneously a new and very old one for the non-Native reader. Is it still possible to find ways of payment beyond money? If so, does that mean that Native Americans have not yet reached the stage of a market economy? What the reader must grasp is that, in terms of Native American culture, a story is the most valuable means of trade, because a story carries meanings, history, lessons, among so many other things.

“Old Woman Cold Crow’s Story as Payment to Bombarto Rose”

The gift of a sculpture

This story marks one of the highlights of the novel, both in content and arrangement. It is the fourteenth story of the novel, meaning the seventh story of the second set of seven stories. It is not only a payment to Bombarto Rose, but also a gift to the reader. It is the story of Abetung, “a young man’s father [who] liked to look at himself when he was young” (Henry, 86). The young man mentioned is Oskinaway, so at the end of the first half of the novel the reader’s trails again meet with Oskinaway’s, although he was never that far away. Abetung is described as having been exceptionally vain and

deceiving in his youth, since “when he was young and wild, he would go to water and pray, or so people thought. But no, he went to see himself reflecting on the surface of the water” (Henry, 86). The people in his community “felt he would grow beyond this interest in his own shape” (Henry, 86) and he eventually did, but, by then, no one noticed because “people grew accustomed to looking at him, looking at himself in a certain way” (Henry, 86). Thus:

Only he knew he wasn't seeing
the same thing he once saw.
He saw different things each time (...)
Sometimes he saw maps or words
and these created reflections for him. (Henry, 87)

Similarly to Arthur Boozhoo, Oskinaway and other characters in the novel, Abetung receives education from the exterior, “in an academy full of strangers [where] he learned to make sculptures” (Henry, 87), which he handed out in the village. One of these sculptures came into the possession of Old Woman Cold Crow, showing “a man on a red horse” (Henry, 87). In Abetung’s words “This sculpture tells a story” (Henry, 87) and the reader knows it does, because he/she was told about this story by Elijah Cold Crow:

The red horse eats
from blowing weeds in human
indulgence at dusk (Henry, 69)

The ultimate connection between Abetung, Oskinaway and Bombarto Rose, until now implicit in the novel, is that Bombarto Rose functions as a medium for the delivery of certain hints needed to clear Oskinaway’s path, as he becomes the recipient of certain stories, namely Elijah Cold Crow’s dream songs and the story of Abetung, Oskinaway’s father, told by Oshawa’s grandmother, Old Woman Cold Crow.

“Abetung’s Story”

Mary’s child

The Abetung that tells this story is not the vain Abetung of the beginning of Old Woman Cold Crow’s story. He is more mature and conscious of his responsibilities as the bearer of his family’s name, knowing that his “father was Abetung and his father was Abetung and so on back to the earliest inhabitants of this place. I tell it this way, so that these words will have weight in relation to the words they inhabit through the names of my relations” (Henry, 89). Another certainty is the fact that on his mother’s side “there are Seeds in the family, from a long time ago” (Henry, 89), which indicates two things: Abetung’s origins point to the origins of the Anishinabe (Anishinabe meaning first men) and he is most probably a descendant of the light people, due to his connection with the Seeds of the past. After introducing himself in this manner, Abetung introduces the sculpture and calls the reader’s attention to the fact that “the rider [of the horse] doesn’t really have control, and that is part of what the story means” (Henry, 89). Considering the title of this story, the reader is led to the understanding that the rider is Abetung and that, at one point in his life, he did lose control over a situation in which he should have showed more maturity. As the reader will find out, Abetung’s story is the story of Oskinaway’s conception.

In what constitutes one of the few concrete non-symbolic references in the novel, the story of Oskinaway’s conception literally starts with Abetung’s incapacity to dominate a horse belonging to Old Man Geeshis. Old Man Geeshis asked Abetung to “stay and take care of his house and feed his horse while he was gone” (Henry, 89), not without giving Abetung the warning that “whatever you do (...) don’t ride that horse” (Henry, 89). Needless to say, Abetung does the exact opposite and, a few days later, “hopped on its back” (Henry, 90). His recklessness causes him and the horse to have an accident on the frozen road. As Abetung tells, “it didn’t take long to understand we were stuck. The horse couldn’t move from the snow and I couldn’t get myself out from underneath the horse” (Henry, 90). The same frozen road causes another accident, this time involving a car, which “skidded out of control, whirled around on the road in a weird blend of chaotic lights and roaring metal, and smashed into the marsh just a few feet beyond us” (Henry, 90). From where he lies, Abetung sees a woman in the car. This is the account of how

Abetung met Oskinaway's mother, Mary Squandum. Both stuck, unable to engage in conversation, nevertheless they communicated for the whole night until, "at the sun's zenith, the intensity of our communication somehow turned into an attraction that I knew would save the both of us from freezing to death" (Henry, 91), to such an extent that Abetung saw himself "with this woman, dreamy-eyed, living out a long human life together" (Henry, 91-92). At one point of the day Abetung realizes the ice has melted enough for him to set himself free. He manages to reach the woman's car and saw that "there was another body in the car with her, draped across her legs unmoving" (Henry, 92). The body belongs to Franklin Squandum, her brother and Oskinaway's uncle, who had returned from Vietnam two years before and was visiting his sister the first time in four years. Eventually Abetung and Mary are found by Old Man Geeshis upon his return. He takes them to his house, where Abetung recalls being filled "with warm teas and bitter remedies I never caught the name of" (Henry, 93). On the one hand, Geeshis feels angry at losing his horse, but, on the other hand, he does not exclude the chance of things meant to be and "with that Geeshis left, and though I felt his anger and his disappointment at the loss of his horse, I also felt between his words a deeper knowledge that perhaps Mary wouldn't have survived if I hadn't taken his horse" (Henry, 94). Furthermore, Oskinaway would not have been born.

While Old Man Geeshis leaves to try to get Mary's brother out of the car, Abetung falls asleep and dreams of his childhood. A vision may come as a dream, and in his dream Abetung sees his past and his future seeds, "the boy alone at the bottom of the hill singing for another to come back" (Henry, 95). Abetung recalls that upon his awakening from his dream he "saw Mary Squandum on top of me, her tears reflecting fire in the open door of the wood stove streaming down her face. Through her passion, at that moment I felt every part of myself again. My legs came back to me" (Henry, 95). Such is the story of the conception of two boys: Oskinaway and his twin brother. Since his twin brother appears only in visions and dreams, it is safe to say that the twin brothers function as a metaphor for a divided self searching for wholeness. For Oskinaway finding his twin brother means finding his roots, his family and himself. Furthermore, as David Leeming and Jake Page argue:

Twins are a favorite motif in Native American mythology as well. Sometimes they are fathered by the sun – especially in the Southwest – and sometimes by

the original culture hero. In either case they usually do some of the work of creation. Often – especially among the northern tribes – the mother of the twins dies at their birth. In many cases the twins go in search of their divine father. While it is true that the twins sometimes reflect the duality of the world, it must be said that in many Indian cultures they simply represent the existence of two moieties, or socioreligious subdivisions, in the tribe. (153)

“Geeshis”

Unfinished trails

This short story narrated by Old Man Geeshis is a description of the scene of the accidents upon his return to recover Franklin Squandum’s body from the car. As he recalls, “I know that when you leave a place and return again the place changes, but when I went back I was not ready for such a change” (Henry, 96). Somehow the description that follows resembles Elijah Cold Crow’s death scene, as he had been “run down by a vehicle out of control” (Henry, 80) and Bombarto Rose found him “frozen in a ditch, beyond wild wheel tracks” (Henry, 80). The reader also has the information that Elijah Cold Crow died on “a high hill overlooking Megis Lake” (Henry, 85). There are such similarities that the reader may be led to believe that Mary Squandum, when losing control over the car, accidentally killed Elijah Cold Crow. Similarly to Elijah’s death, where his eyes and lips had been eaten by winter crows, Old Man Geeshis’s horse becomes a victim of the “scavengers [who] had flown down and circled around the body of the dead horse” (Henry, 96). Nevertheless, Franklin’s body seems to, at the same time, complete Elijah’s body (missing eyes and lips), since “only an eye and a corner of the mouth were in sight in the fading sun” (Henry, 96) and:

that one open eye gazed out into the twilight, still specked with a semblance of light that I believed let it see on after death, until the light cast further into belief of the death of a man who used the light to make the mind see whatever it was Squandum saw in his lighted world. (Henry, 96)

After saying goodbye to the horse, Old Man Geeshis drives to town “to tell the sheriff about a dead man in a sinking car on the road to Megis Lake” (Henry, 97). As it seems, and

once again similarly to Elijah Cold Crow, Franklin Squandum has also failed to walk the whole way to Megis Lake, to the very heart of the Anishinabe spirit.

“Franklin Squandum’s Death Dream: A Mini-Drama for Native Dancers”

The Nest and the Mind

Contrarily to what the title may lead the reader to believe, Franklin Squandum’s death dream is not about his death. As the reader also has no access to information regarding the time the dream took place, it is logical to assume that this story is about the death of someone or something else. The story reveals a ceremonial approach in that, on the one hand, it has been written for Native dancers and on the other, in that it is divided into four scenes. Furthermore, in this mini-drama the sacred number four is referred to in the Anishinabe language when referring to the grandfathers and grandmothers: “Grandfather Beshig”, “Grandmother Neezh”, “Grandfather Nissway” and “Grandmother Neewin” (Henry, 110-111). The number seven is present as well, since this death dream has to be read along with knowledge of The Seven Fires Prophecies of the Anishinabe (Annex 1). In short, the Seven Fires refer to Seven Prophecies given to the Anishinabe people. Each prophecy represents a new stage in the life of the Anishinabe people. The first prophet talks about the Midewiwin Lodge, the second one talks of the birth of a boy and the third one warns the people about the Great Migration. The fourth fire consists of two prophecies, both based on the arrival of the white man, the fulfilment of each depending on how the white man will approach the people. The fifth prophet calls the attention to the false promises of the white people and the sixth foresees internal fighting over which direction to take: the white ways or the old ways. The seventh and final fire is a prophecy of hope, pointing to the generation of the seventh fire as the generation who will rediscover the old ways and keep the people alive. Oskinaway is of that seventh generation, which becomes evident through the joint reading of a passage from The Seven Fires Prophecies of the Anishinabe (related to the Sixth Fire and to the hiding of the scrolls and sacred bundles in the hollowed out log of a tree, to later be discovered by a little boy who would see it in his dreams) and a passage from the mini-drama. The coming of the

seventh generation, in the body of Oskinaway, represents the metaphorical death of the generation of the sixth fire, the one in which “the cup of life almost spilled” (Annex 1). As foreseen by the sixth prophet “it was said that when the time came that the Indian people could practice their religion without fear that a little boy would dream where the Ironwood log, full of the Sacred Bundles and Scrolls were buried” (Annex 1). The boy’s dream is Franklin Squandum’s Death Dream, because that is when Oskinaway is told how to recover the bundles and scrolls.

Within the greater significance of the mini-drama each one of the four scenes also refers to a particular metaphorical death. Scene one represents the death of the deed, that is, the rights to claim Indian land are not as evident and certain as they used to be, as the reading of many court session transcripts may indicate. Scene one presents two characters: a Native dancer and a white man on a white horse. The man is indirectly described as being authoritative and apparently superior, as he looks down on the dancer from the height his horse lends him. The conversation that takes place between both is a battle of words on the question of rightful ownership of land. The white man presents a deed, the Native dancer presents arguments:

Dancer: Are you sure you aren’t lost?

Man: Of course I’m sure.

Dancer: Look around. Does anything look familiar to you? Do you see anything in this place that you recognize?

Man: I see surveyor’s flags. I see potential. I see a corner quick mart, a place where tourists can buy gas, fill huge Styrofoam containers with cool green liquid. A place where children can find a candy bar, where worried mothers can buy aspirin, nonaspirin for feverish kids. A place where short-sighted vacationers can locate matches, paper towels, toilet paper. I see more: the whole lakeshore lined with cottages, a golf course inland, tennis courts. Simple pleasures born of the fruits of years of labor, here in paradise. I’ll call it... Rainbow’s End... the Land of the Holy Mackerel... Columbus Garden. This land has potential.

Dancer: You’re lost.

Man: I am not lost! This is my land. I own it; my father bought it.

(Henry 101)

The calmness of the native dancer exasperates the white man, who calls the police,

screaming on the phone. The Native American is able to destabilize the white world. The second scene represents the near death of Oskinaway/the seventh generation. A police officer appears ordering the dancers and the drummers to stop, as he is accompanied by the “owner” of the property, the white man with the deed. They interrupt the story the drums are telling to “convene in a small circle” (Henry, 106), reminiscent of tribal meetings. When the meeting is finished, one old man orders the drum to “continue the story” (Henry, 106). Within the confusion that sets in, as the police officer wants to arrest everybody, the deed ends up in the hand of a young boy, who takes refuge on the top of a tree, taking cover in a nest. The young boy turns out to be Oskinaway, the one able to recover the Indian’s right to the land. In an attempt to convince the boy to come down from the tree, the police officer prepares to fire “a couple of shots up that way” (Henry, 109). The scene ends with Oskinaway and the fancy dancer who stole the deed from the head officer and handed it to Oskinaway being wounded by the shots.

In scene three the boy finds himself on the ground and notices that “the nest is on the ground upside-down, behind him” (Henry, 109) as described in Roses Meekwa Geeshik’s painting “The Nest and the Mind”. Upon re-entering the nest, the boy finds a door which he passes, following “the movement of the eagle” (Henry, 110). Oskinaway will receive a message from the sacred four: Grandfather Beshig (one), Grandmother Neezh (two), Grandfather Nissway (three) and Grandmother Neewin (four). Number one introduces the boy to those long dead, the old ones, the ancestors. Number two tells the boy to bury the deed, returning it to the earth, meaning that land belongs to land and not to people. Number three promises “something to replace the paper” (Henry, 111); while number four gives the boy his final instructions:

Think and pray when you are inside the nest. When it has fallen from the tree, rest there inside for a moment. Think and pray. You will fall near another tree. Put the paper in a hole beneath the tree at the place where an animal has dug. It will be there when you fall. Cover the hole with leaves. Then, when the men have gone, bury the paper again in another place, in the lot near the cemetery at Four Bears. There we will give you something to replace the paper. (Henry, 111)

As the dancers lead the boy away “he passes Franklin Squandum, the fancy dancer who was shot in the shuffle” (Henry, 111). In scene four the death is of a tree, the one the boy

was in. The boy asks the old man where he is, to which the old man answers: “At the dance ground, Oskinaway. You were in the tree” (Henry, 112). Thus, the boy’s identity is finally revealed to the reader. As foreseen the deed is not found on the boy, the white man’s anger and impotence being muffled by the honor song for the dancer and the warning that “the sun will give a report” (Henry 113).

“Squandum’s Funeral”

The Deer Hunter

As indicated by the title, this story is a description of Franklin Squandum’s funeral: the wake, the ceremony supervised by Jake Seed, the digging of Squandum’s grave, the singing, the mass, the procession, the burial and the folding of the flag. Squandum’s funeral is simultaneously Native and Western, harmoniously joining elements of both, both being equally carefully described. Gordon Henry’s narrative is interrupted only by “The Deer Story”, which is told by Mary Squandum during the time it takes the procession to reach the burial ground. Nonetheless, the burial ends with an ironic note “as Nodin hands Squandum’s mother another efficiently folded triangulated flag” (Henry, 119); as if for the government another death meant as much as another flag. The funeral itself is also interrupted, not by a story but by the appearance of a deer which “runs away with the flag draped over it, swimming off into the distance with it” (Callahan, David, 195). As David Callahan notes “this curious event is one of the numerous events in the novel that subvert the intended direction of events, rendering society’s conventions less stable and more liable to the disturbances of the uncontrollable, the wild” (195). According to Bobby Lake-Thom, “deer are good powers and can be messengers in many different ways” (87). The reader can not but relate this story with the movie *The Deer Hunter* (dir. Michael Cimino, 1978), which addresses issues such as (the Vietnam) war and its effects, violence, patriotism and manipulation while exploring the concepts of ethnicity, family, friendship and community. In this the movie and this story are similar. A parallelism is drawn between Franklin Squandum and Nick. Nick and his friends, Steven and Mike, fight in the Vietnam War, as do Franklin and his friend Nodin. Mike survives Nick, as Nodin survives Franklin. Both Franklin and Nick are deer hunters and they do not die in the war, but in the

aftermath of war: Franklin dies in the car accident, Nick dies playing Russian roulette. Again, both belong to ethnic minorities: Franklin is Native American, Nick is Russian-American. The film ends with Nick's funeral and the focus on the surviving friends, Steve and Mike, while the story ends with Franklin's funeral and focuses on Franklin's surviving friend Nodin. In the same way Nick's body is brought back to America by his friend Mike, Franklin finds his final rest on the reservation both as a Native American and as "another efficiently folded triangulated flag" (Henry, 119). This comparison drawn, ethnic minorities seem to only be worthy of consideration from the government (symbolized by the flag) when needed (for war) or when dead, and being able to draw such a comparison means that the repression of Native Americans was not a mistake or misjudgment. The lesson History teaches is that minorities survive through their communities and the maintenance of a certain heritage.

“Requiem for a Leg”

Missa pro defunctis

In her essay on the politics of cultural appropriation as presented in *the Light People*, Maureen Salzer states that:

In this novel Henry enacts a critique and replacement of received notions of Indian cultures and people; this critique establishes new and culturally sensitive stories about Native realities that replace the stimulated dominant culture representations of Native people with which most readers are familiar.

(38)

“Requiem for a Leg” completes another circle within the circle of the novel. The leg the title refers to is Moses Four Bears' leg, the one which Oshawa's uncle could not bury in the ice during the storm and put on the top of a tree, hoping to bury it the next day, after the storm had calmed down. According to Salzer, the story of the leg is “a tale that questions the assumptions and basis of Western knowledge systems and seeks to replace those with a Native reality based upon natural reasons. Four Bears' leg is a metonym of loss, return, and renewal” (38). At this point the reader does not yet know whether

Oshawa's uncle did as he intended or not, as the story Oshawa was telling Rose left Oshawa's uncle in the library reading the musings of Bombarto Rose. Thus, the reader has no idea of what to expect from this story and is by now getting used to being surprised. The first surprise comes from the title itself, as a requiem for a leg seems excessive. A requiem, in Catholic terms, implies prayers for the salvation of the soul, so that a requiem for a leg will sound strange to a non-Native, but maybe not so strange for a Native. Or is Gordon Henry himself playing the trickster towards the reader, with the idea of a leg having a requiem sounding strange to both the Native and non-Native reader? The requiem is either celebrated before a burial or on occasions of more general remembrance. As the reader does not know yet if Oshawa's uncle has managed to bury the leg or not, he/she will start the story with a degree of expectation and will not be defrauded by the author. "Requiem for a Leg" and the following two stories are probably the highlights of the representation of Native American humour expressed in the novel: ironic, sharp and to the point. As Salzer points out:

Henry wishes to dismantle some of the dominant culture's assumptions about Native communities and individuals. One way he does this is by presenting a view from inside the Ojibwa community, a view that counters romantic and nostalgic assumptions made by outsiders. This choice of perspective re-establishes what may be called in ethnographic turns an emic or insider viewpoint and gives voice to the community whose voice has been silenced under colonialism. Another way Henry counters the simulations is by using humor to counteract methods of oppression. Through these and other narrative strategies, Henry calls into question the received images of Ojibwa people and their lives. (38-39)

The story begins with Oshawa on a school trip visiting a museum, which is famous for an "authentic leg preserved in dry ice" (Henry, 120). In his young innocent ignorance of the old ways, Oshawa wonders if the burial of Moses Four Bears' leg was a common practice and if every village kept a story about such a leg (Henry, 120). He looks at the plaque displayed next to the leg on the wall, which read:

An Ojibway leg, circa 1880-1940. Though it
is not known why the leg was left like this,

some scholars believe burying a leg in full ceremonial legging was a common practice in the reservation period. (Henry, 121)

Salzer argues that “as with many artifacts that were appropriated from native communities, the leg has been assigned a meaning and a place in the museum. Henry asserts that victimization has happened at least twice, once in the appropriation of cultures’ objects and again in the display of those objects” (42). Acting on an instinct, Oshawa interrogates his uncle about the story of the leg he had told him and whether the descendents of Moses Fours Bears would be able to recognize the leg. From the start, the reader is led to the impression that Oshawanung, Oshawa’s uncle, is not too happy about his nephew’s words. First of all, the reader learns that the story of the leg is one that Oshawanung chose to remain a secret, only having told it to Oshawa on a night he had drunk too much. The second hint is given by his address to Sonny Four Bears, Moses’s son, when he tells him “what if the leg *is* your father’s leg? How will you get it back? How will you prove that the leg belonged to your father? Those people will fight you on this” (Henry, 123). At this point, the reader becomes aware of the fact that there might be another, second, story about the leg, a story Oshawanung has not told yet. On the other hand, using the extraordinary example of a leg, Gordon Henry thus addresses the question of cultural appropriation and the Native’s resignation, through Oshawanung’s words, that nothing can be done to recover their lands and their artefacts, that is, their culture. But the younger generation is more confident and Oshawa takes Sonny to the museum:

When he reached the place where the leg hung on the wall, he knew immediately that the leg was his father’s leg. So he took out his camera and shot picture after picture of the frozen leg. He shot partial photos of the moccasin, the legging, the plaque next to the display. (Henry, 123-124))

Sonny is divided about what to do, as he wonders about the fact that “some aimless Indian politician with a bad blend of education and self-righteousness would view the leg as an issue not of the family but of all Indian people across the whole uninvolved country” (Henry, 124). In Salzer’s words:

Outsiders, Native or not, are perceived by Sonny to be as likely to follow their own

political agenda as to advocate for the rights of the Four Bears Family. The imagined “aimless Indian politician” is a character for whom Sonny must be on the lookout. Through his awareness of the mixed nature of the help that may come from outside, Sonny chooses to take responsibility for the leg himself. Henry argues here for the local application of statutes such as NAGPRA [Native America Grave Protection and Repatriation Act] and for self-determination by local communities based upon local knowledge. (49)

Sonny considers burning the photos, but he ends up mailing “the photos out to Willow (...) Willow only confirmed what he already knew: the leg was certainly his father’s and she wanted it out of the museum, to be reburied (Henry, 124). Thus, the amputated leg of a drunken Indian found in a ditch who found it proper to pay homage to his leg marked the start of an episode reflecting the concerns on the problematic of cultural appropriation:

Willow garnered the support of the tribal council and the tribal attorney. The council passed a resolution and the attorney issued a letter to the museum. Museum officials responded civilly but curtly with, in essence, a series of statements that questioned the memory and asserted various theories on the nature of ownership. (Henry, 124)

A legal battle is started and the requiem for the leg, the usual setting for a requiem being a church (a representative of Catholic power), becomes a hearing on the ownership of the leg, set in a courtroom (a representative of the judicial power of the American government). Thus, the Native Americans, here represented by the Four Bears family, will fight on enemy territory. In this sense, Gordon Henry keeps on supplying Native Americans with hints on how to defy colonial power. To the notion of an artistic warrior Gordon Henry adds the concept of the judicial warrior, as if defeating the whites on their own territory and using their own weapons: language and law. The participants in the trial and the choice of lawyers are also treated humorously. On the one hand,

In the light of the tribal attorney’s inexperience in matters other than gaming laws and post-Reorganization Act politics, the tribe and a few upper-middle-class advocates for Indian rights procured an East Coast lawyer named Catullus Cage, a high-priced radical known for fearless legal circumambulations and avant-garde courtroom antics. (Henry, 125)

On the other hand, “the museum employed an Ottawa Vietnam veteran named Tony Nugush, who had lost an arm to a human Viet Cong mine, graduated at the middle of his class at the University of Michigan Law School, and then graduated to a practice in Washington, D. C., to a firm he never lost a case for” (Henry, 125). Finally, the case “was heard before Minerva Salazar, a Hispanic judge recently appointed to the bench by a Republican president who liked her record on affirmative action” (Henry, 125).

Another amusing note is achieved through the preliminary arrangements of the court session, which consist of “a request for an honor song” (Henry, 125). As all Anishinabe ceremonies imply the offering of tobacco, at one point “the lead singer lifted a box of Marlboros out of his breast pocket and passed cigarettes around to each member of the drum. The courtroom waited while they smoked” (Henry, 125), in what constitutes a very well-achieved humorous scene, as the smoking of Marlboros, the ultimate all-American cigarette brand, may hint at an eventual victory of the Native Americans over the white museum people. It also hints at a victory of capitalistic America over Indians and the appropriation of mainstream symbols or objects for American Indian purposes. In fact, the realization of the ceremony is a victory in itself. It is challenged by the Ottawa lawyer for the museum, Tony Nugush, with the argument that it is “highly inappropriate” (Henry, 126). Tony Nugush seems to stand for the successful cases in which the American government managed to “civilize” Native Americans:

This is highly inappropriate, your Honor. An honor song, such as requested by Mr. Cage, has no relevance to the case and no stated recipient of honor. As an ex-dancer and singer, I find the use of the drum is culturally inappropriate. We must not turn this courtroom into a powwow, in the twentieth-century sense, and we must not -. (Henry, 126)

Although the judge warns the lawyers not to turn the courtroom into a circus show, she eventually allows for the song to be performed. “Then the hearing began” (Henry, 127). In this sense, all of the hints in the first part of the story are directed towards hope, belief and the restitution of rights.

The second part of the story consists of the transcript of the beginning of the hearing and starts with the opening arguments of Catullus Cage. Cage starts by arguing that there is truth and there are perceptions of truth, according to the position/situation of

each intervenient, but he believes that throughout the hearing “the truth will come clear to each and every person who visits this courtroom during the tenure of this case, because that is what this case is about, the apprehension of truth” (Henry, 127-128). Cleverly, he thus moves forward to the argument that “in this case the apprehension of truth rests on understanding how something cut off from human existence comes to represent a mere object of limited human possibility” (Henry, 128). During his speech Cage mingles law with the story telling tradition, and by using the metaphor of story to designate the trial, he implicitly warns the court that if the case/story is not resolved there it will be taken to the Supreme Court:

We apprehend the truth as we become part of the story, and the story always brings the truth back to us in some form. In this case, the form is the leg of Moses Four Bears, deceased tribal elder. In this case, the form has come to this courtroom to reassert a misunderstanding, a misconception, a mishandling of some part of the story that is our past. And I believe that if we mishandle the story here, the story will gather more force, more power, and assert the truth at another distant point, in another place that is meant to represent the highest standards of human conduct. (Henry, 128)

In his opening arguments Tony Nugush makes an attempt to distinguish a physical limb from a person’s mind, claiming that the limb, once detached from the rest of the body, does not represent part of the body anymore, by arguing that “Old Man Four Bears is gone, and his mind is gone with him” (Henry, 128) and that the leg “exists as a leg by itself” (Henry, 129). His argument is that the hearing should be based on the question of ownership and evidence, not on the question of moral right and defends that “the leg in question belongs to the museum and the people who have preserved the leg for all these years” (Henry, 129). The rest of this story consists of the interrogation of two witnesses: Willow Four Bears, Moses’s daughter, and Oshawanung. Willow’s testimony is meant to identify the beaded moccasins she herself made. Being interrogated by Nugush she admits the fact that the work is not identified with a signature or any other proof of ownership, but does not give much attention to it. As she says “the signature is in the mistakes of the maker, in imperfect work” (Henry, 135). Nugush’s aim is to cast doubt on the situation, by saying “maybe Oshawanung never buried the leg, or maybe he stripped it of its clothing. Or maybe the museum staff put the articles you claim to recognize on another leg” (Henry,

137). Indeed, Nugush is able to cast the shadow of doubt upon the reader, because he/she does not know yet what happened the day after the storm. Thus, Oshawanung's calling to the stand marks the introduction of the next story, "Oshawanung's story", which will satisfy both the court's and the reader's curiosity as to what happened to the leg. Thus,

Through the separate contexts of the Fineday reservation, the Twin cities Metropolitan Museum, and a Minnesota court of law, Henry sets up a series of episodes in which the leg nearly becomes a character in the novel. Collectively, these episodes explore issues of ownership and appropriation and establish Native rights. (Salzer, 39)

"Oshawanung's Story: Waking in the Library"

Guilt and Shame

A new circle closes and within Oshawanung's testimony in court the reader finds him awakening in the library on the morning after the storm. The basic and most important facts of his testimony are two: he was never able to find the leg (and thus did not finish the burial ceremony) and he kept that fact a secret because, as he states in court, "I felt shameful about my inability to fulfil the old man's request, and I felt a sense of despair about losing the leg" (Henry, 141). As Salzer points out, "the blizzard plays a trickster role preventing the boy from completing his task, even though he returns to try again and again to find the leg" (41). In this sense Oshawanung states:

I can remember I wondered if the secret would be revealed to others in a way that I wouldn't understand. I thought somehow invisible tracks would lead people to the leg and I would have to explain the disappearance of something I didn't understand myself" (Henry, 141-142)

For Oshawanung finally telling this story is the relief of a burden he carried with him for a long time. Oshawanung is one of the many characters in the novel who are able to complete their healing process, one way or another:

If anyone in this courtroom can see the need for the proper return and reburial of

Moses Four Bears' leg, it is me. I would like to help bury that leg as the old man requested so long ago. Perhaps that will bury the dreams that have haunted me for all these years. (Henry, 142)

Within the interrogation of this witness, Cage gives the non-Native reader something to relate to: the wishes of a person as to his or her funeral arrangements, even if only partial. It also confronts the reader with the problematic of broken promises, exceptionally relevant in the history of Native American peoples.

“Systems and Witnesses for the Museum”

Point, Set...

In this story, again consisting of courtroom transcripts, the court and the reader are presented with the witnesses for the museum. There are two witnesses, which makes up for four witnesses altogether within the hearing, two for each completing a circle of four. Witness No. 3 is Adam Post, Curator of the Twin Cities Metropolitan Museum, whose function is to establish the reputation and credibility of the institution both within the educational system as well as in the “modern scientific community” (Henry, 145). It does not take Cage a long time to deconstruct the “scientifically sanctioned practices” (Henry, 145) of that “modern scientific community” (Henry, 145). When Post states that at the museum they knew the leg was Ojibwa “by where the leg was found and by the way the leg was adorned” (Henry, 147), one can not but smile ironically, considering Oshawanung’s story. Thus, the museum people are beaten at their own game, since that statement allows Cage to engage in a well-built argument, which ends with a very simple but very strong conclusion:

Cage: Therefore, since the authentic nature of the leg was determined by an unduplicable cultural context – and an assumption that what you find in a culture resides in and represents the culture – and by significant codes of adornment, you don’t need the human leg as part of a display. A model would have sufficed, don’t you think? (Henry, 147)

With this argument, Gordon Henry intends to deconstruct the Western perception of an anthropologist as a scientist, as far as Native American culture is concerned, and to uncover the so-called scientific methods used and which bring about “only a partial view of natural history. Most often that view typifies narrow conceptions of physical processes: display the physical world; gloss over, in short automated speeches and brochures and clear concise identification plaques, dynamic imaginative natural history as a series of progressive stages of static models” (Henry, 148). The fact that Cage argues is that the story of the leg is not told and that leads to an incomplete view of things, lacking “the meaning of the leg to the people who knew the person who walked, ran, and lost that leg” (Henry, 148). Western science models are accordingly incomplete as they lack both humanity and the recognition of a whole, removing objects from their initial contextualization. Witness No. 4 is Professor Cody Williams, who presents himself as “a doctor of anthropology” (Henry, 149), among other titles, and advocates “his competence and acceptance in working with Native American groups” (Henry, 149). Nevertheless his testimony proves otherwise. In fact, Salzer claims that:

Henry creates Cody Williams as a buffoon-like character whose testimony in the court is as ineffective as his attempts at understanding Ojibwa Culture. (44) (...) Henry creates in Williams a caricatured throwback who views the world in an uncomplicated way. The mocking portrayal creates Cody Williams as a stereotypical anthropologist/ethnographer and, in the process, gives little credit to those current ethnographers who have an awareness of their own positions in relation to the communities they study. (45)

“The Anthro’s Tale”

...and Match

The negative image of anthropologists and their methods conveyed by Gordon Henry in the previous story is further deepened by the choice for this story’s title “The Anthro’s Tale”, suggesting that most anthropologists are not to be taken seriously when it comes to Native American culture and history. This is achieved by using the short form of anthropologist, limiting the profession to an informal context through the informal use of

language, and by considering the anthropologist's testimony before the court not as a testimony, but a "tale". The choice of this denomination indicates a distinction between story and tale, considering the latter not to be trustworthy. The hearing session is told through four stories in which the distinction between story and tale is made clear by the juxtaposition of the second and fourth stories, respectively "Oshawanung's Story" and "The Anthro's Tale", giving the readers hints as to which one should be trusted or believed in. Moreover, the notion of tale, as in fairy tale, recalls the realm of fantasy and imagination as opposed to real events, as well as it recalls the realm of mythic or psychological truth. Nevertheless, later on, Gordon Henry's acknowledges that:

As far as anthropology goes, I feel in some ways, I don't want to say ashamed, but a little more humble about what I wrote there, because I think anthropology has been a common and easy target for native writers for a long time. But I was dealing with more than just anthropology, I think. I was also trying to deal with, very ironically, notions of the social concerns of anthropology and, again, the process as I saw it. I'm not claiming that all anthropologists are bad people, nor am I claiming the opposite. I was trying to bring a little humor to a discussion that's been heated over the years. And so I chose to do it my way, with my particular process, to reflect certain methodologies, terms, and logic as hypothetical absurdity. (Flys, 174)

The anthropologist's tale is an account of how the leg was found and analyzed and the anthropological speculations it was the object of. The finding of the leg was purely accidental, as the anthropologist saw the wooden box in the river. Presumably, the ice on the tree where Oshawanung stored the box had melted and caused the box to fall into the river. The leg ends up in the freezer of the Strawberry Inn awaiting transport to the museum. The account of the debate about the significance of the leg that takes place in the museum is another extraordinary display of Native American humor, which even the non-Native reader will recognize, given that we are in possession of Oshawanung's accounts:

Professor Ripley, of the museum, suggested that the leg was an emblem of warfare, that the person who'd lost the leg was a victim of torture, and that the torturer's probably cut off human parts, limb by limb, and floated them down the river as a reminder to enemies. (...) Then Scoffner introduced his theory of the leg as part of a ritual to test the manhood of warrior initiates. (...) "Perhaps," he

said, “this treatment of the leg involves a ritual for getting rid of diseases in the community, a dream ritual in which the leg takes the diseases into the purifying waters of the river.” “No,” Ripley pressed in, “the leg is given to the river to ensure good fishing.” The argument continued this way for a good while before we all realized the leg and the reason it was in the box could not be explained by any expert in our small circle. (Henry, 154-155)

As the anthropologist admits before Nugush, he and the others, during the whole discussion, never “considered the possibility of the leg belonging to a living twentieth-century Ojibway” (Henry, 155), which, in part, supports the existence of deeply-rooted stereotypes of the Indian as belonging to the past, even among scientists. Thus, what the scientists did was make unscientific assumptions. When questioned by Cage, Williams further admits not having consulted anyone from the community near the place where he found the leg, demonstrating his lack of respect for the knowledge of the Native. This is the point at which Cage sets the trap:

Cage: Gee, I don’t know. A leg floats to you out of nowhere, and your first thoughts is that no one around the village will know anything. Only a few days before, you were going to write a whole book on what you thought the people would tell you. I bet you saw an opportunity in the leg, a chance to capture something unique, a one-of-a-kind find that would forever connect your name with an authentic artifact.

Williams: How dare you make such assumptions ---

Cage: Forgive me for my assumptions, Mr. Williams. If the museum should return the leg for reburial, perhaps the Four Bears’ family and Mr. Oshawanung can forgive you for yours. (Henry, 157)

Case’s closing arguments are Gordon Henry’s means to establish a larger social criticism than that of the wrongful appropriation of the leg. Into Cage’s discourse Gordon Henry weaves criticism of anthropologists’ narrow-mindedness and the way five hundred years of the history and culture of Native American peoples were dealt with by the colonizers and their descendents:

As soon as Cody Williams picked up Moses Four Bears' leg, he left the story unfinished in every scientific detail. He could not determine the source, the time period, or the significance of the leg in accordance with the standards with which he and his peers so closely identify. Of course, this is just part of the story. The deeper, more cumbersome story rests in five hundred years of human history on this continent, in the arbitrary manner in which Eurocentric intellectual culture mongers and mythmakers have judged the first inhabitants of this land. They've killed them, set plagues on them, and then after they are dead, these same people, or at least their descendants, want to remove the remains of the dead and study them, catalogue them, and display them. (Henry, 158-159)

As happened with the opening arguments, Nugush concentrates his closing arguments on the question of ownership, claiming the right of ownership to the museum, as "the museum bought the leg, the museum possesses the leg, the museum owns the leg" (Henry, 160). As Salzer points out:

Historically, collectors and scientists have considered appropriation their right. The passage in 1990 of the Native America Grave Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) complicated this assumption in regard to Native American groups and the remains presumed or purported to be theirs. The episode regarding Four Bears' leg needs to be examined as it relates to NAGPRA, which protects the rights of Native communities and people. (...) Also under the act, huge numbers of skeletons and partial human remains have been returned to their communities for reburial. (47)

The court rules in favor of the Four Bears family based on the federal repatriation laws on Native American remains. Even so, Nugush calls for the exhumation of Moses's body, which is denied. This last attempt to maintain the leg's ownership for the museum is particularly relevant, as the museum's perspective reflects the inability to grasp the concept of cultural appropriation, considering a further desecration of Native American human remains, through the exhumation of the body of Moses Four Bears. Salzer argues further that:

As the episode raises questions about the ownership of tribal objects, the amputated leg of Moses Four Bears metonymically represents all collected human remains. These remains, in turn, represent what has been lost to Indian cultures

through their encounter with non-Indian cultures. In order for the Native cultures to maintain cultural integrity and to attain survivance, the lost objects, artifacts, and remains must be returned to their appropriate places. Their presence in a state of displacement creates tension that will be resolved when what has been lost has been returned. (47-48)

Within this argument, Salzer has managed to establish a link between the novel and the notion of survivance, introduced by Gerald Vizenor.

The events of the story signal many forms of resistance, and the narrative structure of the story itself exemplifies Native American resistance to cultural appropriation through its use of storytelling, tricksters discourse, and comedy, thereby establishing this as a story of cultural survival and renewal, a story of survivance. Gerald Vizenor introduces the concept of survivance in his 1994 work *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*. In the neologism, Vizenor recasts the term survival, which carries the implied meaning of being a static state, into a term that indicates a dynamic and continuing state. This new sense of survival as a process reflects the current situation of Native communities and cultures because it emphasizes both renewal and continuance, past and future. (39-40)

“After the Requiem”

The Circle of Truth

“After the Requiem” is a very short story, but carries a deep significance for one of the characters in the novel. This story constitutes the conclusion of Oshawa’s healing trail, the coming to terms with his guilt for misusing the stone, just as his uncle’s healing process was completed when disclosing the truth about Moses Four Bears’ leg. Oshawa intends to return the stone he was given by his uncle, because he thinks of himself as being unworthy of it and wants his uncle to pass it on to someone who will use it more wisely. His uncle refuses the offer, but Oshawa insists by telling him how he misused the stone: “I shot at someone once, tried to kill, I put anger in the stone” (Henry, 163). As Oshawanung had already told Oshawa “this stone in my hand has two sides painted on it. Each side tells its story. A person can use this stone to remember, or turn it over and use it as a weapon” (Henry, 41). These words, echoed in Cage’s speech about truth and perspectives of truth,

reveal Gordon Henry's preoccupation with the way truth is handled and put forward his perception about how it is a question of informed choice and responsibility.

“Oshawa's Attempt to Kill”

The Wrong Side of the Stone

This is the story of how Oshawa tried to kill Two Birds, but ended up killing only one. Two Birds is the character who keeps teasing Oshawa about the fall of the statue. Oshawa takes the creation stone, puts it in a sling and aims. However, Two Birds “ducked around the corner of the house” (Henry, 164). Oshawa goes to the other side of the house, but blinded by the reflection of sunlight in a window, he ends up aiming towards where he thought he heard Two Birds's voice, in the direction of a tree. The stone hits the tree and then the window of a house. Both boys ran away, one laughing, the other leaving the stone behind. The next day Oshawa found “a dead bird at the bottom of the tree” (Henry, 164) and a few days later he went to Rose's house to ask for the stone. As it happens, Oshawa has used the wrong side of the stone, meant to kill instead of create. By killing a bird, Oshawa killed a part of nature, a part of his heritage. But life is a learning and a healing process, and in order to complete his circle Oshawa has now met both sides of the stone, because one would not exist without the other. Nevertheless, as the stone ended up in Rose's studio and gave her the strength to start painting again, it seems that in using the wrong side of the stone he handed Rose the gift of creation, which in turn completed her healing process.

“Rose Meskwaa Geeshik's After-image Dreams”

Calling the Old Ones

Stories move in circles and slowly the reader joins the pieces of a big puzzle, as the narrators of the earlier stories return in the opposite order. At this time, the reader re-encounters Rose and Arthur Boozhoo, the feverish Jake Seed lying in his room. Rose is finishing the story of the stone and how she returned it to the boy, Oshawa and how the

short possession or loan of the creation stone led her back to painting. Images whirl in her head and become dreams and perceptions and within this turmoil Rose dreams and paints the stories past and the story to come, the one in which a tree falls and Oskinaway exchanges the deed for a gift. Her dreams stop with the news of her father's sickness, leaving him feverish and unconscious, but speaking Anishinabe fragments through his fever:

“Anday ishaw ahyen, come back, Noka, Ojeeg, Maingance, Amikwa, Ahkeewaynzee Kinew, Abetung, Geezhis, Geeshik Eway Abaht, Quayzaince Nimkee, Kahbemubbe, Minogeshig, come back...” (Henry, 166)

Although most readers are probably unfamiliar with the Anishinabe language, there are enough hints to conclude that Jake Seed is invoking or visioning the return of the old ones, the bringers of light.

“Arthur Boozhoo: Two Dogs Stuck Together”

“If an Indian book contains no dogs, then the book is written by a non-Indian or mixed-blood writer.”

Sherman Alexie

Rose's story is, at this point, interrupted when “a boy from the village came up to her house” (Henry, 167). He was sent to get Jake Seed to solve a problem in the village. As Seed is sick, Arthur, being his apprentice, offers to go:

When I reached the hill, I looked down and saw a group of children in a circle in the field below, just this side of the school road, not too far from Squandum's driveway. From where I stood I could make out two dogs in the center of the circle. The details grew clearer as I came to the perimeter of the circle, a mangy long-haired white mongrel mounted, dancing on two legs, at the rear end of a brown dog. (Henry, 167)

The two dogs are stuck together. In order to separate them the children turn to Arthur, who tries all the magic he can think of, but without any success. The following attempt is made

by LaVerve, the son of the minister at the Episcopal church, as Arthur “watched him dance the same dance I had danced, only he danced with a different personal vigor of drunken actions and breathless curses” (Henry, 169). Arthur and LaVerve join efforts, according to LaVerve’s suggestion: “You grab that white bastard and I’ll pull on this brown bitch” (Henry, 169). LaVerve ends up shooting the white mongrel but, nonetheless, the dogs still do not separate. Arthur picks them up and carries them to Seed’s house, where

Seed slid out of his chair then and leaned over the dead white dog. He whispered into the dog’s ear. I didn’t hear the words or the language, but when he settled back into his chair he told me to take the white dog out and bury it. I did as he told me, and I expected the white dog to remain fast to the brown, but when I lifted the dead dog the two dogs separated and the brown dog ran off into the darkness. (Henry, 171)

Thus, Jake Seed’s old magic succeeds where Arthur’s (young and basic) magic had failed. Seed is able to separate the white from the brown, which constitutes a big problem for Arthur:

As I dug and as the hole got bugger and deeper, I still couldn’t separate in my mind the living dog from the dead dog or the white dog from the brown dog. I couldn’t separate those dogs and I couldn’t reconcile the failure of my illusions about magic with the physical form I dropped into the hole I’d dug. (Henry, 171)

Jake Seed is one of the light people, a bringer of light, one of the old ones, a condition which allows him to be able to distinguish between the way things used to be and are now. Neither Arthur Boozhoo nor Oskinaway possess that ability, as they had been subjected to two different sets of values, the Western and the Native American, and cannot tell where one ends and the other begins. They are the new generation who has to adapt and find balance within the two worlds. Killing the white dog is not the answer, because times are different now. That is the message Seed sends Oskinaway through Seed and that is why “Arthur Boozhoo stopped his story then” (Henry, 171) and tells Oskinaway:

This is only part of what Seed asked me to tell you. In four days, if you want Seed to try to see where or who your parents are, you should come to this place at dusk.

Bring tobacco, bring a cloth. (Henry, 172)

“Seed’s Journey to the Cave”

Cranes rise again

“Seed’s Journey to the Cave” begins and ends with references to cranes. In the Anishinabe clan system, the Crane Clan is the one who exercises chieftainship and also carries the task of storytelling. In this penultimate story the reader returns to the characters of the first story, “Invisible Trails”: Oskinaway, Jake Seed, grandfather and grandmother, all related, all light people. The initial reference to the cranes point to change, as within the view Seed shows Oskinaway and his grandparents from the top of a hill there were “cranes angled by overhead, barely visible but formed together, distinct in the last tinges of red light in the air” (Henry, 173). On the top of the hill there is also a huge tree, which they circle four times and after that they make the customary tobacco offering as a sign of respect towards the Creator. After another ceremony, which resembles a Houdini escape on his best days, Jake Seed tells Oskinaway about his parents:

Your mother is alone now in the city. Trains are passing overhead and she sleeps against a concrete wall now. If you try to find her you won’t get there in time. But someday when you are older, she will come back to you in a nonhuman form and teach you about healing and language. As for your father, I heard stories about him, and though the stories seem hard to follow, or unrelated, there is a trail. Part of the trail is in your name, part of the trail is marked next to the name of your ancestors, with an X. Look for Abetung, he who inhabits, like the X on a treaty document. This same X makes us related too. The man you are looking for is descended from a more distant Seed (Henry, 174)

Thus, all the stories that the reader has been told, those stories that seemed hard to follow or unrelated, were both Seed’s and the reader’s trail to reach knowledge about Oskinaway’s parents and to accompany Oskinaway further on his own trail, which is now Oskinaway’s responsibility. This is the message Abetung passes to his son through Jake Seed:

I believe the man I saw on that journey, the man who spoke to me in that cave, he is your father, and when the time is right you, my boy, will have to find the cave on your own, so you can bring that other, the boy who was born just before you, out of the world of secrets, out of the invisible unknown, back to the village. By then your father will live only for making his little human forms, and he will see them as the family he shouldn't have let go of, and he will let go of the family he should have made. Perhaps the things I've told you here will take care of your dreams, as will some songs you will receive from other dreams. (Henry, 179)

The journey Seed refers to is his journey to a cave, to which he was led by a young boy, Oskinaway's twin brother, the one who was born just before him, and where he met the sculptor Abetung, Oskinaway's father.

Abetung is Jake Seed's seventh prophet because he tells Seed about the seventh fire and the seventh generation. To Jake a vision of the future is revealed:

'Tomorrow's people are here now,' he said. 'Most of them will look back in time and say, "Remember the old ways; remember the beginning, the stories and the prophecies." (...) "I tell this to you, old man,' he said, gesturing to the boy beside him, 'because my son is listening and he takes this as truth.'" (Henry, 176)

When Seed finishes telling Oskinaway about Abetung, he leaves, accompanied by Arthur and Oskinaway's grandparents. The boy stays behind and "just before his grandfather came back for him, and drew him out of his attention to the depths of darkness, the boy heard a song" (Henry, 179). The name of the song is "The Song of Oskinaway":

The Song of Oskinaway

Distant Seed,
out of light,
remember the last voice,
the voice of the people,
the force, and speak
of illumined faces,
a heart hungry for home calls,
through Squandum, beyond Abetung
cranes rise again (Henry, 180)

Thus, through the words of Seed, through Squandum and Abetung, and within Oskinaway, the cranes, that is the chieftains and storytellers, will rise again. Furthermore, the crane, besides being important in Anishinabe clan structure, is also the holder of a more general significance in Native American culture in general, as Bobby Lake-Thom explains:

This bird is the peacemaker and fisherman. He is a good-luck sign while you are fishing, or during conflict. He brings peace, harmony, and good luck. He is graceful, tactful, and direct. The feathers from these birds are used in healing ceremonies to take away negative energy and anger, and to bring peace and harmony to a situation. (108)

“We the People”

The Eternal Fire

Most references to the Seven Prophecies appear in dreams, songs and stories and always linked to Oskinawa: Elijah Cold Crow’s Dream Song (Henry, 75); Abetung’s words “remember the old ways; remember the beginning, the stories and the prophecies” (Henry, 176) and “as I said, the people of tomorrow are here now in what we do and say. I know because my son here is one of them, and there is a boy you yourself know who has exactly the same face” (Henry, 178-179); “The song of Oskinaway” (Henry, 180) and the reference to the fact that “in the fall of the fiftieth year of the seventh fire, with a tribally packed financial aid package, he enrolled in veterinary college at Michigan State University” (Henry, 182-183). The ultimate reference, however, is one that appears at the beginning of *The Light People*, in the form of a magic song sang by Arthur Boozhoo at a child’s birthday party. This song eventually relates to this last story, “We the People”:

*Sleep, peels, angles of angels sing of sign,
sword of words, elm smells concrete, encore
on the corner, a northern ornithologist, jest
in case, sends a letter which ends in ways to
sway opinion to slice the union onion with a
sword of words, without tears. (21)*

“We the People” (Henry, 181-226) is the last and longest story of *The Light People*. It is the closure of a circle. According to Jake Seed’s Words in the previous story, all of the stories told up to this point serve the purpose of setting a trail which would allow both Jake Seed and the reader to gather information which, in its turn, would help Oskinaway in the search for his mother and father. Thus, his wish expressed in the first story is partially fulfilled in the penultimate one, as Seed informs Oskinaway about the whereabouts of his parents. At this point the only story yet untold is Oskinaway’s. “We the People” is the last story within the novel and tells the reader of Oskinaway’s trails leading away from the reservation to university and back to the reservation, in short, Oskinaway’s circling trail of healing.

The first thing the reader learns in this story is that “Oskinaway was tired of working with people” (Henry, 181), which ceases to be surprising once explained:

He’d seen elders and children go cold, shivering on the road to the tribal offices as he and other tribal employees passed in new blue-and-red vehicles with the Fineday tribal logo and tribal motto shining forth in the north country sun, with words and images that covered the whole native state of Minnesota in magnitudinous brightness and official integrity. He’d also seen money changing hands – red to white to red to white- in an unchecked flow between council officials, all their relations, government agents, bingo lawyers, and a thousand consorts of these types in the form of consultants. (Henry, 181)

Through Oskinaway’s eyes the reader is shown the reality of reservation life, which is not that stereotypical magical place where tobacco is smoked by elders who tell stories. The reservation Gordon Henry presents here is a place of harsh living conditions, opportunists, bribery and bureaucracy. As Sean Strawberry wisely states: “in order to maintain our sovereign status as an independent nation, we must ascertain the interests that will proliferate our specialness” (Henry, 181), which, in his case, is a “twenty-four-hour gas, beer, wine and video station, *The Restless Native*” (Henry, 181). Thus, “after a particularly frustrating morning in the dead of winter when Oskinaway had to explain a form letter to a traditional elder face to face, to clarify why, in accordance with program guidelines that were vague even to him, the elder and her grandchildren were being denied home heating assistance, wonder ceased for him” (Henry, 182), Oskinaway considers moving on “to continue his education, to work with animals instead of people” (Henry, 182) and “in the

fall of the fiftieth year of the seventh fire, with a tribally backed financial aid package, he enrolled in veterinary college at Michigan State University” (Henry, 182-183). The same construct that works for a stereotypical and romantic view of the Native American by Euro-Americans allows for Oskinaway’s romantic vision of his studies:

As he studies veterinary texts, inside himself he saw a white fox bounding on a doctored leg on a hillside; he saw blue herons striding back to rivers after being untangled from the lines of careless fisherman; he saw black horses giving birth, a trembling colt standing in a pasture at dawn; he saw a yellow dog returning to its people, whole and alive, bounding into the arms of a child. (Henry, 183)

Oskinaway continues his studies, leading a somewhat untroubled life until the day he has a vision of “a woman in a blue dress dancing before him. More clearly, he saw hundreds of cowrie shells covering the woman’s dress” (Henry, 184). The woman is presumably his already passed away grandmother, as further on a link is established between her and a blue dress. The cowrie shells, also known as Megis shells, constitute one of the most sacred objects in Anishinabe culture and Native American culture in general, relating directly to the Ojibway Creation Story (Appendix 2):

When Aki (the Earth) was young, it was said that the Earth had a family. Nee-ba-gee’-sis (the Moon) is called Grandmother, and Gee’-sis (the Sun) is called Grandfather. The Creator of this family is called Gi’-tchie Man-i-to’ (Great Mystery or Creator). Gzhemnido is another Ojibway word for Creator. The Earth is said to be a woman. In this way it is understood that woman preceded man on the Earth. She is called Mother Earth because from her come all living things. Water is her life blood. It flows through her, nourishes her, and purifies her. On the surface of the Earth, all is given Four Sacred Directions North, South, East and West. Each of these directions contributes a vital part to the wholeness of the Earth. (...) The Creator sent his singers in the form of birds to the Earth to carry the seeds of life to all of the Four Directions. (...) Gzhemnido then took four parts of Mother Earth and blew into them using a Sacred Shell. From the union of the Four Sacred Elements [Earth, Wind, Fire and Water] and his breath, man was created. It is said that Gzhemnido then lowered man to the Earth. Thus, man was the last form of life to be placed on the Earth. From this Original Man came the A-nish-i-na’-be, this is what it means: Ani – from whence; Nishina – lowered; Abe – male of the species.

On the next day Oskinaway finds a bird on the stone, breathing but not moving. Seed's vision is fulfilled: Oskinaway's mother visits him in a non-human form. After being able to gain the bird's trust Oskinaway discovers it has a wounded wing, which makes him remember "who he was and where he was, so at once he decided to take the bird with him, to find a way to heal the bird" (Henry, 186), which constitutes, according to David Callahan,

An activity congruent with the life of his family and his community as he recalls it, in which his grandparents take in a man even older than they are, a man whose identity Oskinaway the child never could work out, but he is remembered as one of the light people, too. That is, he constitutes a link to his people's wisdom, but again he needs to be read by Oskinaway; knowledge is not ladled out on a plate. (...) when the old man dies Oskinaway learns that his name was Oskinaway as well and that he had been named after him. (196)

He takes it with him to the classroom in order to ask for his professor's assistance. On that day Oskinaway is unable to focus his attention on the class, his mind wandering to memories of his grandparents and life on the reservation, probably brought about by the bird. At the end of the class all of Oskinaway's expectations related to his course are destroyed, upon hearing the professor's reply to his request:

Maybe you haven't been listening. You've gotta start thinking domestic or farm. We've made no mention of wild animals in this class or any other class in this program. This bird is a wild bird. (Henry, 188-189)

Thus Oskinaway pursues his own line of investigation to heal the bird, getting so involved in the task that he ends up receiving a note from the college telling him his notes "have fallen below the minimum standards required for enrollment in the Michigan State University Veterinary College" (Henry, 191).

The realization that, after all, the veterinary course is not what he had expected, leads Oskinaway to leave for his grandparents' house on the reservation, walking the path of Arthur Boozhoo, as both represent the failure of the American school system to comprehend and provide for the educational needs of ethnic minorities. In the house, he finds fragments of old newspaper articles and glances through them. One of the fragments

contains a name which will relate Oskinaway's grandparents to Jake Seed: Minogeshig (one of the names invoked by Seed within his fever). Joining the various fragments Oskinaway finds out that

The old people had kept allotment records under the dishes on the shelves. He pored through the names on the thin paper, and noticed a few underlined with red marker. Among the names of his grandparents and great-grandparents he saw the name Abetung, the name of his father, underlined like all the rest. (Henry, 193)

Oskinaway keeps following the trail of Seed's vision. After his mother visits and stays with him in a non-human form, Oskinaway finds "Abetung, he who inhabits, like the X on a treaty document" (Henry, 174). In the meantime the reader discovers that Rose Meskwaa Geeshik has become the tribal social service director, who informs Oskinaway about a possible job. He also meets a former girlfriend, Goldie Kinew, Oshawanung's daughter, whose grandfather is, according to her, "going fast" (Henry, 195), as "he dreams full time now. You know, the conversations, old stories, old songs, different places, names of the dead, invisible dogs, things like that" (Henry, 195). While Goldie's grandfather is considered to be losing his mind by many, he does nothing else but to remember and invoke the old ways. He is Oshawanung's father, the keeper and passer of the creation stone, but not a respected member within the present community of the reservation.

Eventually Oskinaway gets the job in the tribal youth services where he develops and implements several successful projects. Oskinaway would work during the day, devoting his nights to the bird's healing. Somehow he knows that the bird's healing process is not only a physical one, that body and mind cannot be separated in the Native American approach to healing. So, one day, "while reading through a subscription of one of his many bird magazines Oskinaway was struck by a half-page ad:



(Henry, 197)

Oskinaway purchases the program, whose teaching process relied on music, repetition and imitation:

According to such a system the bird would be subjected to recordings of phrases – set against a musical accompaniment that was scientifically specified in tempo and type – which the bird would then imitate. (...) Through such a method Benbow had taught over 160 birds how to recite the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States. (...) the bird would be able to learn more elaborate phrases and more extended uses of words, as well as understand and think about the words and phrases it learned. (Henry, 198)

Oskinaway feels drawn to the bird and, while it is healing, tries to teach it how to speak through the teaching program advertised by the northern ornithologist, Professor Horace Benbow, perhaps in an unconscious attempt to access an entrance to the spiritual world by sharing the same language with the animal. The perceptions of Oskinaway's spiritual importance and the bird's spiritual symbolism unite in a moving story of healing and recreation. As has been stated before, the bird, in the form of an eagle, is the intermediary between the Anishinabe and the Creator, the prayer carrier and an important presence in healing ceremonies. Should the bird die, a crucial, sacred link would be broken. Thus, by saving the bird twice, Oskinaway restores the medium for Anishinabe spirituality and prayers. Similarly unconscious on the part of Oskinaway is the attempt to force on the bird the one thing that has so harmed the Native Americans: the American way of life, as symbolized by the Preamble to the Constitution of the United States, the basis for the lessons of the teaching program. The bird eventually learns three words (we the people) but fails to interiorize the rest (of the United States). Ironically enough the three most important symbols of the United States of America are rejected in *The Light People*: the Constitution (by the bird), the American flag (which is stolen by the deer at Franklin Squandum's funeral) and Christian values (when Oshawa accidentally breaks the statue of the Virgin Mary at a school play). Equally interesting is the fact that only the two first tapes of the teaching program are recorded. This may illustrate the emptiness of the Constitution of the United States of America, a document that has hardly applied to Native Americans. On the other hand the attempt of teaching the bird the words of the Constitution makes one digress to the Oath of Allegiance, a legal requisite for American

citizenship, memorized and delivered by those who aspire to the American way of life.

It seems that by rejecting the Constitution but by learning the words “We the People” the bird completes the circle of a people who, in order to survive and heal, should find its own trails in the fulfilment of the Seventh Prophecy, and reaffirms the pride of an identity long lost for some but recoverable for many others. It is the bird, his mother, that makes Oskinaway aware of everything:

And at once he saw the whole bird as a source of strength, as a strong healing animal. And at that point the physical animal turned to human vision, turning time backward and forward at the same time as Oskinaway saw himself seeing the powerful ascension and limitless flight of the bird, of the past joining with the first tentative spread of the wing by this bird as it rose complete from its own recovery, to a future strength where its now limited vision could then encompass expansive landscapes and myriad movements from heights granted by the returned power of one wing.” (Henry, 207)

This awareness is immediately transcribed onto paper by Oskinaway in the form of a speech to be delivered at the tribal council, curiously held at the Original Man gym, “original man” being another translation for Anishinabe. The circle of healing is complete. Oskinaway, member/representative of the Anishinabe people, and the bird, the spiritual link between Oskinaway/the Anishinabe and the Creator, have found their harmony as protagonists of a Story of Recreation, and “at times, when he remembered the words in just the right way, when he spoke them as the bird spoke them, he also remembered how he had decided to let the bird go” (Henry, 226). The end of the book echoes Lee Francis’s synthesis of the situation that “Urban American Indian Youth need to understand that one’s identity is not about me, me, me, me. It’s about we, the People” (83).

Part III

Conclusion

In an autobiographical essay Sherman Alexie writes: “I made a very conscious decision to marry an Indian woman, who made a very conscious decision to marry me. Our hope: to give birth to and raise Indian children who love themselves. That is the most revolutionary act possible” (7). Eurocentrism has, over the centuries, undermined the self-confidence and scientific authority of ethnic minorities in matters regarding their own history and culture. It has managed to manipulate and dominate fields such as history, science and the arts and chosen its set of values as the mainstream, reinforced by both public and private institutions. To be able to shift Native American beliefs to Christianity and the use of Native language to the use of English was a major victory from the bureaucrats’ and politicians’ point of view. In the words of Gabriel Horn:

As a man and a student of history, I would also learn that cultural genocide begins when one people robs the religious views of another people through indoctrination and fear, and how the practitioners of Christianity made every effort imaginable to impose their anthropomorphic God on Indian children, stealing our future of the most precious and vital view of life and of the world and of the universe. (66)

Indians were being civilized. Instead of subduing or eliminating Indians by war, the colonizers chose to try methods such as the spreading of diseases, alcohol and the word. The latter was a powerful tool, as the apprehension of a linguistic system, in that case disguised as a religious/spiritual message, implied the apprehension of its cultural and historical contextualization. As Jorge Noriega explains, “the ‘formal education’ of the indigenous peoples of North America began at virtually the moment in which the European drive to colonize the continent began in earnest” (371) and “their traditional languages and cultures, religions and world views were systematically denigrated and suppressed” (371). Native Americans are shifting between two worlds, two histories, two languages, two sets of values and a very particular form of colonization. They are dependent within their limited independence. Though some advances have been made in the restitution of artifacts, burial sites and land, Native Americans struggle with a legacy of a language that does not originally articulate their culture. This is a problem especially for those who use language as a means of conveying cultural heritage. In fact, this is a postcolonial problem,

which has raised many debates concerning whether authors should use their native language, thus respecting their cultural heritage, or use the colonizer's language, which would reach a much larger audience, especially if the text is intended to be educational or provocative. Many claim that writing in English is to approve of colonialism and to recognize the colonizer's domination over a particular ethnic group. N. Scott Momaday chose to write in English, a decision he believes is far from recognizing Euro-American sovereignty. In fact, the exact opposite took place. He stole "the enemy's tool" and adapted it to suit his purposes, to make the non-Native reader feel a stranger in his/her own world, knowing that the Native reader would grasp the contents, even if written in English. Thus, the contemporary Native American novel was born in 1968, setting an example for a new generation of Native American writers, Gordon Henry Jr. included, who comments that "I always resist writing what I think are conventional straight-line narratives, if there is such a thing. (...) I did try to break with what I thought of as conventional forms" (Flys, 176). The literary movement is accompanied by manifestations in music, painting and cinema, among others. Native American criticism focuses on problems such as stereotypical representations of Indians, cultural appropriation and the manipulation of history, as can, for example, be observed in the film *Harold of Orange*, written by Gerald Vizenor. A non-informed non-Native viewer will not grasp more than a quarter of the movie's message, humor and irony, but will know that the irony is not directed towards Native Americans. To a certain extent, the mood of the movie is recaptured in *The Light People's* stories describing the trial over the question of ownership of Moses Four Bears' leg. The tone is ironical, humorous and critical.

Social criticism and thought-provoking discourse are a constant in *The Light People*, a novel which goes far beyond the theoretical boundaries of postmodernism and plunges deep into the roots of Native American oral traditions, chosen by Gordon Henry as the framework for his novel. Within the recollection of Native American storytelling traditions, Gordon Henry easily moves from past to present and future and back to the past, through frequent change of narrators or the absence of specific time references. He defies norms by using them, emptying forms of their original functions. Thus this novel is not really a novel. It is narrative, drama, poetry and prose. It goes beyond the rigid formal parameters. This novel is a puzzle in which every single piece is different from the next but altogether they form a coherent logical unit. The message conveyed is that it is not rigid

form that distinguishes artistic work, it is the ability to change and adapt and recreate. Art cannot be measured by rules at the risk of destroying content and any content can be presented in one or more forms. Change, adaptation and recreation are keywords in the analysis of the novel; here they merge together to produce a challenging experience for both Native and non-Native readers. For David Callahan,

Gordon Henry's *The Light People* is a novel that cannot be simply visited on tour from that Euro-American literature, to which the reader returns after stocking up on a repertoire of images of the exotic Other. In order to follow it at all, the reader needs to enter into the circular structure as articulating a morality; as, indeed, being mimetic of it. Not only that, the reader needs to be able to respect the presence of vision and dream experience, to be able to read it as a continuum and not as sites of rupture." (198)

The past is represented through references to the old people, the old ways, and the light people. It is also implicit within dream and vision passages and ceremonial references. There are many pages holding hidden references to the story of the Great Flood, the Migration story, the Seven Fires Prophecies and the Creation story. They are not clear, which may reflect the present situation in which many Native people have little idea about their roots and traditions. References to the present also occur implicitly, mainly in passages that touch upon social criticism. Issues such as the American school system, the mixed-blood, alcoholism, living conditions on reservations, can easily be found through attentive reading. One of the most criticized institutions in the novel is probably the education system, both in the past and in the present. References to mission and boarding schools are not very positive and education in Western terms is viewed as unsuitable to the needs of ethnic minorities. Arthur Boozhoo attends drama classes when he wants to learn magic and Oskinaway learns how to treat cats, dogs and cows instead of foxes, wolves and birds. Representations of the future are achieved through visions, dreams and prophecies, which forward a message of hope. The failure of institutions to understand Native American culture and history and thus provide any basis for hope is a recurring theme in the novel. The criticism is sometimes equally divided between Natives and non-Natives, such as through the characters of Two Birds, Tony Nugush and the anthropologist. Another key concept in the novel is the notion of healing as a process which needs to be aimed at

both body and spirit. All characters and narrators in the novel undergo healing processes, as do the author and, hopefully, the readers of the novel. Most of the characters find their comfort in the arts: painting, sculpting or writing poetry, using them to articulate their processing of a wide variety of issues. The ultimate example comes from the prisoner of Haiku, who chooses a Japanese poetry form to express Native American concepts and interpretations; in the same way, Gordon Henry chooses the novel to represent his perception of the past, the present and the future of Native American people.

Thus the question becomes: what is Gordon Henry's perception? Is the novel one of so many acts of recovery, or is it a break from the past? After reading and reflecting upon the novel the conclusion is that it is both. Gordon Henry never disregards the importance of the past as crucial to the achievement of an individual and collective Native American identity. Language, stories, myths and ceremonies have to be kept alive so that all generations to come can be familiar with the teachings and ways of the old ones. This concept is explicit in the choice of the title and in the recurring references to the old ways throughout the novel. Nevertheless, as the historical and cultural context keeps changing, so must the people. Gordon Henry expresses the urgency of adapting to the fact that there are two worlds and that neither of them will go away. All have to change and adapt in order to create equilibrium. In order to change, people must first realize that they were wrong or intolerant. That is the task Gordon Henry and many other postcolonial writers have chosen to carry out: to enlighten, explain and teach. In this sense, Gordon Henry follows the theoretic conceptualization presented by Chinua Achebe and regards his own writings as a teaching tool. Nevertheless, the teaching process consists of two entities: the one who teaches and the one who learns. There are many ways of teaching, but the one that is probably one of the most efficient is the All-American model of "Do it yourself". In Gordon Henry's case, if the reader is willing to learn, he/she will find more than enough suggestions about where to start. Thus the concept of the novelist as a teacher is only complete when considering the reader as a participative, responding and inquiring student, as has been stated before.

Nonetheless, the most significant suggestion of all, the one that becomes evident after all trails are disclosed, is that Native American peoples must urgently change and adapt or else there will be no more people. Native Americans must fight for their rights, their identity and their heritage. But the fight defended by Gordon Henry is not a physical

one. There are new means and new tools, ironically handed over by those who have to be fought. The new tool is art and the artist is the new warrior. The survival of Native American heritage, language and culture depends on the new Native American, on the generation of the seventh fire, that is, on a new generation of artistic warriors.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1

The Seven Fires Prophecies of the Anishinabe

Seven prophets came to Anishinabe. They came at a time when the people were living a full and peaceful life on the North Eastern coast of North America. These prophets left the people with seven predictions of what the future would bring. Each of the prophecies was called a fire and each fire referred to a particular era of time that would come in the future. Thus, the teachings of the seven prophets are now called the "Seven Fires".

The first prophet said to the people, "In the time of the First Fire, the Anishinabe nation will rise up and follow the sacred shell of the Midewiwin Lodge. The Midewiwin Lodge will serve as a rallying point for the people and its traditional ways will be the source of much strength. The Sacred Megis will lead the way to the chosen ground of the Anishinabe. You are to look for a turtle shaped island that is linked to the purification of the earth. You will find such an island at the beginning and at the end of your journey. There will be seven stopping places along the way. You will know the chosen ground has been reached when you come to a land where food grows on water. If you do not move you will be destroyed."

The second prophet told the people, "You will know the Second Fire because at this time the nation will be camped by a large body of water. In this time the direction of the Sacred Shell will be lost. The Midewiwin will diminish in strength; a boy will be born to point the way back to the traditional ways. He will show the direction to the stepping stones to the future of the Anishinabe people.

The third prophet said to the people. "In the Third Fire, the Anishinabe will find the path to their chosen ground, a land in the west to which they must move their families. This will be the land where food grows on water.

The Fourth Fire was originally given to the people by two prophets. They come as one. They told of the coming of the Light Skinned race.

One of the prophets said, "You will know the future of our people by the face the Light

Skinned race wears. If they come wearing the face of brotherhood then there will come a time of wonderful change for generations to come. They will bring new knowledge and articles that can be joined with the knowledge of this country, in this way, two nations will join to make a mighty nation. This new nation will be joined by two more so that four will form the mightiest nation of all. You will know the face of the brotherhood if the light skinned race comes carrying no weapons. If they come bearing only their knowledge and a hand shake."

The other prophet said," Beware if the Light Skinned race comes wearing the face of death. You must be careful because the face of brotherhood and the face of death look very much alike. If they come carrying a weapon...beware. If they come in suffering... They could fool you. Their hearts may be filled with greed for the riches of this land. If they are indeed your brothers, let them prove it. Do not accept them in total trust. You shall know that the face they wear is one of death if the rivers run with poison and the fish become unfit to eat. You shall know them by these many things.

The Fifth Prophet said, "In the time of the Fifth Fire there will come a time of great struggle that will grip the lives of all Native people. At the warning of this Fire there will come among the people one who holds a promise of great joy and salvation. If the people accept this promise of a new way and abandon the old teachings, then the struggle of the Fifth Fire will be with the people for many generations. The promise that comes will prove to be a false promise. All those who accept this promise will cause the near destruction of the people."

The prophet of the Sixth Fire said, "In the time of the Sixth Fire it will be evident that the promise of the Fifth Fire came in a false way. Those deceived by this promise will take their children away from the teachings of the ELDERS, grandsons and grand-daughters will turn against the ELDERS. In this way, the ELDERS will lose their reason for living... they will lose their purpose in life. At this time a new sickness will come among the people. The balance of many people will be disturbed. The cup of life will almost be spilled. The cup of life will almost become the cup of grief."

At the time of these predictions, many people scoffed at the prophets. They then had medicines to keep away sickness. They were then healthy and happy as a people. These

were the people who chose to stay behind in the great migration of the Anishinabe. These people were the first to have contact with the Light Skinned race. They would suffer the most.

When the Fifth Fire came to pass, a great struggle did indeed grip the lives of all Native people. The Light Skinned race launched a military attack on the Indian people through-out the country aimed at taking away their land and their independence as a free and sovereign people. It is now felt that the false promise that came at the end of the Fifth Fire was the materials and riches embodied in the way of life of the light skinned race. Those who abandoned the ancient ways and accepted this new promise were a big factor in causing the near destruction of the Native people of this land.

When the Sixth Fire came to be, the words of the prophet rang true as the children were taken away from the teachings of the ELDERS. The boarding school era of "civilizing" Indian Children had begun. The Indian language and religion were taken from the children. The people started dying at an early age... they had lost their will to live and their purpose in living.

In the confusing times of the Sixth Fire, it is said that a group of visionaries came among the Anishinabe. They gathered all the priests of the Midewiwin Lodge. They told the priests that the Midewiwin Way was in danger of being destroyed. They gathered all the sacred bundles. They gathered all the scrolls that recorded the ceremonies. All these things were placed in a hollowed out log from the ironwood tree. Men were lowered over a cliff by long ropes. They dug a hole in the cliff and buried the log where no one could find it. Thus the teachings of the ELDERS were hidden out of sight but not out of memory. It was said that when the time came that the Indian people could practice their religion without fear that a little boy would dream where the Ironwood log, full of the Sacred Bundles and Scrolls were buried. He would lead his people to the place.

The Seventh Prophet that came to the people long ago was said to be different from the other prophets. He was young and had a strange light in his eyes. He said, "In the time of the Seventh Fire, New People will emerge. They will retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail. Their steps will take them to the ELDERS who they will ask to guide them on their journey. But many of the ELDERS will have fallen asleep. They will awaken to

this new time with nothing to offer. Some of the ELDERS will be silent out of fear. Some of the ELDERS will be silent because no one will ask anything of them. The New People will have to be careful in how they approach the ELDERS. The task of the New People will not be easy.

If the New People will remain strong in their Quest, the Water Drum of the Midewiwin Lodge will again sound its voice. There will be a Rebirth of the Anishinabe Nation and a rekindling of old flames. The Sacred Fire will again be lit.

It is at this time that the Light Skinned race will be given a choice between two roads. If they choose the right road, then the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and final Fire, an eternal Fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood. If the light skinned race makes the wrong choice of roads, the destruction which they brought with them in coming to this country will come back at them and cause much suffering and death to all the Earth's people.

Traditional Mide people from other Nations have interpreted the two roads that face the Light Skinned race as the road to technology and the other to spiritualism. They feel that the road to technology represents a continuation of Head-Long rush to technological development. This is the road that has lead to modern society, to a damaged and seared Earth. Could it be that the road to technology represents a rush to destruction? The road to Spirituality represents the slower path that traditional Native People have traveled and are now seeking again. The Earth is not scorched on this trail. The grass is still growing there.

The prophet of the Fourth Fire spoke of a time when "two Nations will join to make a Mighty Nation". He was speaking of the coming of the Light Skinned race and the face of brotherhood that the Light Skinned Brother could be wearing. It is obvious from the history of this country that this was not the face worn by the Light Skinned race as a whole. That the Mighty Nation spoken of in the Fourth Fire has never been formed.

If the Natural People of the Earth could just wear the face of brotherhood, we might be able to deliver our society from the road to destruction. Could we make the two roads that today represents two clashing world views come together to form a mighty Nation? Could a Nation be formed that is guided by respect for all living things? Are we the New People

of the Seventh Fire?

Source: Alpha Institute. <http://www.alphai.org/eldp1.html>.

Appendix 2

The Ojibway Creation Story

Boozhoo' (hello), my name is Mishomis. I am an Ojibway Indian. I live here in my cabin on the forested shores of Madeline Island. Madeline Island is in Lake Superior and is part of a group of islands now called the Apostle Islands. It is not far from the city of Ashland, Wisconsin. Many years ago, my Ojibway ancestors migrated to this area from their original homeland on the eastern shores of North America. Now the Ojibways and their offshoots are spread from the Atlantic coast, all along the St. Lawrence River, and throughout the Great lakes region of this country. Madeline Island was the final stopping place on this great migration. Here, the Waterdrum of the traditional Midewiwin Lodge sounded its voice loud and clear. Its voice attracted the many bands of the Ojibway until this island became the capital of the Ojibway nation.

It has been many years since the Waterdrum has sounded its voice here. This Waterdrum that I have beside me was handed down from my grandfathers. I am preparing this place to be a place of rebirth for traditional Indian ways. I am preparing myself so that I might remember the teachings of my grandfathers. I would like to give these teachings to you. I believe that, together, we can begin the journey back to find what many of our people left by the trail. This will be a journey to rediscover a way of life that is centered on the respect for all living things. It will be a journey to find the center of ourselves so that we can know the peace that comes from living in harmony with powers of the Universe. I do not believe in isolating myself in the memories of the past. I do believe that with the teachings of yesterday we can better prepare ourselves for the uncertainties of tomorrow.

I hope you will take these words that I seek to put down and use them in a good way. Use them to teach your children about the way life has developed for the Native people of this country. Use them to redirect your life to the principles of living in harmony with natural world.

I would like to tell you an account of how man was created on this Earth. This teaching was handed down by word of mouth from generation to generation by my ancestors. Sometimes the details of teachings like this were recorded on scrolls made from Wee'-gwas (birchbark). I am fortunate to be the keeper of several of these scrolls. They will help me remember some of the details of what I give to you.

When Aki (the Earth) was young, it was said that the Earth had a family. Nee-ba-gee'-sis (the Moon) is called Grandmother, and Gee'-sis (the Sun) is called Grandfather. The Creator of this family is called Gi'-tchie Man-i-to' (Great Mystery or Creator). Gzhemnido is another Ojibway word for Creator.

The Earth is said to be a woman. In this way it is understood that woman preceded man on the Earth. She is called Mother Earth because from her come all living things. Water is her life blood. It flows through her, nourishes her, and purifies her.

On the surface of the Earth, all is given Four Sacred Directions: North, South, East, and West. Each of these directions contributes a vital part to the wholeness of the Earth. Each has physical powers as well as spiritual powers, as do all things. When she was young, the Earth was filled with beauty.

The Creator sent his singers in the form of birds to the Earth to carry the seeds of life to all of the Four Directions. In this way life was spread across the Earth. On the Earth the Creator placed the swimming creatures of the water. He gave life to all the plant and insect world. He placed the crawling things and the four-leggeds on the land. All of these parts of life lived in harmony with each other.

Gzhemnido then took four parts of Mother Earth and blew into them using a Sacred Shell. From the union of the Four Sacred Elements and his breath, man was created.

It is said that Gzhemnido then lowered man to the Earth. Thus, man was the last form of life to be placed on the Earth. From this Original Man came the A-nish-i-na'-be, this is what it means:

Ani = from whence Nishina = lowered Abe = male of the species

This man was created in the image of Gzhemnido. He was natural man. He was part of Mother Earth. He lived in brotherhood with all that was around him.

All tribes came from this Original Man. The Ojibway are a tribe because of the way they speak. We believe that we are nee-kon'-nis-ug' (brothers) with all tribes; we are separated only by our tongue or language.

Today, the Ojibways cherish the Megis Shell as the Sacred Shell through which the Creator blew his breath. The Megis was to appear and re-appear to the Ojibway throughout their history to show them the Path that Gzhemnido wished them to follow. Some Ojibway Indians today wear the Megis or Cowrie shell to remember the origin of man and the history of their people.

There are a few people in each of the tribes that have survived to this day who have kept alive their teachings, language, and religious ceremonies. Although traditions may differ from tribe to tribe, there is a common thread that runs throughout them all. This common thread represents a string of lives that goes back all the way to Original Man.

Today, we need to use this kinship of all Indian people to give us the strength necessary to keep our traditions alive. No one way is better than another. I have heard my grandfathers say that there are many roads to the High Place. We need to support each other by respecting and honoring the "many roads" of all tribes. The teachings of one tribe will shed light on those of another.

It is important that we know our native language, our teachings, and our ceremonies so that we will be able to pass this sacred way of living on to our children and continue the string of lives of which we are a living part.

Miigwech (thank you).

Mii si wi (that is all).

As told by Edward Benton-Banai in "The Mishomis Book"

Re-written by Cheryl Spaniola

May 2001

Source:

<http://www.homestead.com/famousamericanindians4/OjibweCreationStory.html>