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Claiming Europe: Native American Literary Responses to the Old World

LEE SCHWENINGER

In Osage writer Carter Revard's short story, "Report to the Nation: Claiming Europe," the narrator claims much of England, France, Spain, Italy, and Greece for the Osage Nation: "I waved an arm as I was passing over the Garonne, in Bordeaux, so we now have the area of Aquitaine as I understand," writes Revard. After asserting his claim, the narrator questions whether or not the French actually understood that their country therefore belonged to the Osage Nation. But, he continues, the people "were friendly and they fed [the Native conquistador] well, accepting in return some pretty paper and some metal discs with which they seemed very pleased."¹ After commencing with surface playfulness, Revard implies an underlying seriousness in his response to Europe and the colonization of North America by the Spanish, French, and British. When he talks of the Osage people actually settling in Europe, he echoes the words of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century European colonists in the New World: "It would at first be a hard and semi-savage life, and there would be much danger from the Europeans who in many cases would not understand our motives; as a chosen people, setting up standards, we would probably have to suppress some opposition. . . . We will, however, as the superior race, prevail in the end."²

In a sense, then, Revard as a Native conquistador leads the way into Europe. He is followed by Gerald Vizenor (*Heirs of Columbus*, 1991), James Welch (*The Heartsong of Charging Elk*, 2000), Leslie Marmon Silko (*Gardens in the Dunes*, 1999), and Louise Erdrich (*The Master Butcher's Singing Club*, 2002).³ All four well-known authors send their characters to Europe, compelling the former colonial powers to deal with this insurgence of Native writers and characters. Although there are significant differences among the works by these

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Native writers, they all share an important similarity: the return to Europe, to a place where each of the authors, if not always the characters, has an ancestral history. Thus, each author confronts some aspect of that ancestry and tells a story from a Native point of view. These authors make the conscious and deliberate choice to investigate this other homeland. Despite (or perhaps because of) critical attention to a character's coming to terms with his or her Native American place and identity, scholars have paid relatively little attention to writers and characters investigating Europe or their European heritage. Similarly, only a handful of critics and/or authors have addressed the issue of Native American literary responses to being in Europe, the other homeland.⁴ The recent turn to Europe by these authors cries for investigation.

Before exploring Europe with Revard and other Native American authors, however, it will be instructive to look at how several Native authors address issues of mixed heritage and of homeland. In the introduction to *Critical Perspectives on Native American Fiction*, Richard Fleck writes that a prevalent general theme of Native American literature is a "gradual reaffirmation of tribal values" for alienated Native Americans.⁵ Stories about characters getting in touch with or reaffirming their tribal identity are common in recent Native American literature.⁶ One need only think of D'Arcy McNickle, Welch, Momaday, Silko, Erdrich, and Linda Hogan, all of whom write about issues of alienation and identity.⁷ William Bevis articulates his notion of "homing in" in Native American novels: "coming home, staying put, contracting, even what we call 'regressing' to a place . . . is a primary mode of knowledge and a primary good."⁸ According to Bevis, this return is an important and prevalent characteristic of Native American literature. Although he does not explicitly state the importance of a "homing in" motif in his book *That the People Might Live*, Jace Weaver suggests a similar importance of place, of community: "Native writers, in their commitment to Native communities, write to and for Native peoples. They take cultural endurance as a priority and provide an 'abiding sense of remembrance.' They write that the People might live."⁹

If, on the one hand, there is a tendency among many Native writers to turn to their Native communities, there is also a common impulse to depict non-Indians or whites and mainstream white culture within the United States as corrupt and racist. In N. Scott Momaday's essay "The Morality of Indian Hating," for instance, the very title suggests this impulse.¹⁰ In her recent historical novel, *Pushing the Bear*, Diane Glancy describes the horrors perpetrated on the Cherokees during the forced removals of the 1830s: in addition to the immediate physical hardships the people underwent, they also suffered from the realization that they were very literally losing their homes. The character Maritole, for instance, describes returning to her cabin to gather her family's belongings: "I threw back the door and found white people at my table."¹¹ Gerald Vizenor's quotation of a firsthand account of a massacre in eastern Colorado 1864 in "Sand Creek Survivors" recalls and exposes the horrors perpetrated by whites: "after the attack, tribal bodies were scalped and butchered by federal troops. . . . I heard of one instance of a child a few months old being thrown in the feed box of a wagon, and after being carried some distance, left on the ground to perish. I also heard of numerous

instances in which men had cut out the private parts of females, and stretched them over the saddle bows, and wore them over their hats while riding in the ranks.”¹² In “Remembering the Spirit and the Land in the Time of Sitting Bull,” Elizabeth Cook-Lynn also reminds her readers of white atrocities:

Imagine Indians
hunted like wild beasts along the
sun-drenched river beds
smoke on every horizon
the wounded lying in the bushes
unable to run or regret.¹³

In the story “Imagining the Reservation,” Sherman Alexie describes the enemy in the context of language: “How can we imagine a new language when the language of the enemy keeps our dismembered tongues tied to his belt?”¹⁴

At the same time that they expose the inhuman behavior of Euro-Americans and condemn their actions, these writers acknowledge in many cases that they themselves share this enemy’s ancestry, and they thus continue to struggle with formulating a response to the Old World. On the one hand, they see and describe the Old World and its peoples pejoratively, often depicting whites as depraved and heartless conquerors. But, on the other hand, because Native writers themselves often share—and create characters who share—a European ancestry, they ultimately imply that the Old World itself is a place to be reckoned with. One’s identity, both personal and communal, somehow continues to be tied up in the lands drained by such rivers as the Seine, the Thames, and the Tagus.

In this sense, along with the tradition of coming home or “homing in” is an equally prevalent acknowledgment of the author’s mixed heritage. The theme of homing in can be said to necessitate a denial of one’s European heritage, even a conscious choice to be Indian. In his autobiographical account, *The Names*, Momaday, for example, investigates the European side of his mother’s ancestry, acknowledging its importance to him: “That is a whole story, hers to tell; yet some part of it is mine as well. And there is a larger story; I think of where I am in it.”¹⁵ But in the memoir, in which he retraces the Kiowa migration from the headwaters of the Yellowstone River, he does not venture back to France or England. In the same memoir, Momaday articulates his mother’s and his own conscious choice of a heritage, writing that, as a young woman, his mother (who except for a great-grandmother had European ancestry) “began to see herself as an Indian. That dim native heritage became a fascination and a cause for her. . . . She imagined who she was. This act of the imagination was, I believe, among the most important events of my mother’s early life, as later the same essential act was to be among the most important of my own.”¹⁶ Momaday has said that by investigating his father’s heritage he “acquired an identity, and it is an Indian identity, as far as I am concerned.”¹⁷ And certainly, his memoir as a whole is an investigation of his Native roots.

The title of Louis Owen's book *Mixedblood Messages* (1998) suggests the importance of both Indian and Euro-American heritage to the author: the core purpose of his book, he writes, is to address "questions of mixedblood and how we articulate those questions."¹⁸ And in *I Hear the Train* (2001), Owens recounts that he made several trips to France in the 1990s "to plug" his novels. Otherwise, he seems relatively uninterested in the French, beyond making generalizations about how they insist that "everyone drink wine" and about how they "do take art very seriously."¹⁹ Certainly there's no suggestion that he's returning to (an)other homeland or that the French have anything to offer him culturally. As has been the trend until very recently with a few high-profile Native American authors, Owens seems simply to turn his back on Europe and embrace Native America. He recounts a somewhat ritualistic visit to his grandmother's birthplace in Oklahoma: "I stopped in Muldrow, where our grandmother had been born, and then went up to Tahlequah, a place she and our mother had often spoken of." In the essay "The Syllogistic Mixedblood" Owens writes explicitly of his preferred heritage: "I do not seek Irish signifiers in this family, for the stories that have defined me . . . have never been Irish. . . . I cannot deny that I am attempting to appropriate a kind of 'Indianness' into my own life."²⁰

In the novel *The Surrounded* D'Arcy McNickle (Irish, French, Cree, Salish), who had himself been to Oxford University, refuses to send his mixed-blood character Archilde to Europe to study music: "You must send him away," Father Grepilloux tells Max: "You have the means, send him to Europe, send him to Rome and Paris."²¹ Despite the encouragement of one character, however, McNickle refuses to send Archilde to Europe, to give him a chance to explore his father's homeland. The novel thus centers on the homeland of his Salish mother rather than his Spanish father. In his memoir introduction to *On Second Thought*, Mohawk poet Maurice Kenny recalls the important influence that Euro-American poet T. S. Eliot had on him; but, writes Kenny, Eliot "had turned to Europe and Judeo-Christian belief, and I honestly did not wish to go that road."²² As these examples demonstrate, despite their acknowledgement of European ancestry, many mixed-blood authors have denied or rejected an investigation of their European heritage; instead they keep their characters (or, in memoirs, themselves) focused on Native America.

The author perhaps as involved as any with exploring and writing about his mixed-blood heritage is Gerald Vizenor.²³ Both his fiction and autobiographical accounts are replete with descriptions and characterizations of "crossblood" characters and what he calls mongrels. In the book *Crossbloods*, for instance, he writes that "Crossbloods are a postmodern tribal bloodline, an encounter with racialism, colonial duplicities, sentimental monogenism, and generic cultures." But, continues Vizenor, the encounters between cultures "are comic and communal, rather than tragic and sacrificial."²⁴ Vizenor himself deals with the leveling of cultural differences and the Euro-American racialism that are features of his Euro-American heritage. In *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991), Vizenor expresses his preference for Native America: the "New World is heard, the tribal world is dreamed and imagined. The Old World is seen, named and stories are stolen, construed, and published."²⁵

Vizenor portrays Columbus as a tribal man trapped in the “terminal creeds” and the moral determinism of the Old World: “Columbus arises in tribal stories that heal with humor the world he wounded; he is loathed,” writes Vizenor, “but he is not a separation in tribal consciousness. . . . [he] is a trickster overturned in his own stories five centuries later” (185). Vizenor here acknowledges an affinity with the European, both the man and the culture. Columbus “was an obscure crossblood who bore the tribal signature of survival and ascended the culture of death in the Old World” (3). Indeed, Vizenor repeatedly alludes to and characterizes what might well be the connection of Columbus with Sephardic Jews, who, like Native Americans, the author argues, also faced persecution and exile in their homeland.

In *The Heirs of Columbus* Vizenor sends a character, Felipa Flowers, to London, not to claim the land (as in Revard’s case), but to reclaim the remains of Pocahontas. An antiquarian bookseller has offered Felipa the remains of this early Native American traveler to Europe after he heard of Felipa’s legal right to the remains of Columbus, of whom she is one of the heirs. However, Felipa’s fate in England is no better than that of Pocahontas four centuries earlier. In describing this return to Europe, Vizenor draws a number of parallels and similarities between the experiences of the two tribal women. The comparisons begin immediately: Felipa arrives in London “on the same day in March that Pocahontas, weakened with a fever, boarded the *George*” (97). Like her predecessor, according to Vizenor, Felipa stays at the Belle Sauvage Inn on Ludgate Hill, the same place that Pocahontas stayed in 1616. Felipa had come “determined to rescue the remains of a young tribal woman who had died in service to the religious politics of the colonies” (97), and she meets the book dealer at a performance in honor of the memory of Pocahontas. Here also Vizenor insists on similarities between the two representatives from the New World. Felipa dresses as Pocahontas is reputed to have dressed, and Treves, the book dealer, even suggests that the celebration is itself in honor of Felipa, as well as of Pocahontas: “We honor you, in this instance, and the memories of Pocahontas” (99), he says. In a sense, Vizenor recreates Pocahontas and envisions (or revisions) her death through Felipa. There is a biting irony in the fact that Felipa’s corpse is found leaning against a statue of Pocahontas at Gravesend, where this tribal convert was put ashore and died nearly four centuries earlier.²⁶ Felipa thus exists and dies in the shadow of the statue; and both women are murdered by the European culture brought back from the New World. That is, as Vizenor puts it, both died “in service to the religious politics of the colonies” (97).

Because the author does not depict an actual quest to find an Old World home or identity, the concept of “homing in” on a European past or culture does not literally apply. There is, nevertheless, a clear sense throughout the description of Felipa’s journey that a sort of reconciliation with Europe is necessary. This much is suggested by the fact that even though Felipa is murdered and robbed of the remains, Pocahontas’s bones do finally end up back in North America, to be buried properly, at least in Vizenor’s fiction: “The heirs of Columbus held reburial ceremonies for Felipa Flowers, Pocahontas, and Christopher Columbus; their remains were sealed in vaults at the House of

Life near the base of the Trickster of Liberty” (176). The trip to England was thus necessary and can be read as successful. As Vizenor intimates, stories of inheritance are of critical importance: “The significance of their inheritance could be measured by certain historical probabilities and the inheritance of their genetic code. The denial of their unusual origins would be a cold shoulder to the sacred stories, true or not” (165). Like Momaday and Owens, Vizenor seems on the one hand to be interested in Europe (in this case, England) only insofar as it helps a Native character claim or repatriate the remains of a Native ancestor. That Felipa dies in the attempt to reclaim the bones of Pocahontas suggests, on the other hand, that the people from the Americas still die in service to the politics of the colonies and that the Old World still embodies terminal creeds. As the bookseller Treves tells Felipa, for instance, “The Old World celebrated death” (99). Countering this terminal creed of the Old World, as Vizenor makes clear in the epilogue, “we heal with opposition, not separation, or silence, and the best humor in the world is pinched from opposition” (176).

Unlike Felipa in Vizenor’s novel, the Native American character at the center of James Welch’s *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (2000) survives his trip to Europe, where he, in fact, eventually decides to remain. The novel tells the story of an Oglala man who before the action of the novel has been traveling with Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show until he falls ill in France and is left behind. The novel records his subsequent sixteen years in France. Charging Elk ultimately chooses a life in France with his French wife and child over a return to his mother, her people, and his homeland. Despite his survival in Europe, however, Charging Elk is more a man without a country than a man who chooses a new home.

Perhaps what happens to Charging Elk in France—having been left behind by his guardians and then imprisoned by the French—can be seen as a metaphor for his own culture’s leaving him behind and his own ultimate denial of his Oglala kin. His experiences in France can perhaps be seen as emblematic of what happened to the Sioux and other tribal Native Americans in the United States during the closing decades of the nineteenth century. For example, the Wild West scenes in which cowboys and cavalry kill Indians parallel the actual battles between the U.S. Calvary and the Plains Indians. French authorities fail in their attempt to recognize Charging Elk as a French citizen just as the U.S. government forced assimilation of the Indians. Charging Elk’s long imprisonment in Marseilles parallels reservation life, initially a form of imprisonment in the United States. There is a final apparent, if reluctant, acceptance of a foreign culture imposed from the outside. And there is the dark irony that Charging Elk is long thought dead and is thus unable to receive the assistance he needs from the French government. Is this Welch’s sardonic comment on the essentialist and reductive notion that Native Americans ceased to exist after 1890 and thus survive in European and Euro-American consciousness only as nineteenth-century warrior stereotypes?

Charging Elk does not go to Europe in search of an ancestor’s roots, of course. He is, after all, full-blood Oglala—like his historical predecessors Black Elk and Luther Standing Bear, actual men who created personas and

narrated their travels to Europe with the Wild West Show.²⁷ Without imposing an identity between character and author, I suggest that although Welch's character is not returning, James Welch himself, does, in a sense, return to the home of his ancestors by writing a novel that relates a history of a displaced, unrooted Native American in Europe. One example of the character's rootlessness in France comes near the end of the novel when Charging Elk wanders through the streets of Marseilles in search of his former employer, the fish monger. Charging Elk—now a somewhat naturalized Frenchman—"was nervous, almost frightened at being discovered." Even though he has a new French suit, a legitimate job at the docks, speaks fluent French, has a French wife, and papers signifying that he is a citizen of France, he's afraid that his old friend will recognize him. He's afraid not of what he is, but of what he might be thought to be: "an oddity, a big man with dark skin and long black hair who looked as if he belonged in an immigrant neighborhood." From Charging Elk's point of view, there is only a reluctant acceptance of him as a man: "Now people looked at him with that same suspicion he had felt when he first walked these streets [sixteen years earlier]. It had been a puzzling hostility then, but now he was afraid someone would recognize him as the notorious killer of the famous chef."²⁸

As this scene suggests, Welch's novel is not about France or a return to France so much as about a displaced Native American. Indeed, at the end of the novel, Welch describes the Oglalas as displaced whether they're in Europe or the United States. The young-generation Oglala actors of the Wild West Show whom Charging Elk meets after his many years in France recall the history of dispossession in the previous century. They tell the expatriate about Wovoka and the Ghost Dance, and they tell him about Wounded Knee: "Nearly two hundred—men, women, and children. Those people were sick and starving. They were dressed in rags. Now they are all buried in one grave overlooking Wounded Knee Creek. The government didn't have the decency to let their relatives have them, to give them proper burials" (433–34). The young Wild West actors also tell Charging Elk about forced schooling where officials treat the children very badly, and they tell him about the poverty on the reservation: "There are many hungry people who beg at the agency," they report (433). Despite this summary of dismal contemporary events in the Dakotas, the actors urge and advise him to return home to his mother.

That Charging Elk does not return, but instead chooses to stay in Marseilles with his wife (apparently without a thought of taking her with him to the New World), suggests that, according to Welch, there's no going back. The novel ultimately intimates that once France (or Europe in general) has interceded in Native American affairs, whether in the Dakotas or in France, there is no possibility of a return to some precontact ideal. Charging Elk has no choice but to walk away from the fairgrounds and the America that they're meant to represent. His wife Natalie faces a situation that parallels Charging Elk's: When this former farm girl feels overwhelmed by being in the city of Marseilles and away from her father, she gets homesick and thinks of the farm where she grew up. But she realizes that "Going home was impossible now. It

was no longer her home. This strange and sweaty city was home" (414). Such a sentiment applies equally to her husband.

Thus, although Charging Elk remains in Europe with a wife and a child, the novel's conclusion emphasizes the fact of his losing a home, rather than gaining one. Like the historical Black Elk and Standing Bear, Charging Elk (based on an historical figure) is presumably full-blood Sioux, and thus does not return to an old homeland in any ancestral sense when he comes to France. He does, however, encounter the European culture that transformed his people and homeland. Charging Elk's reluctant acceptance of his new life can be seen as symbolizing the imposition of nineteenth-century European culture on Native Americans in the United States. Through his framing of the novel with descriptions of white injustice and brutality toward Native Americans and his "you-can't-go-home-again" theme, Welch emphasizes the idea of the Old World as a death culture. Even though the emphasis is on his having turned his back on his homeland, Charging Elk does ultimately settle in France. Welch has thus, in a sense, turned the tables on the history of colonization. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, for example, the "past, our stories local and global, the present, our communities, cultures, languages and social practices—all may be spaces of marginalization, but they have also become spaces of resistance and hope."²⁹ Insofar as Welch forces the non-Native reader to see Europe and the history of a Native American in Europe from a Native point of view—in fact from that of a Native immigrant—he relates a history previously denied to Native Americans. In *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* Welch reverses the colonial enterprise and thus in a sense decolonizes himself.

Leslie Marmon Silko, like Welch, writes a historical novel in which her Native American protagonist travels to Europe; but unlike Welch, Silko brings her heroine home. In *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999), both the Euro-American characters and their ward, an American Indian girl named Indigo, tour England and the continent. The trip to Europe is inspired by Edward, the entrepreneurial botanist, who wants to steal medicinal plants, *citrus medica*, from Corsica. Edward's illegal and ultimately unsuccessful attempt (he's apprehended trying to smuggle the cuttings back onto the Italian mainland at Livorno) contrasts with the young Native American girl's easy, and legal, acquisition of a huge variety of seeds from many different gardens in Europe. She plans to take the seeds back to her garden in the dunes. One obvious, if implicit, interpretation suggests that although Europe and North America might indeed have much to offer each other, any exchanges between the two continents and different cultures should be made with honesty and good intention, not with stealing and smuggling (as Edward tries to do and as Europeans generally did in the New World). In suggesting similarities between transcontinental colonial enterprises, Silko draws a number of parallels between American Indian history and the history of oppressed cultures in the Old World. Of the Irish, for instance, she asks "how much innocent blood spilled in Derry over the years of the occupation or how much more blood might yet spill?"³⁰

Several motifs running through the novel are important in the context of a Native turn to Europe. Silko suggests that gardens are at the center of many cultures, whether Native American, Euro-American, or European; and she recalls that, like the indigenous peoples in the New World, many ancient Europeans were colonized by outsiders. In addition to these motifs, Silko suggests that the messiah speaks across cultures, as well as across continents. Indigo acknowledges the fusion of the messiah of the Ghost Dance rituals and the messiah of Christian tradition, and she thus believes her trip to Europe to be a pilgrimage: "The farther east they traveled, the closer they came to the place the Messiah and his family and followers traveled when they left the mountains beyond Paiute country" (320–21). Similar to the seeds that constitute a physical manifestation of what Europe has to offer, the fusion of the messiah of Judeo-Christian culture and of the Ghost Dance ritual, recalls Silko, is a spiritual manifestation of another basic similarity between the two cultures. As Indigo studies a painting of the Christian Madonna on an abbey wall, she remembers the messiah and his mother at a dance: "and in that instant Indigo felt the joy and the love that had filled her that night long ago when she stood with Sister Salt, Mama, and Grandma to welcome the Messiah" (321).

In spite of the potential implied by these transcultural elements of the novel, Silko ultimately suggests that—like the Ghost Dance itself—any cultural marriage of Europe and North America is doomed. Edward's failures parallel this cultural defeat. He fails to smuggle the clippings, and he fails as a husband. The literal marriage between the sympathetic Hattie and the insensitive and self-serving Edward collapses. By the time she returns from Europe, Hattie realizes that her marriage to Edward is doomed.³¹ But other than affording Hattie this realization and providing a few seeds, Europe has little to offer either Hattie or Indigo. For instance, Indigo insists that she will miss only the blue of the Mediterranean. Far more important to Indigo and thus to the novel as a whole is her return to her North American homeland in the dunes where she and her sister begin a sort of new, post-Edenic (but precontact?) existence. At the end of *Garden in the Dunes*, Silko insists that home is not to be found on the eastern side of the Atlantic, but rather on the western side, in the Americas. The novel ends with an encounter of good omen, as a New World rattlesnake returning to drink at the spring, "stopped drinking briefly to look at Sister, then turned back to the water; then she gracefully turned from the pool across the white sand to a nook of bright shade. Old Snake's beautiful daughter moved back home" (479).³² In this sense, Silko explores that other homeland but, like Vizenor, ultimately rejects it in favor of a home in the New World. She makes the conscious choice to bring her character back to the American Southwest, the place she deems home, but Indigo's trip to Europe is a necessary precursor to her ability to make that choice.

Like Silko, N. Scott Momaday (French? British, Kiowa, Cherokee)³³ finds an important bond between himself as a Native American and peoples who, as Momaday sees it, have suffered in ways similar to American Indians. Especially important to Momaday is Russia. He spent half a year in the Soviet Union in the 1970s, teaching in Moscow, and took a trip to Siberia in 1997.

Although there is, of course, no indication that the Kiowa writer has a Russian heritage, in a comment written under his mother's photograph in his autobiographical book *The Names* (1976), he suggests that "There is something Russian or Asian about her here."³⁴ That he feels a spiritual or creative affinity with Russia is evident in other writings as well. Of his first sojourn in Russia (then the Soviet Union), for example, he writes that he experienced a creative surge, "Something about that time and place made for a surge in me, a kind of creative explosion. I wrote numerous poems."³⁵

Back in Moscow after his trip to Siberia, Momaday hears of a bear ceremony, evidently practiced in the east. After the hunter returns with the bear on a sled, the people honor it and then "the bear is ushered to its house."³⁶ This story inspired the title of his book, *In the Bear's House* (1999), in which Momaday makes an explicit connection between his Kiowa heritage and the bear heritage of western Siberia. He recounts the Kiowa story: "long ago, a Kiowa boy turned into a bear. . . . [and through] the power of stories and names, I am the reincarnation of that boy." In the context of hearing about the Siberian ritual, he writes in the same introduction, that he recalls the words of the ritual: "'Where are you going?' asks the singer. The hunter replies, 'I am going to the bear's house.'"³⁷ In the *New York Times* essay, "On Common Ground in Siberia," Momaday writes that he has shared much with the Russians, as the title and subtitle, "A Meeting of Native Peoples from New Mexico and Russia," suggest.³⁸

In an essay "Zagorsk: To the Spiritual Center of Russia," Momaday again states the explicit connection he feels between the Russians and his own Kiowa ancestors. Specifically, he notes the similarities in conceptions of spirituality between the two peoples: "The notion of a people full of God intrigued me, and it rang true to my experience. . . . There is a kind of link . . . [with the] *mordas* of northern New Mexico." Momaday also finds a connection between the peoples' ability to endure: "From the first moment I set foot on Russian soil I could feel the strength of that country. I could see in that cold, hard land—in the faces of the people there—an endurance, a holding fast against great odds, that reminded me of the strength that has informed other peoples, my own Native American people included."³⁹

Similarly, when Momaday explores the caves of western Europe, he makes connections between the prehistoric tribes of Europe and those of the western hemisphere. In the essay "Sacred Images," for instance, he remarks on the love that must have inspired the artists to draw on the walls and ceilings of the caves. The animals themselves, suggests Momaday, must have "inspired wonder and awe and reverence. As much as did the buffalo and the horse to the Plains Indian of the nineteenth century, they extended his human being to the center of wilderness, of mystery, of deepest life itself."⁴⁰ For artists in both the New and Old Worlds, these animals were sacred, insists Momaday. Ultimately, what he finds worthwhile about the Old World is how it relates to his Kiowa, not his European, ancestry. He's interested in survival and spiritualism akin to his own and his father's Kiowa experience, not his mother's European background.⁴¹ As suggested by both Silko and Momaday, it's the Native American character (or author) who chooses to accept or reject a

European heritage or any connection to Europe at all; to be in the position to make this choice from inside Europe, as it were, is a form of power, power suggested by Revard and wrested by these authors.

At the midpoint of his story "Claiming Europe," Revard seems to shift gears. He acknowledges that to claim Europe as he does at the beginning of the "Report to the Nation" is to behave toward contemporary Europeans as their (and his) ancestors behaved toward Native Americans. Rather than use military force to drive the Europeans from their lands, he argues, "we would do better just to transport Europe over to us." To do this, proposes Revard, we need only a word processor. Thus instead of literally colonizing Greece, for example, Revard recommends that "it would now be possible for any Osages to feel free to use whatever comes down from Olympos, such as epics, tragedies, democracy, honey and honeybees, odes, civil wars of people or gods or both, good water, idealism, and the like."⁴² Revard's recommendation functions on several levels. On the one hand, he is satirizing the long-held European notion that anything Native is free for the taking. On the other hand, however, he suggests that there is much to be gained by a Native exploration of Europe and European culture. In this sense, he insists on the right to claim part of that European heritage.

With his preference for a "word war" over a literal war, Revard anticipates several Native American authors who associate colonization and the use of language.⁴³ In this sense, going to Europe for Vizenor, Welch, Silko, Momaday, Revard, and others is a means of recapturing stories and thus ransforming language. It's an acknowledgment of the fact of colonization, but it's also a statement about "survivance," to use Vizenor's term. It is through the stories that one survives, writes Silko in *Ceremony*: "You don't have anything / if you don't have the stories."⁴⁴ Vizenor forcefully articulates this idea when he writes that Pocahontas was a hand talker: "Hand talkers are healers," says Felipa (*Heirs* 99). They have stories in the blood. Carter Revard gets the stories he needs from literary travels to Europe, that other homeland. It's not the gold he is after, he insists, but the story. And it's the story and use of the English language that enables survival, say Vizenor, Silko, Owens, Momaday, and Erdrich.

The Master Butcher's Singing Club (2003) allows Louise Erdrich to return to a theme she merely hints at in her much earlier novel, *The Beet Queen* (1986). In reviewing the earlier work, Leslie Marmon Silko writes that "Erdrich leaves her element" when she writes about North Dakota: "hers is an oddly rarified place in which the individual's own psyche, not racism or poverty, accounts for all conflict and tension."⁴⁵ In response to Silko's comments, Susan Castillo argues that Silko implies that "Erdrich is ambivalent about her own Indianness, and that she is skirting issues which . . . are vital ones in the texts of so-called ethnic writers." Castillo points to a central issue of the turn to Europe by these novelists: the unspoken demand that Native writers stick to Native subjects. Castillo problematizes this restriction: "While it is true that she has German-American as well as Chippewa blood, the fact that she chooses to focus on this facet of her ancestry in *The Beet Queen* can hardly be construed as a betrayal of her Chippewa roots."⁴⁶

Erdrich's more recent novel literally begins in Germany, traces the immigration and life of the non-Native master butcher in Fargo, North Dakota, uses a smattering of (sometimes untranslated) German language throughout, and finally returns to Germany in its concluding chapters. Further emphasizing this turn to Europe, Erdrich dedicates the novel to her father (of German descent). In the acknowledgments, she writes that her German grandfather is pictured on the cover, that he, like the author's own grandfather, had American-born sons fight on the American side in World II, and that, like the character Delphine, her grandmother had a "short stint as a human table in a vaudeville act."⁴⁷

Although a search for a German (or U.S. or Native American) identity does not necessarily lie at the center of the novel, Erdrich does explore the issue of an American-born male, Erich (not Erdrich), who was drafted into the German army during the Second World War. Despite his having grown up in the United States, he identifies with his German ancestry: "he had become in his deepest person thoroughly German. Or what he thought of as German" (352). Later he denies his naturalized father and American-born brother when they come to visit him in a POW camp in Canada. His first impulse is not to put himself at risk with the other German POWs by letting them know he's American-born—but he has other reasons as well: "He wasn't about to put himself in danger for reasons of mere sentiment. Besides, he was not who they thought he was, not at all." He denies his father because "He'd struggled to be a German. . . . Erich's new father was a boundary on a map" (363). He has chosen a German identity.

The novel also suggests that Erdrich is exploring her German ancestry in that it begins and ends with the words of a German song, the master butcher's song. The epigraph offers the German song, which begins "*Die Gedanken sind frei / Wer kann sie erraten?*" (Thoughts are free / Who can grasp them?). In the final paragraph, the character Step-and-a-Half hums "German sailor's songs," "patriotic American songs, Cree lullabies, sweat lodge summons, lost ghost dance songs, counting rhymes, and hymns to the snow" (388). In a sense, just as Revard claims Europe by bringing the stories home from Greece and Italy, Momaday from Siberia, Erdrich retrieves a song from Germany. Like Vizenor, Silko, Momaday, and Welch, then, Erdrich is in a sense calling into question limits previously placed on Native identity and on Native authors.

By claiming Europe, this community of well-established and by-now-canonized writers has chosen to challenge mainstream conceptions of what constitutes Indian literature by offering Native American critiques of Europe. They're writing from positions of privilege and choice—and thus of power. By defying cultural and historical roles imposed by the dominant culture they're emancipating themselves. To choose to claim or not to claim a European heritage is a declaration of sovereignty and a form of liberation that these authors are prepared to make. Erdrich, for instance, denies difference, or links tribes (German, Ojibwa, and Cree) through song. She thus claims Europe. These songs "all come from the same place," she insists. "Our songs travel the earth. We sing to one another. Not a single note is ever lost and no song is original" (388).

NOTES

1. Carter Revard, "Report to the Nation: Claiming Europe," in *Earth Power Coming: Short Fiction in Native American Literature*, Simon Ortiz, ed. (Tsaile: Navajo Community College Press, 1983), 166, 167. Revard's story has been reprinted with a different subtitle: "Report to the Nation: Repossessing Europe," in *Nothing But the Truth: An Anthology of Native American Literature*, John Purdy and James Ruppert, eds. (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2001), 333–44.

2. *Ibid.*, 170.

3. There are, to be sure, important earlier accounts by Native Americans of their travels to Europe. Three Ojibwa writers, for example, describe their trips to England in the early nineteenth century: George Copway, Peter Jones, and George Henry. LaVonne Ruoff has discussed their literary contributions in "Reversing the Gaze: Early Native American Images of Europeans and Euro-Americans" (in *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*, Gretchen M. Bataille, ed. [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001], 198–221). In the same essay, Ruoff also briefly discusses Mohawk writer Joseph Brant who visited England after supporting the British during America's war for independence. (See p. 207.) Perhaps best known are two early twentieth-century Oglala travelers, Black Elk and Standing Bear, for their accounts of experiences with Bill Cody's Wild West Show. See John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks*, as told through John G. Neihardt (1932; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1979) and Raymond J. DeMallie's *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given through John G. Neihardt* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985). See also Luther Standing Bear's *My People the Sioux* (1928; reprint, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975). Overlooking some of Standing Bear's comments about mistreatment that he and other Native actors suffered at the hands of the cowboy actors and other whites in the show, Rita G. Napier contends that "[a]ll the Indians who have left written records have testified uniformly to the good treatment they received in Wild Bill's show" (Napier, "Across the Big Water: American Indians' Perceptions of Europe and Europeans, 1887–1906, in *Indians and Europe: An Interdisciplinary Collection of Essays*, Christian F. Feest, ed [Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989], 383–401). Both Black Elk and Standing Bear, for the most part, depict their experiences in a favorable light.

4. In addition to LaVonne Ruoff and Christian Feest mentioned above, a few critics have explored the topic of Native Americans in Europe. Carolyn Thomas Foreman writes about Native Americans (but not necessarily writers) who have toured Europe. Jace Weaver offers a different view of Native Americans outside the United States in "Innocents Abroad," Chapter Seven of *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law, and Culture* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 117–29.

5. Richard Fleck, "Introduction," in *Critical Perspectives on Native American Fiction*, Richard F. Fleck, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, Inc., 1993), 3.

6. Investigation of this theme of identity has become so prevalent, in fact, that *American Indian Quarterly*, for example, has temporarily stopped accepting essays devoted to questions of identity in Native American literature.

7. I refer to Archilde in McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936), Abel in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* (1968), the nameless protagonist in Welch's *Winter in the Blood* (1974), Tayo in Silko's *Ceremony* (1977), and Omishto and Angel in Hogan's *Power*

(1998) and *Solar Storms* (1995) respectively. In each case the character makes some sort of return to home, family, or tribe.

8. William Bevis, "Native American Novels: Homing In," in *Critical Perspectives on Native American Fiction*, Richard F. Fleck, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Three Continents Press, Inc., 1993), 16.

9. Jace Weaver, *That the People Might Live* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 161.

10. N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words* (New York: St. Martin's Press), 59.

11. Diane Glancy, *Pushing the Bear: A Novel of the Trail of Tears* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 14.

12. Gerald Vizenor, *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 33.

13. Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, "Remembering the Spirit and the Land in the Time of Sitting Bull," *I Remember the Fallen Trees: New and Selected Poems* (Cheney: Eastern Washington University Press, 1998), 28.

14. Sherman Alexie, *Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (New York: Harper Collins, 1994), 152.

15. N. Scott Momaday, *The Names* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 8.

16. *Ibid.*, 25.

17. Quoted in Matthias Schubnell, *N. Scott Momaday: The Cultural and Literary Background* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1985), 141.

18. Louis Owens, *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998), xvi.

19. Louis Owens, *I Hear the Train: Reflections, Inventions, Refractions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 108, 115.

20. *Ibid.*, 98.

21. D'Arcy McNickle, *The Surrounded* (1936; reprint, Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978), 108.

22. Maurice Kenny, *On Second Thought: A Compilation* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 21.

23. In "Crossblood Strategies in the Writings of Gerald Vizenor" (*Loosening the Seams: Interpretations of Gerald Vizenor*, A. Robert Lee, ed. [Bowling Green: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 2000], 20), David Murray points out that "Vizenor's writing, with its emphasis on the crossing of races, genres, conventions, and boundaries of all kinds, offers one of the most powerful and extended demystifications of [the essentializing] rhetoric of Indianness."

24. Gerald Vizenor, *Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports* (1976; reprint ed Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), vii–viii.

25. Gerald Vizenor, *The Heirs of Columbus* (Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 1991), 93. Subsequent references to *Heirs* will appear parenthetically within the body of the text.

26. See Helen Roundtree, "Pocahontas: The Hostage Who Became Famous," in *Sifters: Native American Women's Lives*, ed. Theda Perdue (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 14–18.

27. See the two accounts of Black Elk's experiences: John Neihardt's *Black Elk Speaks* and Raymond J. DeMallie's *The Sixth Grandfather*. See also Luther Standing Bear's *My People the Sioux*.

28. James Welch, *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* (New York: Doubleday, 2000), 408. That reluctant acceptance is also evident in the attitude of his French father-in-law. After agreeing to the marriage, Vincent asks in a prayer that his deceased wife and God forgive him (*Charging Elk*, 403). Subsequent references to this novel appear parenthetically within the body of the text.

29. Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 4.

30. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Gardens in the Dunes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 264. Subsequent references to this novel will appear parenthetically within the body of the text.

31. Momaday makes a very similar point in his 1964 essay, "The Morality of Indian Hating": "The relationship between the white man and the red was doomed from the outset by a conflict of attitudes and a disposition of intolerance" (in *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages* [New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997], 60).

32. As Revard notes, European vipers are without rattles: "I don't know why the poison snakes never invented, in Europe, rattles to warn people, but this one clearly did not get in the first strike" ("Report to the Nation," 178).

33. In *The Names* (New York: Harper, 1976), Momaday writes about his great-great grandfather on his mother's side, recalling that "family tradition has it that he was predominantly French" (9).

34. N. Scott Momaday, *The Names* (New York: Harper, 1976), 23.

35. N. Scott Momaday, *In the Presence of the Sun: Stories and Poems* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), xx.

36. N. Scott Momaday, "On Common Ground in Siberia: A Meeting of Native Peoples from New Mexico and Russia," *New York Times*, 14 September 1997, sec. 6, part 2, 48.

37. N. Scott Momaday, *In the Bear's House* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 9, 11.

38. "On Common Ground in Siberia," 48.

39. N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1997), 133.

40. *Ibid.*, 128.

41. In his travel descriptions of Germany and Spain, he leaves out the people altogether; he is much more interested in the buildings and the history. In the novel *The Ancient Child* (1989), the reader sees Momaday's character Setman in Paris for only one day. He attends his art opening and has sex with the French gallery owner, but as soon as he hears of his adoptive father's death, he leaves immediately without a backward glance. His only other interaction with France (and thus with his European ancestry) is a few memorized words from the opera *Carmen*.

42. Revard, "Claiming Europe," 170, 177.

43. In the introductory chapter to *Other Destinies* Louis Owens, for example, notes that "the Native American writer . . . must also function within an essentially appropriated language. For behind the modern Indian author's fluent mastery of English lies a centuries-old history of assimilation" (12). In *Mixedblood Messages*, similarly, Owens writes that "we humans have the ability to appropriate and liberate the other's discourse. . . . We can use the colonizer's language . . . to articulate our own worlds and find ourselves whole. This has been the project of Native American writers for a long

time" (xiii). In *I Hear the Train* he writes that Native Americans "have appropriated the master discourse, making the invaders' language their language . . . and turning it against the center" (251). In the introduction to her anthology, Joy Harjo writes that many Native Americans have lost the use of their own language and so use only English, French, or Spanish: "These colonizers' languages, which often usurped our own tribal languages or diminished them, now hand back emblems of our cultures, our own designs: beadwork, quills, if you will. We've transformed these enemy languages" (in *Reinventing the Enemy's Language: Contemporary Native Women's Writings of North America*, Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird, eds. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1997), 22.

44. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony* (1977; reprinted, New York: Penguin Books, 1986), 2.

45. Leslie Marmon Silko, "Here's an Odd Artifact for the Fairy-Tale Shelf," *SAIL* (first series) 10.4 (1986): 110.

46. Castillo, "Postmodernism, Native American Literature, and the Real: The Silko-Erdrich Controversy," *Massachusetts Review* 32.2 (1991): 288.

47. Louise Erdrich, *The Master Butcher's Singing Club* (New York: Harper Collins, 2003), 389. Subsequent references to this text appear parenthetically within the body of the text.