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UNITED STATES

RE-VIEWING AMERICAN MULTICULTURAL LITERATURE

A. ROBERT LEE



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Re-Viewing American Multicultural Literature

Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans

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Universitat de València

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UNITED STATES: Re-Viewing American Multicultural Literature

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Acknowledgments

To have this collection of pieces published in a leading Spanish series like the Universitat de València's Biblioteca Javier Coy d'estudis nord-americans could not be thought other than a privilege in its own right. But it also gives me the opportunity to discharge various further kinds of debt within Spain. To say that I have been a frequent academic visitor is to understate by a large margin. Since the late 1970s I have found myself endlessly in the Peninsula (to include Portugal)—whether for university lecture invitations, seminars, EAAS, AEDEAN, SAAS and different author conferences, or UNED broadcasts. The connection, however, apart from my school-time Spanish language struggles with *hubiera/hubiese*, begins in any substantial sense with the presence for whom this series is named: Javier Coy.

He and I first met at the Salzburg Seminar for April 1976, a conference held under Fulbright auspices to reflect the U.S. Bi-Centennial. That led to shared occasions first at the Universidad de Salamanca, then at the University of Kent, UK, where as a Britisher teaching American Studies and Literature I held a full-time post for over a quarter-century, and subsequently at venues across Europe and the U.S.A. My friendship with him was quick to extend to Juan José Coy and Enrique García Díez, not least when first Enrique and then in the light of Enrique's too early death Javier himself moved from Salamanca to the Universitat de València. In March 1999 I was invited to give a keynote lecture at the SAAS Conference in Santiago de Compostela. It required not the slightest hesitation to invoke Javier as *el fundador o casi-fundador de Estudios Norteamericanos en España*. He has been, and remains, nothing less. In this respect the volume to hand adds my own tribute to *Nor Shall Diamond Die: American Studies in Honour of Javier Coy* (2003) in which, deservedly, he is celebrated by colleagues and friends at home and abroad. On a personal note he will remember, en route to an AEDEAN conference at the Universidad de Santiago de Compostela, the group car journey we made from Salamanca via Oporto less in search of spiritual revelation than the definitive Portuguese lunch. A fond time. A fond memory. To Javier, and to Juan José and the late Enrique, *saludos y gracias por todo*.

The connection with Spain, early and presently, also requires mention of yet other networks and friendships. They each have come into ever sharper relief when looked at from Nihon University, Tokyo, where I took up a Chair in American Literature in 1997. Spain thus has become a connection across Asia as much as Europe. As to names, these include Ángel Luis Pujante, Juan Antonio Suárez, Clara Calvo, David Walton and Keith Gregor of the Universidad de Murcia; Félix Martín, Isabel Durán, Ana Antón Pacheco and Sylvia Hilton of the Universidad Complutense; Rocío Davis, Rosalía Baena Molina, Andrew Breeze, José Gabriel Rodríguez Paxos and María Luisa Antonaya of the Universidad de Navarra; Barbara Ozieblo of the Universidad de Málaga; María Frías,

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The connection now extends into *UNITED STATES: Re-Viewing Multicultural American Literature* and with it to Carme Manuel in whom the Biblioteca Javier Coy has its editorial figurehead. I thank her enormously for her friendship, her wholly estimable professionalism and for encouraging me to rework the pieces collected here.

Josefa Vivancos Hernández has brought Spain into my life in a way I could never have anticipated. My gratitude continues to grow.

Introduction

Overviews, Review-Essays, Interviews, Reviews

America is a unique sociological fabric, and it bespeaks poverty of imagination not to be thrilled at the incalculable potentialities of so novel a union of men.... America is already the world-federation in miniature....

America is coming to be, not a nationality, but a trans-nationality, a weaving back and forth, of many threads and colors. Any movement which attempts to thwart this weaving, or to dye the fabric any one color, or entangle the threads of the strands, is false to this cosmopolitan vision.

Randolph Bourne, "Trans-National America," *Atlantic Monthly*, 118, July 1916

United States. Multicultural American Literature. The two phrases play into, and against, each other with a near inevitability. For despite all longstanding talk of the one canonical America, a culture, a history, of presiding mainstream, how else to capture the sheer heteroglossia—the plies of voice—that has been the actual gallery of American lives and literature? To this end the pieces gathered in *UNITED STATES: Re-Viewing Multicultural American Literature*, drawn from work done across the past three decades, will be seen in one degree or another to have been pitched in the spirit of Randolph Bourne's "Trans-National America."

That is, they aim to reflect a sense of the nation's plurality spoken, and more to the point written into, its literature and augmented by a latter-day sense of theory in which issues of literary formation and canon have come under major interrogation. Even so their compass addresses principally only four prime arenas within U.S. multicultural literary tradition—African American, Native American, Latino/a and Asian American.

Overview or review-essay, interview or review, all to one degree or another have undergone revisions of styling. Generally, however, and in the interests of maintaining the integrity of the given account, each text has not been updated beyond the original date of publication. That, and where first published (or delivered in the case of "Insider, Outsider: Japanese American Writing Japan"), is indicated at the end of all the contributions. A number, it should be noted, were written for different readerships, some general ("Black American Fiction Since Richard Wright"—first issued as a British Association Pamphlet in

1983), some scholarly (“Afro-America, the Before Columbus Foundation and the Literary Multiculturalization of America”—a contribution to the *Journal of American Studies* in 1994). Others take on a comparative note (“Imagined Cities of China”) or are author-centered (“Chester Himes,” “Langston Hughes”). Whichever the case, and with the *juego de palabras* of the title as working cue, I hope these accounts will be read as complements and follow-throughs to earlier literary explorations of mine, especially *Designs of Blackness: Mappings in the Literature and Culture of Afro-America* (1998) and *Multicultural American Literature: Comparative Black, Native, Latino/a and Asian American Fictions* (2003). For it has been a continuing stimulus, and pleasure, to work in these literary domains, America and indeed beyond, in which the writ of multicultural life and word has held imaginative sway.

“Ethnics Behaving Badly: U.S. Multicultural Narratives,” the essay which opens this collection, is meant as a kind of working banner, a mapping of terrain. It leads directly into overviews which speak to modern America’s multicultural literary flourish and the key domains in play. The review-essays tackle both creative work and some of the arising critique and scholarship—with the creation of the Before Columbus Foundation under Ishmael Reed’s inspiration as touchstone. The earliest piece, “Hurts, Absurdities and Violence: The Contrary Dimensions of Chester Himes” (1978) is part of what in retrospect can be seen to have been the historic re-evaluation of Himes: it is reproduced almost to the letter in the form first written. The six interviews, with Gerald Vizenor, Frank Chin, Louis Owens, John G. Cawelti, Rex Burns, and myself, live voices in a live literary context, confirm American writing and its different seams of ethnicity as shared colloquium. The dozen reviews, in turn, are offered as reception markers in the evolution of U.S. multicultural literary tradition, estimations of both original-creative writings and pertinent scholarship.

America’s plural ethnicities and their ongoing imaginative manifestation in story, poem, drama and discursive writing, invites ever fuller recognition: *UNITED STATES: Re-Viewing Multicultural American Literature* is meant as a contribution to precisely that end.

Overviews

Ethnics Behaving Badly: U.S. Multicultural Narratives

I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow damned up in my soul, not lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who feel that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it... No, I do not weep at the world—I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.

Zora Neale Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" (1928)¹

Zora Neale Hurston's celebrated refusal of ethnic victimry casts a forward light of immense significance. It does so, too, with all her typical bodaciousness, wonderfully engaging in idiom and bold in the point being made. No "sobbing school of Negrohood" indeed, no suffering minority status whether by race, class or gender but rather wit, savvy, singularity, a true oyster knife celebration of appetite for self and world.

Given her upbringing in the all-black town of Eatonville, Florida, her subsequent time at colleges like Morgan State, Howard and Barnard, and the triumphs (however insufficiently acknowledged at the time) of a best novel like *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) or a virtuoso self-chronicle like *Dust Tracks on a Road* (1942), it could hardly be open to doubt that Hurston did not understand, or experience, any amount of vintage racism. But her characteristically sassy refusal to indulge the piety of what she terms the "tragically colored" syndrome, adds its own twist. Self-pity of all kinds, but black self-pity in particular, invites not merely being decried but the loftiest smack of dismissal.²

Bad behavior? For sure, yet as with so much of her work, it could not have been more intrinsic to her general style or quite more inviting. Nor do matters rest only with her own example. Among other implications, few weigh more than how she anticipates later "ethnic" writers who also complicate, not to say outmaneuver and subvert, stereotypic

¹ "How It Feels to Be Colored Me" first appeared in *World Tomorrow* 11, May 1928. Epifanio San Juan was the editor of the pamphlet series in which this essay first appeared. I remain grateful for his encouragement.

² Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Philadelphia and London, J.B. Lippincott, 1937; *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1942.

expectations about the whole issue of belonging to an assumed minority niche. Nor, in this respect, would it be accurate to advance Hurston as somehow one of the very few, even the only begetter, of Bad Behavior within modern African American tradition. Companion voices have been several and emphatic.

George Schuyler's *Black No More* (1931), with its plotline of a rogue geneticist able to change skin color, takes a zany, Menckinite tilt at America's supposed "chromatic democracy," and within it, at black-bourgeois fantasies of becoming ever whiter.³ Wallace Thurman's *Infants of the Spring* (1932) turns an unflattering spotlight on the black literary-cultural efflorescence once trumpeted by Alan Locke's anthology *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (1925), an insider's satire of the grandstanding, spats, gender-bends, and frequent illicit liaisons of Harlem's 1920s literati.⁴ Chester Himes's *Pinktoes* (1961), if at first thought little more than a sexually off-color Olympia Press confection, uses its comedy of uptown Manhattan partying to probe not only the fleshly but the larger cultural implications of inter-racial close encounter.⁵

Few contemporaries have better carried forward this genealogy of constructive irreverence than Ishmael Reed. The bow he made with *The Free-Lance Pallbearers: An Irreverent Novel* (1967), as originally and quite aptly subtitled, and *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down* (1969), inaugurates a career of satiric metafiction as controversially keen-eyed, and agile, and quite anything in the supposed mainstream. Does not a version of the Nixon years as Science Fiction dream-novel, or a western well ahead of Mel Brooks's screen comedy *Blazing Saddles* (1974) with its trickster black sheriff and a rancher-cum-villain in the person of Drag Gibson, challenge if not quite all the rules, then at least the usual expectations, of the two genres in play? Reed's subsequent fiction, to include *Mumbo Jumbo* (1972), his circling pastiche of 1920s race manners with "Jes Grew" as a trope for the spread of black style and jazz, and *Flight to Canada* (1976), his spoof slave metafiction with helicopters over the quarters and TV broadcasts, gives witness to no dip in virtuosity or ironic fashioning.⁶

Carlene Hatcher Polite's *Sister X and the Victims of Foul Play* (1975), "jazz narrative" in Ishmael Reed's words, and a text which shows nothing if not a postmodern willingness to patrol its own telling, likewise does an about-face in terms of literary genre.⁷ It turns a conventional murder plot back on itself, for the death of Arista Polo, dancer-artist, points to far larger stakes, the plot whereby black art, and with it black grace of music and movement, can be reduced to show-time, an updated commercial sale of flesh. Which foul play most applies, that of the murder in question or that of race-privileged art and history as mainstream at the expense of black creativity?

A shared against-the-grain spirit animates Trey Ellis's *Platitudes* (1988), a novel like its follow-up *Home Repairs* (1993) and the tongue-in-cheek short story "Guess Who's Coming to Seder" (1989), is not only full of self-referencing but written under the rubric of what its

³ George Schuyler, *Black No More: Being An Account of the Strange and Wonderful Workings of Science in the Land of the Free, A.D. 1933-1944*, New York: MaCauley Co., 1931.

⁴ Wallace Thurman, *Infants of the Spring*, New York: MaCauley Co. 1932; Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro: An Interpretation*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1925.

⁵ Chester Himes, *Pinktoes*, Paris: Olympia Press, 1961.

⁶ Ishmael Reed, *The Free-Lance Pallbearers: An Irreverent Novel*, New York: Doubleday, 1967; *Yellow Back Radio Broke-Down*, New York: Doubleday, 1969; *Mumbo Jumbo*, Garden City, New York: Random House, 1972; *Flight to Canada*, New York: Random House, 1976.

⁷ Carlene Hatcher Polite, *Sister X and the Victims of Foul Play*, New York: Doubleday, 1975.

author calls Cultural Mulatto or New Black Aesthetic auspices.⁸ That is, Ellis makes a conscious pitch to move on from historic themes of protest, one-time slavery or color-line and ghetto, into contemporary Manhattan black young-writer life. This is Manhattan unghettoed, a cyber-savvy world of mixed schooling, pop culture, foodways, sex talk and dress. In the computer linkage of Dewayne Wellington and Ishee Ayam, writers both, he a would-be experimentalist and she an Alice Walker-style womanist, Ellis goes a great deal further than the portrait of access to the mainstream. He asks what narrative best tells contemporary Afro-America and its context. Given the novel's montage of snippets and computer letters, photographs, teases of fact and fiction, even fake SAT tests, the one fictional story (that being shared by Deewayne and Ishee) mirrors their own apparent actual and mutual story. Amid pc and gender ideology, black sisterhood and the new black manhood, how is contemporary man-woman love to work or find its right working language and measure? Has one set of platitudes simply been replaced by another? Ellis's novel steps boldly, inventively, and with its own armory of provocation, on to battle-strewn ground.

In Darryl Pinckney's *High Cotton* (1992) W.E.B. DuBois's notion of the Talented Tenth, in yet another irreverence, is put under ironic auspices, as the Also Chosen.⁹ This is 1960s black Middle America drawn to Black Power as a kind of suburban chic, Africanization as gesture—hair, dashikis, argot. The funny, rueful shies come fast and many, from the narrator's "No one sat me down and told me I was a Negro" (3) to riffs on the one hand about "the paradise of integration" (82) and on the other "Negrofirstism" (131). In keeping with, say, James Weldon Johnson's earlier fiction of fact, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912), Pinckney rings his own changes on the novel-as-autobiography.¹⁰ His alter ego voice, thus, offers a reflexive, and adroitly mock-heroic, gloss to its own call to radicalism:

Then came the Revolution, that loss of meridian, brought to the suburbs by elder siblings in Easter break. The Revolution drove up in Day-Glo vans, electric Kool-Aid Volkswagons and souped-up convertibles. One of my sisters could be counted on to bring home the longhairs, the other sister to drag in the militants... Never mind that the Revolution was tardy and hollow, had come late to the suburbs, like foreign films, certain music, bell-bottoms, and pot. Revolutionary defiance was expected of me, and whites and blacks agreed in my case, was long overdue. My best friend, Hans Hansen, admitted, "I used to think your people were lazy. Now I understand. It's sickle cell." (108-9)

Hurston, throughout, acts as an antecedent, a working marker. Her imaginative making-over of the black Florida of Eatonville, of the Hoodoo she often calls a sympathetic magic, and of the turns of vernacular black etiquette and speech as she garnered it from her own upbringing, the Caribbean, the Gullah and other islands off the Carolinas and the folklore she began under Franz Boas, has belatedly won its better recognition. That, nonetheless, and since her rehabilitation since the 1970s, is far from ignoring the other kinds of controversy she has aroused. Is there, or not, still an insufficiency, to her takes on the politics of segregation, and behind it, the historic shadow of slavery? Did she, most notably

⁸ Trey Ellis, *Platitudes*, New York: Vintage, 1988; *Home Repairs*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993.

⁹ Darryl Pinckney, *High Cotton*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1992.

¹⁰ James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, Boston, Massachusetts: Sherman French, 1912.

in *Dust Tracks on a Road*, too readily trim her sails, edit, appease, even self-censor, for a white readership?

The paradoxes extend in a number of directions. Her relish, and affirmation, of Afro-America's cultural vitality can hardly be doubted. It expresses itself in the stories, folklore and the novels begun with *Jonah's Gourd Vine* (1934) and whose high point, in most opinion, is to be found in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937) as the tough but warmly fond, even lyric, life of Janie Crawford.¹¹ Yet Hurston, symptomatically, would also oppose the Brown v. Board of Education decision of 1954 outlawing Separate but Equal schooling on the not a little unusual grounds that its effect, as she believed, would demean black teachers and schooling.

Alice Walker, to whom much of Hurston's recovery is owed, offers a greatly relevant perspective in the Dedication of her *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... and Then Again When I Am Being Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader* (1979):

Zora Neale Hurston was outrageous—it appears by nature. She was quite capable of saying, writing, or doing things *different* from what one might have wished.¹²

It may well be an irony in keeping that if Walker could write fervently in praise of Hurston as womanist founder, even while alleging “oddly false-sounding” notes in *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Ralph Ellison, whose *Invisible Man* (1952) exhibits its own contrariedades of voice, speaks of the “blight of burlesque” in Hurston's writings.¹³ Either way, in her every swerve and counter-flow, bad behavior comes into play, the unwillingness on Hurston's part to settle for the received wisdom, the comfort of stock formula. Henry Louis Gates, in his Afterword to the Library of Congress edition of *Dust Tracks on a Road*, gives furtherance to this by arguing for a necessary complexity to Hurston's writings that “refuses to lend itself to the glib categories of “radical” or “conservative,” “black” or “Negro,” “revolutionary” or “Uncle Tom”—categories of little use in literary criticism” (288).¹⁴

Reminders of Hurston's resistance to easy categorization virtually jump out from *Dust Tracks on a Road*.¹⁵ On the one hand the text offers an abundance of down-home nuance (“I have been in Sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots” and “I was a Southerner and had the map of Dixie on my tongue” [280]). On the other hand a kind of fighting talk is always in evidence, not merely her sideswipes, muted or not, at white Dixie, but at being held to any one-note Negro category (“There is no *The Negro* here” [230]) or “Why should Negroes be united? Nobody else in the United States is” [237]).

The willingness, in other words, to fire more than one shot across the bow at any one time, or to take few prisoners be they white or black, is unmistakable. In telling her life in *Dust Tracks on a Road* the effect is cumulative, whether Eatonville as “the first attempt at organized self-government on the part of Negroes in America” (3), or her girlhood will to

¹¹ Zora Neale Hurston, *Jonah's Gourd Vine*, Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott, 1935.

¹² Zora Neale Hurston, *I Love Myself When I Am Laughing... and Then Again When I Am Looking Mean and Impressive: A Zora Neale Hurston Reader*, ed. Alice Walker, Old Westbury, New York: Feminist Press, 1979.

¹³ Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*, New York: Random House, 1952, 1982.

¹⁴ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Zora Neale Hurston: ‘A Negro Way of Saying Things,’” Afterword to Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, The Restored Text Established by the Library of America, New York: Harper Perennial, 1992.

¹⁵ Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road*, Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1942; *Dust Tracks on a Road*, reprinted, with additional original chapters and Introduction by Robert Hemenway, Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1992. Page references are to this edition.

creativity and set-to physical fight with her stepmother (“This was the very corn I wanted to grind” [101]), or her friendship with the great blues queen Ethel Waters pitched as a French kiss (“I am her friend, and her tongue is in my mouth” [245]), or the memory of early publication like *Mules & Men* (1935) (“You know the feeling when you found your first pubic hair” [211-12]).¹⁶ These, and like sayings, amount to un-piety given its own Hurston style, a force of voice at once guardedly intimate yet full of public daring. They offer a perfect departure-point for the play of contrarian register, the bad behavior, within U.S. multicultural fiction.

The use of the word “Indian” is postmodern, a navigational conception, a colonial invention, a simulation in sound and transcription. Tribal cultures became nominal, diversities were twisted to the core, and oral stories were set in written languages... Native American Indians are burdened with colonial pantribal names, and with imposed surnames by missionaries and federal agents. More than a million people, and hundreds of distinct tribal cultures, were simulated as Indians; an invented pantribal name, one sound, bears Treaties, statutes, and seasons, but no tribal culture, languages, religion, or landscape.

Gerald Vizenor, *Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports* (1990)¹⁷

Postindian mixedblood. Gerald Vizenor’s self-description in his *Interior Landscapes: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors* (1990) carries his typical style, a touch baroque, neologistic, challenging.¹⁸ Born of White Earth Anishinaabe (Chippewa-Ojibway) and white fur trader origins, his fractured Minneapolis upbringing would lead on to army service in Japan, social work at the city’s American Indian Employment Center, his considerable stint as reporter for the *Minneapolis Tribune*, and the eventual professorial career spanning Bemidji State to Berkeley to the University of New Mexico. As one of the most published authors in Native American history, and across novels, stories, drama, poetry, and a huge body of discursive work, he has been both genial and fierce in exploring how Native peoples have been figured, or rather disfigured, in the standard versions.

“I believe we are all invented as Indians” he says in a 1981 interview.¹⁹ “Indian is a nominal invention of racialism and colonialism, an invented name, unheard in native oral languages” he writes in a 1995 autobiographical essay.²⁰ Few have more teased even as they have been serious in their nay-saying to the triumphalist Euro-American narrative of hemispheric discovery and conquest. In this he has sought to counter, yet always bring to bring trickster imaginative invention to, the almost casual travesties of name, typecast, humor, appearance, that have enclosed Native America. That, as much as anything, embraces the notorious binary of Noble Savage or Devil, the Vanishing American ethos, victim figurations of reservation and city, and each and every turn of savagist mystique to

¹⁶ Zora Neale Hurston, *Mules & Men*, Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott, 1935.

¹⁷ Gerald Vizenor, *Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minneapolis Press, 1990.

¹⁸ Gerald Vizenor, *Interior Landscapes: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.

¹⁹ Neal Bowers and Charles Silet, “An Interview with Gerald Vizenor,” *MELUS* 8.1, 1981, 41-9.

²⁰ Gerald Vizenor, “Visions, Scars, and Stories,” *Contemporary Authors Autobiography Series*, Vol. 22:3, Detroit, Michigan: Gale Research Company, 1995.

do with the tribes. Against each of these, and without the slightest overlooking of cavalry and other war defeat, removals, Dawes and other allotments, the Trail of Tears, the setbacks of disease and poverty, he has posited his notions of *postindian* and *survivance*. These bespeak Native life as more than mere survival, but rather a vast and wholly ongoing enactive human reservoir of creativity, whether belief-systems or story both spoken and written, and managed against historical odds both on the reservations and in the cities.

Rarely has his trickster irony been more energetic, even unreal, than in his novels. These look first to *Bearheart* (1978, revised 1990), with its pilgrim vision of a regressive and consumerist America as much out of spiritual balance as oil. Thereafter the span has included *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1987, 1990), with its parallel trickster turns of the Anishinaabe Griever de Hocus and the Chinese monkey-king Sun Wu k'ung as well-aimed shies at the politics of American prolificacy and PRC state authoritarianism; *The Trickster of Liberty: Tribal Heirs to a Wild Baronage* (1988), an antic campus detective story as much to do with American history as with anthropology and purloined museum holdings of Native relics and bones; *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991), a quincentennial about-face portrait of the High Admiral as himself a returnee Native mixedblood; *Dead Voices: Natural Agonies in the New World* (1992), his Beckett-like parable of modern bear-transformation and shamanism; *Hotline Healers: An Almost Browne Novel* (1997), his pastiche of New Age and psychic Indians not least through Almost's Blank Book business; and *Chancers* (2000), more trickster fantasy set in the University of California's Phoebe Hearst Museum as an exchange of anthropologist for Native skulls. With *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57* (2003), he sends one more trickster, the *hafu* Ronin Browne, to Japan's Peace Memorial Museum in a novel-as-meditation upon the memorialization of both Japanese and American war death.²¹

Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance (1994) and *Fugitive Poses: Native American Scenes of Absence and Presence* (1999), Vizenor's two full-length discursive works, demonstrate the same gamester virtuosity, his impatience with set-piece versions of history. Both continue the contradance of earlier essays and polemical writing to include *Wordarrows: Indians and Whites in the New Fur Trade* (1978), *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent* (1981) and *Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo, and Other Reports* (1990). The reckoning further needs to include the panels of memory, White Earth to Minneapolis, Japan to Berkeley, built into *Interior Landscapes: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors* (1990) and the wide-ranging contrariety of view given in *Postindian Conversations* (1999).²²

²¹ Gerald Vizenor, *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Truck Press, 1978, revised as *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1990; *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, Normal, Illinois: Illinois State University/Fiction Collective, 1987; *The Trickster of Liberty: Tribal Heirs to a Wild Baronage at Petronia*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1988; *The Heirs of Columbus*, Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1991; *Dead Voices: Natural Agonies in the New World*, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992; *Hotline Healers: An Almost Browne Novel*, Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1997; *Chancers*, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000; *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2003.

²² Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance*, Hanover, New Hampshire: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1994; *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1998; *Wordarrows: Indians and Whites in the New Fur Trade*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1978; *Earthdivers: Tribal Narratives on Mixed Descent*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1981; *Crossbloods: Bone Courts, Bingo,*

Ceci n'est pas une pipe. Magritte's celebrated jugglery of a title, a painting whose visual image is belied by its accompanying word gloss, gives Vizenor his cue for *Manifest Manners*. The cover's Andy Warhol silk-screen acrylic profile of Russell Means, AIM luminary alongside Dennis Banks, he takes as symptomatic of each endlessly reiterated fiction of the Indian. Braided, in a bone choker, apparently silent-wise in demeanor, in warrior regalia and with a pastel brown-red daubed from his forehead to chest, Means looks to be the perfect brave—impassive, and to be seen as silent. In fact he is out of time, posed, painterly, a beguiling and indeed artful travesty from a New York studio. In a repeated phrase throughout *Manifest Manners*, and with an additional nod to Michel Foucault's *This is Not a Pipe* (1973), Vizenor observes of Warhol's fiction of the Indian, and as though in countering obligation in the face of all other like fictions, "This portrait is not an Indian."²³

The disclaimer does immediate, and almost literally and appropriate eye-catching good service, a simultaneous yes and no to the ironies of the Indian as endlessly imaged, and multiplied, as shadow, harlequin, hologram, manikin, chimera, other, or rather, in Vizenor's purposive coining, double others. As title-phrase, too, manifest manners, another of Vizenor's revamps, contributes its own working gloss: this is manifest destiny de-triumphalized, guyed, for its privileging of the one version, the one language, of American history over another. Each working sequence builds out from these standpoints.

"Postindian Warriors," as opening chapter, typical essay-cum-story, takes a range of ironic soundings at the imaging of Native people, from Lewis and Clark to *Dances with Wolves*, The Indian entries in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* to Michael Mann's *Last of the Mohicans*, and with time called on AIM's Clyde Bellecourt, Banks and Means for playing their part in the collaborationist fakery of the Indian. "Double Others," with a greatly affecting reference to Charles Alexander Eastman, Ohiyesa under his Santee Sioux tribal name, as the only Native doctor at the Wounded Knee massacre, leads on to the question of why no memorial of a kind with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial to honor less "the last major battle of the Indian Wars" than a "massacre of tribal women and children" (50). The same refusal of step-lock versions of history underwrites "Shadow Survivance," an essay that moves several ways at once: a further smack at anthropology (Vizenor calls it anthropologetics), a dislike for the narrow reservation cultural nationalism of Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, the teasing of Paula Gunn Allen for her "lesbian spiritualism," and skepticism at literary critique like Charles R. Larson's *American Indian Fiction* (1978) as deploying "wrong categories" (80).

Shorter pieces deal variously in Columbus and Mother Earth as more styles of *figura* than fact ("Eternal Havens"); Ishi, the last Yana survivor, as infinitely more elusive than some turn-of-the-century California stone-age exotic ("Ishi Obscura"); casino culture as at once footfall of when Luther Standing Bear had coins thrown at him and the modernity of "white people throwing money at the tribes" (139) with all its implications for Native gain and loss ("Casino Coups"); and AIM as "more kitsch and tired simulation than menace or moral tribal visions" (154), a view that has put Vizenor much on the firing-line ("Radical

and *Other Reports*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1990; *Interior Landscapes: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1990; Gerald Vizenor and A. Robert Lee, *Postindian Conversations*, Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1999.

²³ Michel Foucault, *Ceci n'est pas une pipe*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1973. Trans. James Harness, *This is Not a Pipe*, Berkeley: University of California Press. 1983.

Durance"). Controversialism was rarely so adept, a refusal to follow the one or other prescribed viewpoint.

Delivered as the Abraham Lincoln lectures at the University of Nebraska, *Fugitive Poses* tackles, as Vizenor sees it, the fatal, if unintended, discrepancy between Indian and Native. Indians he takes to signify Baudrillardian simulation, the silhouettes or indeed the double others perpetuated in the dominant culture. These have found their forms in the demonology of captivity narratives, museum artifacts and bone displays, set-piece Noble Savage canvases like those of Charles King, the static Indian portraits of Edward Curtis's photography (precisely "fugitive poses" [161]), anthropological case-study, and every manner of film, sports, cartoon, and literary imagery. Notably Vizenor will again have nothing of romantic victimry (he refers to it as the "archive of victimry") or its equally romantic noble opposite.

Natives, in Vizenor's counter-coining, and as one of his continuing motifs, do and must look to *survivance*, imaginative sovereignty, its terms those of the living not the dead. To this end *Fugitive Poses* advances a number of theatres in which native sovereignty becomes less an issue of land or, for sure, blood quantum, than of self-imagining, memory, story (be it oral or scriptural), humor, tease, play, a repertoire of living continuity he terms *transmotion*. For Vizenor Native presence trumps absence, survivance trumps survival. Native life signifies active over passive verb. His own writer's role has been a call to subversion of those historical and social science semantics by which Natives in the Americas have been positioned in hemispheric time and image.

In the writings of Leslie Marmon Silko, Laguna storyteller and eco-activist, one meets a further and different contrariety of voice, tribal-political but far from narrow and rarely without its own dark laughter. In "Listening to the Spirits" (1998) she observes: "I believe that the Pueblo people, the indigenous people of the Americas, we're not only Indian nations and sovereign nations and people, but we are citizens of the world."²⁴ The novels bear every witness: *Ceremony* (1977) as the play of two war-zones, Pacific World War II and the Laguna-Keres terrain of Los Alamos with the story of the returning Tayo told in the form of a life-history yet reflexively itself a story-ceremony; *Almanac of the Dead* (1991) as a hemispheric parable of the indigenous Americas bent upon restitution of sovereignty and human spirit in the face of colonialism and war; and *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999) as a multi-narrative of American exile centered in its imaginary Sand Lizard People heroine and with the garden as orchestrating metaphor. No stranger to controversy, as born out not only in her critique of the capitalist west but in her attacks on Gary Snyder and other white shaman figures and on Louise Erdrich as too ready an acolyte of the postmodern turn, her *Storyteller* (1981) embodies her own interests and styling.²⁵

Of her recent novels few more exhibit this pugnacity than *Almanac of the Dead*, her resolutely hemispheric text of the Americas. For it envisages nothing less than the restoration of historic landscape—the return to indigenous custody through a risen people's army of a borderless, brown, nature-respecting human order in despite of all European (and

²⁴ Ellen L. Arnold, "Listening to the Spirits: An Interview with Leslie Marmon Silko," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 10.3, 1998, 1-33. Reprinted in Ellen L. Arnold, *Conversations with Leslie Marmon Silko*, Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2000, 165.

²⁵ Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*, New York: Viking Press, 1981; *Almanac of the Dead*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991; *Gardens in the Dunes*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991; *Storyteller*, New York: Little Brown/Arcade, in arrangement with Seaver Books, 1981.

Euro-American) cooption. In this respect Tucson, the American southwest, acts as the novel's geo-historical centre, a place-name originally meaning "plentiful fresh water... in Papago" (190) yet where the city has "built its largest sewage treatment plant... next to the river" (189). Sewage, corruption, people and territories despoiled, underwrite the novel at every turn. This is the Americas as broken history, dysfunctions of caste and family, modernity as glut. Tucson itself is designated a "city of thieves" (610).

According to the passed-down Mayan Almanac of the Dead, however, actually a Book of Life, there is the prophecy of a reversal, a taking back of the land. This will take form in an eventual south-to-north indigenous alliance ("The prophecies said gradually all traces of Europeans in America would disappear and, at last, the people would retake the land" [631-2]). Silko, even so, offers no reductive white-brown cultural binary, a too ready blame narrative. Her vision remains one of the Americas historically forged of myriad nomenclatures and genealogies, be they tribal, Euro-white, north and south American, military or corporate.

The novel, to this end, sets its narrative register as one of politics, crime and betrayal. Guns and cocaine rule. Oil, uranium mining and like excavation have left the land scarred. The CIA operates unchecked. Regimes run from Cuban revolutionary schools to police and army video torture-pornography. Hollywood and TV Hotline Indians appear in the media. Selective imaging of Chiapas-like insurrection implies a controlled media. Real estate is endlessly finagled. The human organ trade lurks. Marxism and Capitalism vie, the one all plots and assassination, the other consumer frenzy. Either way, tribal dispossession continues. Above all the writ is war large and small ("War had been declared the first day the Spaniards set foot on Native American soil, and the same war had been going on ever since: the war was for the continents called the Americas" [133]).

The upshot, its more than seventy characters, ply of plot-lines, and compendium of indigenous sites—whether Arizona, New Mexico, Mexico, Central America, Alaska, New Orleans or Las Vegas, and desert, city or jungle, could not more aspire to be the eco-epic *de nos jours*. Silko unhesitatingly makes use of Yaqui, Navajo, Laguna, Hopi, Cherokee, Seminole, Mayan, and Inca tradition. She invokes the Aztecs as original blood sacrifice sorcerers who caused tribal peoples to flee north. The novel's inventory reworks Native snake creator-gods and paired twin mythology (Lecha and Zeta as heiresses to the almanac, Tacho and El Feo as leaders of the coming insurrection guided by macaw spirits). Shamanism prevails, or as Comrade Angelita, tribal revolutionary, observes "The ancestors's spirits speak in dreams. We wait. We simply wait for the earth's natural forces already set loose, the exploding, fierce energy of all the dead slaves and dead ancestors haunting the Americas" (518). Other gods enter the reckoning, not just Quetzacoatl, but the African and Haiti-to-New Orleans ancestor godheads of Damballah, Ogoun and Eursulie.

Opinion, predictably, has varied. Silko over-reaches, her novel too crowded, or hectoring, or damagingly under-edited. Admirers speak of rare brilliance, the New World as indeed a very old world, replete in its own wisdom of populations and languages. The novel, even as it fills out its tapestry of fissure and self-loss, its show of multiple sexual desire or damage, so bears the promise of a redemptively better world of the Americas than that preyed on by the modern raptors of both capitalism and communism. Within the novel the almanac supplies the banner of resistance, complex prophecy, a codex. Born down across five hundred years and weathered by time and transport, and annotated by the grandmother Yoeme and others before her, its deciphering remains incomplete. Literally its

“horse-gut parchment” (570) has been part eaten by starving fugitives at one point. That it is given by the psychic Lecha to the coke addicted Seese, searching for her kidnapped infant son, to transfer to computer files, implies unfinished history, a text of life still to be fulfilled.

To this end Silko can list past tribal and slave insurrections. Spanish *encomienda* and Dixie plantation labor give departure-points. The role of the Seminoles with Andrew Jackson in his victory at the Battle of New Orleans and unedifying expulsion to the west-of-the-Mississippi Indian Territory that becomes Oklahoma acts as symptomatic historic irony. Geronimo and Wovoka, Wounded Knee, the Navajo code-speakers in World War II, and the recent indigenous rebellions in Guatemala, El Salvador and Peru, all bespeak a Native trajectory. The novel’s proliferating strings of story and cause-and-effect builds into the one composite narrative.

Each contributing folder of characters and action is so conceived to work as the narrative subsequent to the original Death Dog rule across the Americas. Lecha as psychic and Zeta as smuggler serve as inaugural voices. Seese becomes adoptee amanuensis for the almanac. The Tucson desert ranch with its family of Ferro, Jamey, Paulie and their dogs and companions might be time’s outpost, a remnant tribal colony. Seese’s connection through her stolen child Monte into the David-Eric-Beaufrey-Serlo gay circuit, the latter with his monied search for *sangre pura* eugenics with body parts supplied by Trigg, throws a morbid light on both death cult photography, the raising of children, and race and gender purity. In the Max, Leah and Sonny Blue imbroglio, New York mafia crime is brought south to the country golf world of Arizona, another layer of corruption. The figure of Menardo, self-denying mestizo and global insurance entrepreneur, his affair with the greatly mis-named Alegria, his half-membership of Arizona’s power-elite El Grupo, his willing collusion in the CIA arms operation, and his farcical death on being shot through a supposed bullet-proof vest by his chauffeur-spy Tacho (a not so veiled allusion to the 1890s Ghost Dance and imagined immunity from bullets), supplies both truth to history and pastiche. The Angelita La Escapía-Bartolomeo axis nicely undermines Cuban-style Marxism as solution (“The Indians couldn’t care less about international Marxism; all they wanted was to retake their land from the white man” [326]).

In Sterling, initially banned by the Laguna for breaking tribal community protocol and showing their sacred stone snake to a film-crew, the novel has its conciliator and returnee. As he makes his way out of Tucson, the very vortex of historic ill, he encounters the pueblo’s new giant snake (“The snake was looking south, in the direction from which the twin brothers and the people would come” [763]). On Silko’s part this is the novel as hemispheric vision, mythic while would-be actual, ecological while sedimented in the humanity of its indigenous peoples, and the Americas in their entirety as first and last landscape.

Other Native authorship has long added to, and complicated, this consortium of voice, various in standpoint yet always the necessary claim to a Native America its own complex historical self-fashioning. Vine Deloria’s *Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto* (1969), and its sequel *We Talk, You Listen: New Tribes, New Turf* (1970), call time on Natives as margin, exotica, the butt of “exceptionalist” American history.²⁶ Elizabeth Cook-Lynn (Crow Creek Sioux), founder-editor of *Wicazo sa review*, in *Why I Can’t Read*

²⁶ Vine Deloria, Jr., *Custer Died for your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, New York: Macmillan, 1969.

Wallace Stegner and Other Essays: A Tribal Voice (1996) both berates white cultural constructions of the west and argues for a reservation-centered Native authorship. Craig Womack (Muskogee-Creek-Cherokee) in *Red on Red: Native American Separatism* (1999) also posits a “redstick” ethos, Native writing to be read (and written) from a tribal-specific base. Sherman Alexie delivers satire as fast on the improvisory literary draw as it is given to portraying Coeur d’Alène and other Native lives of the Pacific Northwest, reservation and city, in a story-collection as dexterous as *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993).²⁷

In “The Invention of John Wayne” from his *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place* (1998) the late Louis Owens (Choctaw-Cherokee), quite one of Native America’s best voices, bracingly tackles the supreme actor-incarnation—the costs and burdens—of Hollywood’s version of the white frontier west and its opposing Indian Country.²⁸ Vizenor’s notion of postindian does not always, or in every respect, extend to each of these writers as the appropriate working gloss. But they all share with him the will to imagine, or as much to the point to counter-imagine, a Native America in word and story unfixed of any and all cliché.

Aztlán, like *la raza*, bears the banner, the call to awareness and rally, of *chicanismo*, especially as embodied in legendary 1960s activism like that of César Chávez’s UFW, José Ángel Gutiérrez’s *la Raza Unida* and “Corky” González’s Denver-based Crusade for Justice. González himself would supply a panoramic verse anthem in his incantatory *I Am Joaquín/Yo soy Joaquín* (1972). A new fiction beckoned in landmark novels like Tomás Rivera’s bilingual migrant labor story-cycle “... y no se lo tragó la tierra/*And the Earth Did Not Part* (1971), Rudolfo Anaya’s affecting New Mexico child memoir *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972), and Rolando Hinojosa’s Rio Grande Valley/South Texas sequence begun with *Klail City y sus alrededores/Klail City* (1976, 1987). A Chicana surge of literary voice lay to hand in voices like those of Cherrié Moraga’s *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios* (1983) with its challenge to gender and sexual boundaries, Ana Castillo in *The Mixquiahuala Letters* (1986) as inter-ethnic sorority and travel, and Sandra Cisneros in *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories* (1991) with its vignettes of childhood, family and love relationship.²⁹

²⁷ Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, *Why I Can’t Read Wallace Stegner and Other Essays: A Tribal Voice*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996; Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American literary Separatism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993; Sherman Alexie, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1993.

²⁸ Louis Owens, *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place*, Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998.

²⁹ Rodolfo González, *I am Joaquín/Yo soy Joaquín*, New York: Bantam Books, 1972; Tomás Rivera, “... y no se lo tragó la tierra/*And the Earth Did Not Part*, Berkeley, California: Quinto Sol Publications, 1971; Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*, Berkeley, California: Quinto Sol Publications, 1972; Rolando Hinojosa, *Klail City y sus alrededores*, Habana, Cuba: Casa de las Américas, 1976/ *Klail City* Houston, Texas: Arte Público Press, 1987; Cherrié Moraga, *Loving in the War Years: lo que nunca pasó por sus labios*, Boston, Massachusetts: South End Press, 1983; Ana Castillo, *The Mixquiahuala Letters*, Binghamton, New York: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingüe, 1986; Sandra Cisneros, *Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories*, New York: Random House, 1991. All of these texts are given close analysis in my *Multicultural American Literature: Comparative Black, Native, Latino/a and*

Luis Valdez and his Teatro Campesino revolutionized Chicano drama, rarely more so than in the stage-performance and film of *Zoot Suit* (1981) with its memories of Sleepy Lagoon and the 1940s *pachuco* riots. Edward James Olmos brought East Los, the inner-city hispanidad of Los Angeles, to the screen in *Stand and Deliver* (1987) just as Cheech Marin became a voice of comedy. Guillermo Gómez-Peña's *Warrior for Gringostroika* (1993), and related texts, supplied quite dazzling performance art. A *Latino/a* renaissance, to draw upon Puerto Rican, Cuban American and each other Latino cultural, could not have looked more in prospect. Yet, as ever, no orthodoxy, or one presiding consortium, was to prevail; quite the contrary. The contending voices have been many, few more interestingly against-the-grain or mutually contrastive than Oscar Zeta Acosta and Richard Rodriguez.³⁰

Himself no stranger to bad behavior, Hunter S. Thompson supplies working touchstones for Acosta. On February 9 1969 he writes in a letter cast in typically un-respectful yet fond manner "I guess you wetback freaks have a special god."³¹ The previous year, April 1968, Acosta is to be heard writing to Thompson "Once upon a time I was a liberal, yesterday I was a militant, today I am a revolutionary, trying like hell not to become uptight."³² Under his own sobriquets, whether the Brown Buffalo. La cucaracha. Samoan or Thompson's 300 pound Dr. Gonzo in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas* (1971), Oscar Zeta Acosta (1935-74) supplies a stirring, if often marginalized, name in the making of 1960s counterculture and beyond.

There is Acosta the anarcho-libertarian Chicano raised in California's Riverbank-Modesto and who makes his name as legal aid lawyer in Oakland and Los Angeles after qualifying in San Francisco in 1966. There is the Airforce enlistee who, on being sent to Panama, becomes a Pentecostal convert and missionary there (1949-52) before opting for apostasy and a return to altogether more secular ways and times in California. There is the jailee in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico in 1968, forced to argue in local court for his own interests in uncertain street Spanish (or *caló*) after a spat with a hotelkeeper. Not least here is the Oscar of the barricades, the battling lawyer of the High Schools and St Basil's Cathedral protests in 1968. This is the "buffalo" who becomes the *La Raza Unida* independent candidate for Sheriff of Los Angeles in 1970, who regularly affirms his first allegiance by signing himself "Oscar Zeta Acosta, Chicano lawyer," and who finally leaves for Mexico in despair, madness even, at the marring internal divisions of Chicano politics.

To these, always, has to be added the rombusious tequila drinker and druggie ten years in therapy; the hugely overweight ulcer sufferer who spat blood, the twice-over divorcee, and the eventual *desaparecido* in 1974 aged 39, who was last seen in Mazatlán, Mexico, and whose end has long been shrouded in mystery. Was he drug or gun-running, a kind of Chicano Ambrose Bierce who had created his own exit from history, or a victim of kidnap or other foul play? Even in summary Acosta can hardly be said not to invite attention as an American one-off, an original, a counter-writer. Above all, from a literary perspective, there

Asian American Fictions, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003, Jackson, Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2003, especially Chapter 5.

³⁰ Luis Valdez, *Zoot Suit and Other Plays*, Houston: Arte Público Press, 1992; Guillermo Gómez-Peña, *Warrior for Gringostroika*, St. Paul, Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1993.

³¹ Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear & Loathing in America: The Brutal Odyssey of an Outlaw Journalist 1968-1970*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002, 36.

³² Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear & Loathing in America: The Brutal Odyssey of an Outlaw Journalist 1968-1970*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 2002, 52.

has to be Acosta the legendary first person singular writer of *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* (1972) and *the Revolt of the Cockroach People* (1973).

The “I” persona assumed by Acosta in *The Autobiography of a Brown Buffalo* bows in with a suitably Beat gesture of self-exposure: “I stand naked before the mirror” (11). He sees a body of “brown belly,” “extra flesh,” “two large hunks of brown tit” (11). Evacuation becomes a bathroom opera of heave, color, the moilings of fast-food leftovers. Hallucinatory colloquies open with “Old Bogey,” James Cagney and Edward G. Robinson (or at least their screen personae). In their wake he turns to “my Jewish shrink,” Dr. Serbin, the therapist as accuser, and whose voice echoes like some Freudian gargoyle throughout. Glut rules, a build-up of “booze and Mexican food” (12), Chinese pork and chicken, pills for dyspepsia, and his shower room tumescence and betraying fantasy coitus with Alice, the leggy, blond Minnesota partner of his friend Ted Casey back from overseas military duty in Okinawa.

This is opening ventriloquy busy and comic in its own right, at once self-serious yet self-mocking. There is even a Beat “on the road” intertextual shy as Acosta plunges “headlong” in his green Plymouth into San Francisco traffic. Further Beat allusions cluster. “I’m splitting” (33) he writes in beat idiom to his office mate. Procul Harum sings “A Whiter Shade of Pale” on the car radio. He buys liquor opposite City Lights bookshop, “a hangout for sniveling intellectuals” (36) and throws in a reference to Herb Caen long celebrated for his coining, however facetious, of the term beatnik. Memories of marijuana and his first LSD come to mind. He roars drunkenly into Dr. Serbin’s in the guise of “another wild Indian gone amok” (42), another *faux* barbarian. Acosta so monitors “Acosta.” Once again the one text patrols the other.

At Trader JJ’s watering hole, he gives vent to the bar-room and wholly un-pc macho patois of “chinks and fags” (43). The Beatles’s “Help” spills its harmonies and plaintiveness on to Polk Street. Ted Casey tempts him with mescaline, “Powdered mayonnaise” (67), as he terms heroin, appears at a Mafia restaurant where he stops for food. Women, his ex-lover June MacAdoo, Alice, and her friend Mary, all weave into his sexual fantasies even as he frets, with reason, at his own male prowess. The diaroma is motleyed, a comic-cuts weave of illusion and fact. So it is, too, on July 1 1967, that Acosta announces himself as the Samoan, island brown hulk, ethnic transvestite, a figure of guise, mask, harlequinry. “I’ve been mistaken for American Indian, Spanish, Filipino, Hawaiian, Samoan, and Arabian” he witnesses, adding in un-pc idiom, “No one has ever asked me if I’m a spic or greaser” (68). Is this not Acosta as live American multi-text, Latino lawyer yet Latino outlaw? He invokes John Tibeau as *alter ago*, bike-poet on a Harley Davidson, a latter-day West Coast fantasy troubadour and fusion of Lord Byron and the Bob Dylan he listens to with admiration.

He looks back to his Riverbank boyhood with its gang allegiance and fights against the Okies “I grew up a fat, dark Mexican—a Brown Buffalo—and my enemies called me a nigger” (86), war-games, peach-picking, clarinet playing and early first loves. On the other hand he heads into the Pacific northwest with the hitchhiker Karin Wilmington, a journey busy in allusion to Tim Leary, Jerry Garcia, and The Grateful Dead and which takes him into the Hemingway country of Ketchum, Idaho. Both come together as he circles back into his Panama years, his onetime bid to serve as a “Mexican Billy Graham” (132).

As he weaves his way through more drugs, characters like Scott (“a full time dope smuggler and a salesman for Scientology” [152]), he points to the “Oscar” who will be

caught between life of the street and the pen—"The beatniks in the colleges were telling brown buffaloes like me to forget about formal education" (152). For all that he can self-mockingly tell the waitress Bobbi that "My family is the Last of the Aztecs" (140), he follows a Beat-like trail of hippiedom, overdoses and bad trips. He recalls his succession of women and writer alcoholics like Al Matthews, car crashes and blackouts in Aspen, and odd jobs across Colorado and elsewhere. His Chicano self come into focus in the remembrance of being detained in Juarez jail amid "the ugliest pirates I ever saw" (192) and the need to prove, as if in the playing out a formula migrant script, his "American" identity." A border official tells him "You don't *look* like an American you know? (195). Almost inevitably, given a journey text as mythic as actual, the pathway back into Los Angeles becomes the hallowed Route 66.

Acosta speaks of a time when he will become "Zeta," as taken from the last letter of the Spanish alphabet (and, as *The Revolt of the Cockroach People* confirms, also from the name of the hero in the movie *Las cucarachas*), "Oscar" as *auteur* equally in life as text. For the moment, however, he gives the following as his working certificate of identity:

What I see now, on this rainy day in January, 1968, what is clear to me after this sojourn is that I am neither a Mexican nor an American. I am neither a Catholic nor a Protestant. I am a Chicano by ancestry and a Brown Buffalo by choice. (199)

Back, finally, in East LA, the *barrio* known vernacularly in *caló* as "East Los" and "the home of the biggest herd of brown buffaloes in the world" (199), he opts for a moment of rest, temporary and recuperative pause. To hand is "Oscar" as both *chicanismo*'s own literary *vato loco* and yet its own would-be Sheriff of Los Angeles, all to be continued over into the "another story" (199) pending in *The Revolt of the Cockroach People*.

I stand and observe them all. I who have been running around with my head hanging for so long. I who have been lost in my own excesses, drowned in my own confusion. A faded beatnik, a flower vato, an aspiring writer, a thirty-three-year old kid full of buffalo chips is supposed to defend these bastards. (53)

In antic pose (his name card reads "Buffalo Z. Brown, Chicano Lawyer, Belmont Hotel, LA" (48), the "Oscar" of *Cockroach People* positions himself in relation to the Chicano militants involved in the local school strikes of 1968. This authorial I again gives off a beguiling equivocation of self and persona, participant and observer.

On the one hand, as novel-cum-autobiography, the text yields an actual Acosta of LA courtroom and barricade, counsel in the St. Basil 21 and East Los Angeles 13 trials, would-be exposé of the Robert Fernandez and "Roland Zanzibar" murders (the latter the journalist Reuben Salazar of Station KMEX), conferee with César Chávez and "Corky" González, and candidate for Sheriff of Los Angeles County. On the other hand, it yields an Acosta always the writer *semblable* who sees his own silhouette in the Aztec warrior founder god Huitzilopochtli (11). He so speaks of himself as "Vato Número Uno," and "singer of songs" (207). He uses the court to give a parallel history of *chicanismo* with due allusion to Quetzacoatl, Moctezuma, Cortés and La Malinche through to 1848 and the Anglo appropriation of the southwest. He casts himself as both first and third person in accounts of the bombing by Chicano militants of a Safeway Store and Bank of America branch, at once the *carnal* (brother/dude) yet edging into madness at the petty conspiracies and betrayals within Chicano activism.

Throughout, and in an address to the court which as much serves as an appeal to history as to the law, he speaks a language of metaphor:

"A hippie is like a cockroach. So are the beatniks. So are the Chicanos. We are all around, Judge. And Judges do not pick us to serve on Grand Juries." (228)

This parallel of Chicano activist and Beat recurs. The LA Cathedral built by the Vietnam War supporting and autocratic Cardinal McIntyre becomes "a personal monstrosity" (11), the architecture proof of an inner spiritual blight. The Chicano poor who protest against this high-tier Catholicism, in the text's hallucinatory telling, transpose into a "gang of cockroaches" (11), replete with Gloria Chavez, golf club swinging heroine.

As a "religious war" (14) erupts, "Oscar" envisions himself as both his own familiar and his own stranger: "'Come on,' out lawyer exhorts. 'I, strange fate, am this lawyer'" (14). The whole event then veers into seriocomic opera, a politics of the real and yet surreal, as signaled in each of the rallying placards: "YANKEES OUT OF AZTLAN" (32) or, during the fracas over the schools, "MENUDO EVERY DAY" (41) and in the author's own rise to fame, "VIVA EL ZETA!" (164).

Questing, as he says, for "my Chicano soul" (47), "Oscar" also looks back, and with a mix of reproach and yet nostalgia, to "my beatnik days" (65). To the one side stands his trial work with the St. Basil 21 and East LA 13, his flurry of contempt imprisonments (Prisoner "Zeta-Brown, 4889") and eventual political campaign. To the other he gives himself to heady flights of phantasmagoria. "We are the Viet Cong of America," he proclaims (198) more than a little headily. Sexual euphoria, aided by an ingestion of Quaalude-400s, takes the form of his imagined Sheik of Araby practices with his three girl followers and the love tryst with the black juror Jean Fisher. If not actually, then again in his mind's eye, he finally has the entire Californian judicial bench subpoenaed on grounds of historic racism.

Two sequences give added particularity to this play of text as also meta-text. First Acosta/"Oscar" offers the arrest, self-hanging and, above all, autopsy of Robert Fernandez, Chicano prisoner. The corpse ("just another expendable Cockroach" [101]), anatomically sliced and jarred under the guidance of Dr. Thomas A. Naguchi, "Coroner to the stars" as he is known, becomes Acosta's own textual autopsy of the abused larger body of *chicanismo*. The same holds for the police shooting of "Roland Zanzibar." Acosta anything but hides his view that an iconographic and more inclusive process has been involved, that of the ritual silencing of an unwanted and demonized *chicanismo*. "Someone still has to answer for Robert Fernandez and Roland Zanzibar" (258) he editorializes, both in the way of a memorial and yet also to prompt future action.

This doubling, or reflexivity, holds throughout. He depicts both the *vatos*, *cholos*, and *pintos*, of barrio and street, and the cops and white authorities who make up *los gabachos*, as belonging to their own time-frame of the 1960s and yet also to far more ancient white-brown historic timelines and clashes. Acosta enters the text on equally shared terms, lawyer yet meta-lawyer, as he engages in each reeling, often absurdist exchange with Judge Alacran during the "Chicano Militants" and González trials. In his role as "Oscar" or "Zeta" he offers himself as located in both a contemporary Los Angeles courtroom and the courtroom of history.

In truth all the text's main figures are pitched to take on their own kind of mythicism, none more so than César Chávez and "Corky" González, legatees as Acosta construes them,

of an Aztec warriorhood of Zapata and Pancho Villa. In another doubling Mayor Sam Yorty plays Janus, smiling sympathizer yet for Acosta *agent provocateur* who in bad faith counsels Chicano insurrection. A crazed Charlie Manson, “acid fascist” (98), hovers as the presiding spirit of a Los Angeles “the most detestable city on earth” (23). Gene McCarthy features as a radical from the mainstream, one politician in two guises. Robert Kennedy enters and exits as both Democratic Party and *campesino*-supporting martyr, killed by Sirhan Sirhan as “mysterious Arab” (98). A celebrity, and appropriately on-stage, performance of support of his campaign for sheriff is given by “hidden” Chicanos like Anthony Quinn and Vicki Carr. Acosta’s technique is always to emphasize this duality of time, and place, the one timeline, the one location, held inside the other.

Fittingly Hunter S. Thompson makes his appearance as “Stonewall,” yet another life figure consciously given textual or virtual alternative identity. He serves as journalist confessor. For Acosta, too, has his own “other” self to add to the parade, his own mediation of reality and word, the two configurations in one. The upshot is autobiography yet not, a Chicano self locked into actual time and place yet also a self always deftly aware of performing its own fictionalization. Oscar or “Oscar” this is bad behavior with style, life into text and never less than under opposition colors.

In Richard Rodriguez America vaunts quite another kind of opposing voice, one, however, quite as wired from the start to stir the hornet’s nest, to spark ire. *A Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez* (1982), typically, argues for an end to bilingual education and affirmative action, the re-imposition of the Latin Mass, and a break with piety about ancestral migrant-Catholic family culture.³³ Here was transgression from the Cultural Right, no Chicano nationalist rather a writer of Chicano heritage laying claim to the American mainstream. To detractors, few more vocal than Chicano activists, his refusal to join—in fact to oppose—their camp signaled a *trahison des clercs*, his refusal of any or all minority status a species of self-absorption, too great a pondering of his own face in the mirror. To admirers he offers a vindication of the virtues of assimilation whatever the pains of cutting free from family and ethnic-cultural intimacy. That Rodriguez managed a style of rare, even soaring fluency, seemed almost to add insult to injury.

Little, however, could he, or anyone else, have foreseen how “this intellectual autobiography” as he terms *Hunger of Memory*, together with each *Time*, *American Scholar* and PBS McNeil-Lehrer *News Hour* essay, would make him both the media conservative favorite he has become. For there can be little doubt of his bravura, the willingness to play mainstream cat among the ethnic pigeons and with an eloquence as ready as his stance of end-of-history melancholy. In this his autobiography can be compared to great advantage with, say, Linda Chavez’s *Out of the Barrio: Towards a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation* (1991), like-minded in assimilationist ethos but wholly workaday in style.³⁴

As six “essays impersonating an autobiography... chapters of sad, fugue-like repetition” (7) *Hunger of Memory* thus give a new imaginative turn to the continuum to *latino* autobiography—“an intellectual autobiography” (175) he insists. The effect, depending on ideological viewpoint, is to be applauded or decried. Is Rodriguez simply affirming America’s promise of the sovereign self, for all the talk of loss, parental and community

³³ Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, Boston, Massachusetts: Codine, 1982.

³⁴ Linda Chavez, *Out of the Barrio: Towards a New Politics of Hispanic Assimilation*, New York: Basic Books, 1991.