



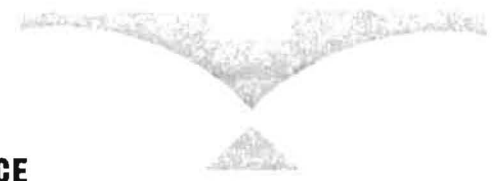
SURVIVANCE

NARRATIVES OF NATIVE PRESENCE

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1. AESTHETICS OF SURVIVANCE

Literary Theory and Practice

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When a language dies, a possible world dies with it. There is no survival of the fittest. Even where it is spoken by a handful, by the harried remnants of destroyed communities, a language contains within itself the boundless potential of discovery, or re-compositions of reality, of articulate dreams, which are known to us as myths, as poetry, as metaphysical conjecture and the discourse of law.

George Steiner, *After Babel*

The theories of survivance are elusive, obscure, and imprecise by definition, translation, comparison, and catchword histories, but survivance is invariably true and just in native practice and company. The nature of survivance is unmistakable in native stories, natural reason, remembrance, traditions, and customs and is clearly observable in narrative resistance and personal attributes, such as the native humanistic tease, vital irony, spirit, cast of mind, and moral courage. The character of survivance creates a sense of native presence over absence, nihility, and victimry.

Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name.

Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry. Survivance is the heritable right of succession or reversion of an estate and, in the course of international declarations of human rights, is a narrative estate of native survivance.

Fourth Person

Charles Aubid, for instance, declared by stories his native presence, human rights, and sovereignty. He created a crucial course and sense of survivance in federal court and defied the hearsay of historical precedent, cultural ethnologies, absence, and victimry.

This inspired storiage was a sworn witness in federal court that autumn more than thirty years ago in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He raised his hand, listened to the oath for the first time in the language of the Anishinaabe, Chippewa, or Ojibwe, and then waved, an ironic gesture of the oath, at United States District Judge Miles Lord. Aubid testified by visual memory, an inseparable sensibility of natural reason, and with a singular conception of continental native liberty. His stories intimated a third person other than the apparent reference, the figurative presence of a fourth person, a *sui generis* native discourse in the oral language of the Anishinaabe. That native practice of survivance, the storied presence of a fourth person, a visual reminiscence, was repudiated as hearsay, not a source of evidence in common law or federal court precedent.

Aubid was a witness in a dispute with the federal government over the right to regulate the *manoomin*, wild rice, harvest on the Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota. Federal agents had assumed the authority to determine the wild rice season and to regulate the harvest, a bureaucratic action that decried a native sense of survivance and sovereignty.

Aubid, who was eighty-six years old at the time, testified through translators that he was present as a young man when the federal agents told Old John Squirrel that the Anishinaabe would always have control of the *manoomin* harvest. Aubid told the judge that the Anishinaabe always understood their rights by stories. John Squirrel was there in memories, a storied presence of native survivance. The court could have heard the testimony as a visual trace of a parole agreement, a function of discourse, both relevant and necessary.

Justice Lord agreed with the objection of the federal attorney that the testimony was hearsay and therefore not admissible and explained to the witness that the court could not hear as evidence what a dead man said, only the actual experiences of the witness. "John Squirrel is dead," said the judge. "And you can't say what a dead man said."

Aubid turned brusquely in the witness chair, bothered by what the judge had said about John Squirrel. Aubid pointed at the legal books on the bench, and

then in English, his second language, he shouted that those books contained the stories of dead white men. "Why should I believe what a white man says, when you don't believe John Squirrel?" Judge Lord was deferential, amused by the analogy of native stories to court testimony, judicial decisions, precedent, and hearsay. "You've got me there," he said, and then considered the testimony of other Anishinaabe witnesses.¹

Monotheism is hearsay, the literary concern and ethereal care of apostles, and the curse of deceivers and debauchery. The rules of evidence and precedent are selective by culture and tradition, and sanction judicial practices over native presence and survivance.

Charles Aubid created indirect linguistic evidence of a fourth person by visual reminiscence. His stories were intuitive, visual memories, a native sense of presence, and sources of evidence and survivance.

Native Humanist

Ishi, the native humanist, endured by survivance and natural reason in two worlds. He was named by an academic, not by vision, a lonesome hunter rescued by situational chance. Native names are collective memories, but his actual names and sense of presence are obscure, yet his museum nickname, more than any other archive nomination, represents to many readers the cultural absence and tragic victimry of Native American Indians in California.

The spirit of this native hunter, captured almost a century ago, has been sustained as cultural evidence and property. Ishi was humanely secured in a museum at a time when other natives were denied human and civil rights.

Alfred Kroeber, the eminent anthropologist, read the newspaper reports and contacted the sheriff who "had put the Indian in jail not knowing what else to do with him since no one around town could understand his speech or he theirs," writes Theodora Kroeber in *Alfred Kroeber: A Personal Configuration*. "Within a few days the Department of Indian Affairs authorized the sheriff to release the wild man to the custody of Kroeber and the museum staff. [Thomas] Waterman arrived in the city with him and Ishi was soon settled" in one of the rooms in the anthropology museum "furnished earlier" by Phoebe Apperson Hearst. Theodora Kroeber continues,

The whole staff concentrated on learning to communicate with him, meanwhile trying to reassure him and to protect him from the curiosity

of the crowds who daily tried to get a closer look at him. It was during those first days Kroeber gave him the name Ishi, which means man or one of the people in Yana, thus satisfying the popular need to call him by name and saving Ishi the embarrassment of telling of his actual private name to a stranger and hearing it used by other strangers, such use of a personal name being taboo to California Indians.²

Ishi was named the last of the Stone Agers, and overnight he became the celebrated survivor of cultural genocide. He was alone but never contemptuous, or servile, and his stories were never given to nihilism or victimhood. He was a native humanist in exile and a storier of survivance.

Ishi had endured the unspeakable hate crimes of miners, racial terrorists, bounty hunters, and government scalpers. Many of his family and friends were murdered: they were the calculated victims of cultural treason and rapacity. Truly the miners were the savages. Indeed, California natives barely survived the gold rush, the cruelties of colonial missions, partitionists, and poisoned water. Only about fifty thousand natives, or one in five, were alive in the state at the turn of the twentieth century.

Ishi never revealed his sacred name or any of his nicknames, but he never concealed his humor and humanity. Lively, eager, and generous, he told tricky wood duck stories to his new friends. This gentle native lived and worked for five years in the museum of anthropology at the University of California.

Ishi was "at ease with his friends," writes Theodora Kroeber. He "loved to joke, to be teased amiably and to tease in return. And he loved to talk. In telling a story, if it were long or involved or of considerable effect, he would persevere with the effort, his voice rising toward a falsetto of excitement."

Saxton Pope, the surgeon at the medical school located near the museum, notes that Ishi "amused the interns and nurses by singing" his songs. "His affability and pleasant disposition made him a universal favorite. He visited the sick in the wards with a gentle and sympathetic look which spoke more clearly than words. He came to the women's wards quite regularly, and with his hands folded before him, he would go from bed to bed like a visiting physician, looking at each patient with quiet concern or with a fleeting smile that was very kindly received and understood."

The Bureau of Indian Affairs sent a special agent to advise Ishi that he could return to the mountains or live on a government reservation. Kroeber writes

that Ishi "shook his head" and said through the interpreter that he would "live like the white people from now on. I want to stay where I am. I will grow old here, and die in this house." And by that he meant the museum. Ishi was clearly a native of survivance.³

Ishi created a sense of natural presence in his stories, a native presence that included others. He was a visionary, not a separatist, and his oral stories were assertions of liberty. This native humanist was amused by the trace of time on a wristwatch and by the silence of scripture. He was a tricky storier in exile.

Ishi was in exile by name, by racial wars, and by the partisans of cultural dominance. He was a fugitive in his own native scenes, pursued by feral pioneers and malevolent miners, yet he endured without apparent rancor or mordancy and created stories of native survivance.

The pioneers were separated from animals and natural reason by monotheism and the biblical covenants of human dominion over nature. Ishi was a humanist more at home in nature than a museum; clearly he was a man of natural reason, a mature storier and healer, and unlike the pioneer predators, he seemed to embrace the merits of a democratic and civil society.

Ishi is not his native name, but we imagine his presence by that museum nickname. Ishi is in our visions, and he persists by that name in our memory. We bear his exile as our own, and by his tease and natural reason we create new stories of native irony, survivance, and liberty.⁴

Higher Civilization

The Cherokee Phoenix, one of the first native newspapers, was established in 1828. Native newspapers "grew slowly" and were "considered an oddity until the last two decades of the nineteenth century," notes Daniel Littlefield in the *Encyclopedia of the North American Indians*. These early native "newspapers were aimed primarily at the American public as well as the local population and promoted an image of 'civilization' to the outside world."⁵

I discovered that image of civilization in the *Progress*, a weekly newspaper published by my distant relatives more than a century ago on the White Earth Reservation in Minnesota. I was inspired by the dedication of the editor and the news stories that created a singular sense of native presence and survivance.

I was a graduate student at the time, more than forty years ago, at the University of Minnesota. During my early research on native writers, tribal leaders, and treaties at the Minnesota Historical Society, a generous reference librarian directed me to the original bound volumes of the *Progress*, the first newspaper published on the White Earth Reservation.

I was transformed, inspired, and excited by a great and lasting source of a native literary presence and survivance. The newspaper countered the notion of a native absence and instead sustained a personal source of solace and enlightenment as well as a unique historical identity. I slowly, almost reverently, turned the fragile pages of the newspaper and read stories and notes by and about my distant relatives.

The *Progress* was founded by Augustus Hudon Beaulieu, the publisher, and Theodore Hudon Beaulieu, the editor. They were directly related to Alice Beaulieu Vizenor, my paternal grandmother, and my great uncle John Clement Beaulieu.

Reading the newspaper that afternoon at the Minnesota Historical Society was truly transformational, a moment that still lasts in my stories and memory, in spite of the unreasonable, dismissive response by the faculty graduate advisor. He refused to accept my historical, descriptive content analysis of the reservation newspaper because, he said, it was not an acceptable subject of graduate study. My advisor apparently considered reservation newspapers mere hearsay and not historical precedent.

The *Progress* announced one spring morning in the first issue, March 25, 1886, that the "novelty of a newspaper published upon this reservation may cause many to be wary in their support, and this from a fear that it may be revolutionary in character." The declaration continues with a sense of native survivance: "We shall aim to advocate constantly and withhold reserve, what in our view, and in the view of the leading minds upon this reservation, is the best for the interests of its residents. And not only for their interests, but those of the tribe wherever they now are residing."

I was persuaded and motivated by the advocacy of the editor, the gestures to the "leading minds" on the reservation, and imagined my presences as a writer for the newspaper. I worried at the same time about the fragile condition of the newsprint.

The main consideration of this advocacy will be the political interests, that is, in matters relative to us and to the Government of the United

States. We shall not antagonize the Government, not act, in the presentation of our views, in any way outside of written or moral law.

We intend that this journal shall be the mouth-piece of the community in making known abroad and at home what is for the best interests of the tribe. It is not always possible to reach the fountain head through subordinates, it is not always possible to appeal to the moral sentiment of the country through these sources, or by communication through general press.

We may be called upon at times to criticize individuals and laws, but we shall aim to do so in the spirit of kindness and justice. Believing that the "freedom of the press" will be guarded as sacredly by the Government on this reservation as elsewhere, we launch forth our little craft, appealing to the authorities that be, at home, at the seat of government, to the community, to give us moral support, for in this way only can we reach the standard set forth at our mast-head.

The *Progress* was dedicated to "A Higher Civilization: The Maintenance of Law and Order."

I was amused by the words "fountain head," the source or originator, but the sense was ironic, an "appeal to the moral sentiment of the country." I was impressed by the dedication of the editor to "moral law" and, in my view, moral agency. Rightly the editor argued, it is not possible to communicate to the government "through subordinates." I was already involved in the discourse of reservation politics and civilization by the first few issues of the newspaper.

The *Progress* was confiscated by federal agents shortly after the newspaper was distributed on the White Earth Reservation. Theodore and Augustus Beaulieu, both tribal members, were ordered by federal agents to leave the reservation. They avoided the agents and found sanctuary in the mission church. The Benedictine priests at the time were active in reservation politics and obviously endorsed the publication of a newspaper for the community.

The *Progress* was first published on March 25, 1886. The second issue was published on October 8, 1887, more than a year after federal agents seized the press and property of the newspaper and after a subcommittee testimony and favorable hearing in federal court. T. J. Sheehan, the United States Indian Agent, a malevolent federal appointee, was an obsessive denier of native liberty, and he would not tolerate freedom of the press on the reservation

without his approval. Sheehan wrote to the editor and publisher that they had “circulated a newspaper without first obtaining authority or license so to do from the honorable Secretary of the Interior, honorable Commissioner of Indian Affairs, or myself as United States Indian Agent.”

Practically every means of communication by federal agencies about natives was ironic, and in this instance the mere use of the word “honorable” was an invitation to mockery. The honorific names of secretaries, commissioners, and federal agents are an eternal summons to ridicule and tricky invectives. The honorable political appointees are obvious contradiction, and those who carried out the policies of dominance are the agents of irony, the measures of dishonor and venality.

The mockery of federal agents has always been a native theme in stories. These practices of mockery are not the same as the cultural tease of acceptance. I read about the abuses of the federal agent on the reservation, and my mockery increased by the page. The *Progress* endured, truly an honorable declaration of native survivance and liberty.

Sheehan asserts in his formal letter that publisher Augustus Beaulieu “did scheme and intrigue with certain chiefs on White Earth Reservation without the knowledge of myself and the Indians of this agency, for the said chiefs to proceed to Saint Paul, Minnesota, for the purpose of signing a power of attorney for the Mississippi Indians, deputizing a person to act as an attorney for the Indians in certain business interests affecting the welfare of the Indians on White Earth Agency, all of which I considered revolutionary to the United States Government and a detriment to the welfare of these Indians.”

Sheehan continues,

Whereas you have at different times advised the full and mixedblood Indians to organize and “kick” against the rule established by myself as United States Indian agent, for the suppression of card playing, or other games which may be detrimental for the Indians on this agency. . . .

Whereas, Theodore H. Beaulieu has written and caused to be printed in a newspaper adjacent to White Earth Reservation, false and malicious statements concerning the affairs of the White Earth Reservation, done evidently for the purpose of breaking down the influence of the United States Indian agent with the Indians of White Earth Agency.

Sheehan unwisely continued to devalue the ideas and interests of the “leading minds” of the reservation until his capricious manner resulted in an official investigation by a subcommittee of the United States Senate. The subcommittee convened a hearing about a year after the *Progress* was confiscated by federal agents.

Clement Hudon Beaulieu was the first witness to testify on Tuesday, March 8, 1887, before the subcommittee of the Committee on Indian Affairs. Clement was the father of publisher Augustus Beaulieu and uncle of editor Theodore Beaulieu.

The *Progress* published the second issue of the newspaper on October 8, 1887, more than a year after the editor and publisher were ordered removed from the reservation by federal agents and six months after an investigation by the subcommittee of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.

Theodore Beaulieu wrote the following on the front page of the second issue:

In the month of March last year, we began setting the type for the first number of The Progress and were almost ready to got to press, when our sanctum was invaded by T. J. Sheehan, the United States Indian Agent, accompanied by a posse of the Indian police. The composing stick was removed from our hands, our property seized, and ourselves forbidden to proceed with the publication of the journal. We had, prior to this time, been personally served with a written notice from Mr. Sheehan detailing at length, surmises beyond number as to the character of The Progress, together with gratuitous assumptions as to our moral unfitness to be upon the reservation, charging the publisher with the voicing of incendiary and revolutionary sentiments at various times.

We do not believe that any earthly power had the right to interfere with us as members of the Chippewa tribe, and at the White Earth Reservation, while peacefully pursuing the occupation we had chosen. We did not believe there existed a law which should prescribe for us the occupation we should follow. We knew of no law which could compel us to become agriculturalists, professionals, “hewers of wood and drawers of water,” or per contra, could restrain us from engaging in these occupations. Therefore we respectfully declined obeying the mandate,

at the same time reaching the conclusion that should we be restrained we should appeal to the courts for protection.

We were restrained and a guard set over our property. We sought the protection of the courts, notwithstanding the assertion of the agent that there would be no jurisdiction in the matter.

The United States district court, Judge Nelson in session, decided that we were entitled to the jurisdiction we sought. The case came before him, on jury trial. The court asserted and defended the right of any member of a tribe to print and publish a newspaper upon his reservation just as he might engage in any other lawful occupation, and without surveillance and restrictions. The jury before whom the amount of damage came, while not adjudging the amount asked for, did assess and decree a damage with a verdict restoring to us our plant. . . .

Now that we are once more at sea, fumigated and out of quarantine, and we issue from dry dock with prow and hull steel-clad tempered with truth and justice, and with our clearance registered, we once more box our compass, invite you all aboard, and we will clear port, set sails to favorable breezes, with the assurance that we will spare no pains in guiding you to a "higher" civilization.

The *Progress* was not the first paper to be published on a federal reservation, but it was the first tribal newspaper to be seized capriciously by federal agents. The *Progress* continued weekly publication for about two years and then changed the name to the *Tomahawk*. The editor and publisher remained the same.

Theodore Hudon Beaulieu, the feisty editor, strongly opposed the federal allotment of reservation land, the provisions of the Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887. One front-page report, for instance, was introduced by this verbose feature headline: "Is it an Indian Bureau? About some of the freaks in the employ of the Indian Service whose actions are a disgrace to the nation and a curse to the cause of justice. Putrescent through the spoils system."⁶ The *Progress* created a sense of presence, survivance, and native liberty by situational stories, editorial comments, reservation reportage, and the resistance of the editors denied a measure of arbitrary federal dominance, historical absence, and victimry.

Natural Estates

The native stories of survivance are successive and natural estates. Survivance is an active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry.

The practices of survivance create an active presence, more than the instincts of survival, function, or subsistence. Native stories are the sources of survivance, the comprehension and empathies of natural reason, tragic wisdom, and the provenance of new literary studies. Native storiers of survivance are prompted by natural reason, by a consciousness and sense of incontestable presence that arises from experiences in the natural world, by the turn of seasons, by sudden storms, by migration of cranes, by the ventures of tender lady's slippers, by chance of moths overnight, by unruly mosquitoes, and by the favor of spirits in the water, rimy sumac, wild rice, thunder in the ice, bear, beaver, and faces in the stone.

Survivance, however, is not a mere romance of nature, not the overnight pleasures of pristine simulations, or the obscure notions of transcendence and signatures of nature in museums. Survivance is character by natural reason, not by monotheistic creation stories and dominance of nature.

Survivance stories create a sense of presence and situational sentiments of chance. Monotheism takes the risk out of nature and natural reason and promotes absence, dominance, sacrifice, and victimry.

Survivance is a practice, not an ideology, dissimulation, or a theory. The theory is earned by interpretations, by the critical construal of survivance in creative literature, and by narratives of cause and natural reason. The discourse on literary and historical studies of survivance is a theory of irony. The incongruity of survivance as a practice of natural reason and as a discourse on literary studies anticipates a rhetorical or wry contrast of meaning.

Antoine Compagnon observes in *Literature, Theory, and Common Sense* that theory "contradicts and challenges the practice of others" and that ideology "takes place between theory and practice. A theory would tell the truth of a practice, articulate its conditions of possibility, while an ideology would merely legitimate this practice by a lie, would dissimulate its conditions of possibility." Theory then "stands in contrast to the practice of literary studies, that is, literary criticism and history, and it analyzes this practice" and "describes them, exposes their assumptions—in brief, criticizes them (to criticize

is to separate, discriminate),” writes Compagnon. “My intention, then, is not in the least to facilitate things, but to be vigilant, suspicious, skeptical, in a word: critical or ironic. Theory is a school of irony.”⁷

Bear Traces

The presence of animals, birds, and other creatures in native literature is a trace of natural reason, by right, irony, precise syntax, literary figuration, and the heartfelt practice of survivance. Consider a theory of irony in the literary studies of absence and presence of animals in selected novels by Native American Indians. The creation of animals and birds in literature reveals a practice of survivance, and the critical interpretation of that literary practice is theory, a theory of irony and native survivance. Verbal irony is in the syntax and ambiguous situations of meaning, absence and presence, as one concept turns to another.

The Anishinaabeg, for instance, are named in “several grand families or clans, each of which is known and perpetuated by a symbol of some bird, animal, fish, or reptile,” observes William Warren in *History of the Ojibway Nation*. The *ajijaak*, or crane totem, is the word for the sandhill crane, a dancer with a red forehead and a distinctive wingbeat. “This bird loves to soar among the clouds, and its cry can be heard when flying above, beyond the orbit of human vision.” Warren, an Anishinaabe historian, declared more than a century ago that native crane leaders in “former times, when different tribes met in council, acted as interpreters of the wishes of their tribe.”⁸

Keeshkemun, an orator of the crane totem at the turn of the nineteenth century on Lake Superior, encountered a British military officer eager to enlist native support for the French and Indian War. Michel Cadotte translated the stories of the orator. Keeshkemun created an avian presence by his totemic vision and natural reason.

“I am a bird who rises from the earth, and flies far up, into the skies, out of human sight; but though not visible to the eye, my voice is heard from afar, and resounds over the earth,” said Keeshkemun.

Englishman, “you have put out the fire of my French father. I became cold and needy, and you sought me not. Others have sought me. Yes, the Long Knives found me. He has placed his heart on my breast. It has entered there, and there it shall remain.”⁹

Metaphors are persuasive in language, thought, and action. “Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature” and “not merely a matter of language,” observes George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in *Metaphors We Live By*. “Metaphor is one of our most important tools for trying to comprehend partially what cannot be comprehended totally: our feelings, aesthetic experiences, moral practices, and spiritual awareness. These endeavors of the imagination are not devoid of rationality; since they use metaphor, they employ an imaginative rationality.”¹⁰

Metaphors create a sense of presence by imagination and natural reason, the very character and practice of survivance. The critical interpretation of native figurations is a theory of irony and survivance. The studies of oratory and translation, figuration, and native diplomatic strategies are clearly literary and historical, text and context, and subject to theoretical interpretations.

N. Scott Momaday, for instance, has created a literary landscape of bears and eagles in his memoirs and novels. “The names at first are those of animals and of birds, of objects that have one definition in the eye, another in the hand, of forms and features on the rim of the world, or of sounds that carry on the bright wind and in the void,” declares Momaday in *The Names*. “They are old and original in the mind, like the beat of rain on the river, and intrinsic in the native tongue, failing even as those who bear them turn once in the memory, go on, and are gone forever.”¹¹

Clearly metaphors provide a more expansive sense of signification and literary survivance than simile. John Searle argues in “Metaphor” that the “knowledge that enables people to use and understand metaphorical utterances goes beyond their knowledge of the literal meaning of words and sentences.” Searle declares that a “literal simile” is a “literal statement of similarity” and that “literal simile requires no special extralinguistic knowledge for its comprehension.”¹²

Metaphor is that “figure of speech whereby we speak about one thing in terms which are seen to be suggestive of another,” observes Janet Martin Soskice in *Metaphor and Religious Language*. The “greatest rival of metaphor, simile, in its most powerful instances does compel possibilities. Simile is usually regarded as the trope of comparison and identifiable within speech by the presence of ‘like’ or an ‘as,’ or the occasional ‘not unlike.’” Simile, she argues,

"may be the means of making comparisons to two kinds, the comparison of similars and dissimilars, and in the latter case, simile shares much of the imaginative life and cognitive function of its metaphorical counterparts." However, simile cannot "be used in catachresis," the excessive or misuse of words. Simile cannot create the lexicon, as does "dead end" or the "leaf of a book."¹³

James Welch, for example, created a precise sense of presence, a landscape by simile. "Tumble weeds, stark as bone, rocked in a hot wind against the west wall," and, "I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon," he writes in *Winter in the Blood*.¹⁴

"I have this bear power. I turn into a bear every so often. I feel myself becoming a bear, and that's a struggle I have to face now and then," Momaday tells Charles Woodward in *Ancestral Voices*.¹⁵ Momaday became a bear by visionary transformation, an unrevealed presence in his novel *House Made of Dawn*. Angela, the literary voyeur, watches Abel cut wood, "full of wonder, taking his motion apart. . . . She would have liked to touch the soft muzzle of a bear, the thin black lips, the great flat head. She would have liked to cup her hand to the wet black snout, to hold for a moment the hot blowing of the bear's life." Later, they come together in the bear heat of the narrative: "He was dark and massive above her, poised and tinged with pale blue light."¹⁶

Another writer, Leslie Silko, encircles the reader with mythic witches, an ironic metaphor of survivance in *Ceremony*. The hardhearted witches invented white people in a competition, a distinctive metaphor that resists the similitive temptations of mere comparison of natives with the structural extremes of dominance and victimry:

*The old man shook his head. "That is the trickery of the witchcraft," he said. "They want us to believe all evil resides with white people. Then we will look no further to see what is really happening. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction. But white people are only tools that the witchery manipulates; and I tell you, we can deal with white people, with their machines and their beliefs. We can because we invented white people; it was Indian witchery that made white people in the first place."*¹⁷

Louise Erdrich creates tropes in her novel *Tracks* that are closer to the

literal or prosaic simile than to the metaphors that inspire a sense of presence and survivance. She names moose, bears, cats, and other animals, but the most common is the dog. For instance, she "shivered all over like a dog," and she "leaned over the water, sucking it like a heifer," and his "head shaggy and low as a bison bull."¹⁸

David Treuer also creates a few animals and birds in his novel *The Hiawatha*: deer, mallards, and a goose kill in the city. Conceivably, only the curious, astray, and then dead deer, an erudite sacrifice, was necessary. That scene in the first few pages becomes the singular metaphor of the novel, a sense of absence and melancholy. Any sentiments of native survivance are overturned by woe and mordancy. The omniscient narrator alleges that "memory always murders the present."¹⁹ Many of the scenes are heavy, overbooked irony. The natives and other characters, however, arise with glory and grandeur as construction workers on a skyscraper, a material metaphor of survivance, but once grounded they are separated, dissociated, tragic, and enervated by cultural dominance, nihilism, and victimry. "The earth would treat them with the same indifference as loose steel, a dropped hammer, a wind-blown lunch," writes Treuer. "This was the secret: the building wanted to stay standing, to grow, to sway but hold on, and so did they." The "tower wanted to be noticed and admired, as did the Indian crew. Its bones of steel and skin of glass were treated roughly by the wind, heat, and ice as were their skin and bones."²⁰

March, the streets are "dirty with sand," and homeless men reach out to touch a wild deer astray in a "church parking lot." Truly a tensive scene as the men reach out in silence to warm their hands on the deer, hesitant, and the deer walks untouched through a "channel of men." Then heedless, one man placed his hand on the deer, and in an "instant it was running." The men "hook their fingers" on the fence "and watch the deer bound down the weedy and trash-strewn slope to the freeway and into the traffic."²¹

Treuer, who slights the distinct character of native literature, pronounces the deer dead in five pages and evokes a weighty metaphor of want and victimry. The scene of the deer astray in rush hour traffic is obvious, portentous. The intention of the author is clear—a dead deer. The choice disheartens and yet appeases by the familiar simulations of sacrifice. That emotive scene provokes the pity and sympathy of some readers, those who may concede

the simulations of victimry. Surely other readers might imagine the miraculous liberty of the deer by natural reason and survivance.

The Hiawatha closes in a second-person crescendo of nihilism. "You move stones with your feet but there is no impression, no remnant of your life, your action. Whatever you do is not accommodated, it is simply dropped onto the hard earth you pass. You will be forgotten. Your feet, your hands are not words and cannot speak. Everything we accumulate — our habits, gestures, muscles trained by the regimen of work, the body remembering instead of the mind — it is of no use."²²

House Made of Dawn by N. Scott Momaday, as a comparison, ends with a song, a sense of presence and native survivance. Abel "was alone and running on. All of his being was concentrated in the sheer motion of running on, and he was past caring about the pain. Pure exhaustion laid hold of his mind, and he could see at last without having to think. He could see the canyon and the mountains and the sky. He could see the rain and the river and the fields beyond. He could see the dark hills at dawn." Abel "was running, and under his breath he began to sing. There was no sound, and he had no voice; he had only the words of a song. And he went running on the rise of the song. *House made of pollen, house made of dawn.*"²³

Treuer declares in *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual* that native fiction, "if there is such a thing," should be studied as literature, and by "applying ourselves to the word, and, at least at the outset of our endeavors, by ignoring the identity of the author and all the ways the author constructs his or her authority outside the text, we will be better able to ascertain the true value of that text."

The "true value" of any text is elusive as truth is only the ironic intention of the author and forevermore of the consciousness of the reader. Treuer creates a fallacy of the "true value" of literature, and he seems heartened by the implied death of the author and by the strains of formalism and erstwhile New Criticism. Yet he does not appear to be haunted by the wake of literary intentionalism or the implied intentions of the native author. "Over the past thirty years, Native American fiction has been defined as, exclusively, literature written by Indians," he notes. The sentiment, however, that "Native American literature should be defined by the ethnicity of its producers (more so than defined by anything else) says more about politics and

identity than it does about literature. This is especially true, and especially clear, when we see that our books are constructed out of the same materials available to anyone else. Ultimately, the study of Native American fiction should be the study of style."²⁴

Treuer shows his own intentional fallacy that counters silky ideas about literature, style, and identity. The symbol of a broken feather enhances the cover of his book, a trace of image and identity politics, and the biographical note that he is "Ojibwe from the Leech Lake Reservation in northern Minnesota" implies that he would rather favor being read for his ethnicity.

So if there is *only* literature by some dubious discovery of the "true value" of the cold, white pages of style, then there is no sense of native presence and survivance. Treuer teases the absence of native survivance in literature, but apparently he is not an active proponent of the death of the author. Surely he would not turn native novelists aside that way, by the ambiguities of cold print, only to declare as a newcomer his own presence as a native author.

Tragic Wisdom

Native American Indians have resisted empires, negotiated treaties, and as strategies of survivance, participated by stealth and cultural irony in the simulations of absence in order to secure the chance of a decisive presence in national literature, history, and canonry. Native resistance of dominance, however serious, evasive and ironic, is an undeniable trace of presence over absence, nihilism, and victimry.

Many readers consider native literature an absence not a presence, a romantic levy of heroic separatism and disappearance, while others review native stories as cryptic representations of cultural promises obscured by victimry. The concurrent native literary nationalists construct an apparent rarefied nostalgia for the sentiments and structures of tradition and the inventions of culture by a reductive reading of creative literature. The new nationalists would denigrate native individualism, visionary narratives, chance, natural reason, and survivance for the ideologies that deny the distinctions of native aesthetics and literary art. Michael Dorris, the late novelist, argued against the aesthetic distinctions of native literature. Other authors and interpreters of literature have resisted the idea of a singular native literary aesthetic.

Native literary artists in the furtherance of natural reason create the promise

of aesthetic sentiments, irony, and practices of survivance. The standard dictionary definitions of *survivance* do not provide the natural reason or sense of the word in literature. Space, time, consciousness, and irony are elusive references, although critical in native history and literary sentiments of the word *survivance*.

The sectarian scrutiny of essential individual responsibilities provokes a discourse of monotheist conscience, remorse, mercy, and a literature of tragedy. The ironic fullness of original sin, shame, and stigmata want salvation, a singular solution to absence and certain victimry. There is a crucial cultural distinction between monotheism, apocalypticism, natural reason, and native survivance.

Dorothy Lee observes in *Freedom and Culture* that the "Dakota were responsible for all things, because they were at one with all things. In one way, this meant that all behavior had to be responsible, since its effect always went beyond the individual. In another way, it meant that an individual had to, was responsible to, increase, intensify, spread, recognize, experience this relationship." Consider, for the "Dakota, to be was to be responsible; because to be was to be related; and to be related meant to be responsible."

Personal, individual responsibility in this sense is communal and creates a sense of presence and survivance. Responsibility in the course of natural reason is not a cause of nihilism or victimry. "The Dakota were responsible, but they were accountable to no one for their conduct," writes Lee. "Responsibility and accountability had nothing in common for them. Ideally, everyone was responsible for all members of the band, and eventually for all people, all things."

Yet Lee declares no "Dakota was accountable to any one or for any one. Was he his brother's keeper? Yes, in so far as he was responsible for his welfare; no, in so far as being accountable for him. He would never speak for him, decide for him, answer prying questions about him. And he was not accountable for himself, either. No one asked him questions about himself; he gave information or withheld it, as he own choice. When a man came back from a vision quest, when warriors returned, they were not questioned. People waited for them to report or not as they pleased."²⁵ Original, communal responsibility, greater than the individual, greater than original sin, but not accountability, animates the practice and consciousness of survivance,

a sense of presence, a responsible presence of natural reason and resistance to absence and victimry.

Survivance is, of course, related to the word *survival*, and the definition varies by language. *The Robert and Collins dictionnaire français-anglais, anglais-français* defines *survivance* as a "relic, survival; cette coutume est une survivance de passé this custom is a survival *ou* relic from the past; survivance de l'âme survival of the soul (after death), afterlife." *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* defines *survivance* as the "succession to an estate, office, etc., of a survivor nominated before the death of the previous holder; the right of such succession in case of survival." And the suffix *ance* is a quality of action, as in *survivance, relevance, assistance*. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines *ance* as a "state or condition" or "action," as in *continuance*. Survivance, then, is the action, condition, quality, and sentiments of the verb *survive*, "to remain alive or in existence," to outlive, persevere with a suffix of *survivancy*.

The word *survivance* has been used more frequently in the past few years since the publication of *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* and *Fugitive Poses: Native American Indian Scenes of Absence and Presence*. "Survivance is an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name," I wrote in *Manifest Manners*. "Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy."²⁶

The word *survivance* has been used in the titles of many essays and at least one recent book. Anne Ruggles Gere, for example, used the word in the title of her essay "An Art of 'Survivance,' Angel DeCora of Carlisle" *American Indian Quarterly*, 2004. Rauna Koukkanen, "'Survivance,' in Sami and First Nation Boarding School Narratives," *American Indian Quarterly*, 2003.

Survivance, the word, is more commonly used in the political context of francophone nationalism and the Québécois in Canada. Other instances of the word include "Cadjins et creoles en Louisiane. Histoire et survivance d'une francophonie" by Patrick Griolet, reviewed by Albert Valdman in *Modern Language Journal*, 1989.

Ernest Stromberg in the introduction to his edited essay collection *American Indian Rhetorics of Survivance* declares that "'survivance' is the easiest to explain," but he does not consider the compound history of the word. "While

'survival' conjures images of a stark minimalist clinging at the edge of existence, survivance goes beyond mere survival to acknowledge the dynamic and creative nature of Indigenous rhetoric."²⁷ Stromberg does not cite, consider, or even mention any other sources, expositions, or narratives on survivance. His rhetoric on survivance is derivative.

Clifford Geertz uses the word *survivance* in a structural sense of global differences, the "recurrence of familiar divisions, persisting arguments, standing threats," and notions of identity. Geertz writes in *Available Light* that a "scramble of differences in a field of connections presents us with a situation in which the frames of pride and those of hatred, culture fairs and ethnic cleansing, *survivance* and killing fields, sit side by side and pass with frightening ease from the one to the other."²⁸ Survivance, printed in italics in his personal essay, is understood only in the context of an extreme structural binary.

"Each human language maps the world differently," observes George Steiner in *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*. He relates these "geographies of remembrance" to survivance. "Thus there is, at the level of human psychic resources and survivance, an immensely positive, 'Darwinian' logic in the otherwise battling and negative excess of languages spoken on the globe. When a language dies, a possible world dies with it. There is no survival of the fittest. Even where it is spoken by a handful, by the harried remnants of destroyed communities, a language contains within itself the boundless potential of discovery, or re-compositions of reality, of articulate dreams, which are known to us as myths, as poetry, as metaphysical conjecture and the discourse of law."²⁹

Steiner considers the aesthetic experience of survivance in the responses of readers, listeners, and viewers to music, painting, and literary art. "Responding to the poem, to the piece of music, to the painting, we re-enact, within the limits of our own lesser creativity, the two defining motions of our existential presence in the world: that of the coming into being where nothing was, where nothing could have continued to be, and that of the enormity of death," he writes in *Real Presences*. "But, be it solely on a millennial scale, the latter absolute is attenuated by the potential of survivance in art. The lyric, the painting, the sonata endure beyond the life-span of the maker and our own."³⁰

Jacques Derrida uses the word *survivance* once in a collection of essays and

interviews, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews*. The interviewers for the monthly review *Passages* followed up a point about Karl Marx and Marxism and asked Derrida if he would be "surprised if there were some kind of return—in a different form and with different applications—of Communism, even if it is called something else? And if what brought it back were a need within society for the return of a little hope?"

Derrida responded that "this is what we were calling justice earlier. I do not believe there will be a return of Communism in the form of the Party (the party form is no doubt disappearing from political life in general, a 'survivance' that may of course turn out to have a long life) or in the return of everything that deterred us from a certain kind of Marxism and a certain kind of Communism." Derrida seems to use the word *survivance* here in the context of a relic from the past or in the sense of an afterlife.³¹

Derrida in *Archive Fever* comments on a new turn of forms in the recent interpretations of *Moses and Monotheism* by Sigmund Freud, the "phantoms out of the past" compared to the form of a "triumph of life." Derrida observes that the "afterlife [survivance] no longer means death and the return of the specter, but the surviving of an excess of life which resists annihilation."³²

Derrida would surely have embraced a more expansive sense of the word *survivance*, as he has done with the word *différance*. Peggy Kamuf points out in *A Derrida Reader* that the suffix *ance* "calls up a middle voice between the active and passive voices. In this manner it can point to an operation that is not that of a subject or an object," a "certain nontransitivity."³³ Survivance, in this sense, could be the fourth person or voice in native stories.

Notes

1. Gerald Vizenor, *Fugitive Poses: Native American Scenes of Absence and Presence* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1998), 167–68.
2. Theodora Kroeber, *Alfred Kroeber: A Personal Configuration* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 81.
3. Gerald Vizenor, *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 126–37.
4. Gerald Vizenor, "Mister Ishi: Analogies of Exile, Deliverance, and Liberty," in *Ishi in Three Centuries*, ed. Karl Kroeber and Clifton Kroeber (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 363–72.
5. Daniel Littlefield, Jr., "Newspapers, Magazines, and Journals," in *Encyclopedia of North American Indians*, ed. Frederick Hoxie (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1996), 328.

6. Gerald Vizenor, *The People Named the Chippewa* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 78–94.
7. Antoine Compagnon, *Literature, Theory, and Common Sense* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 9, 12.
8. William Warren, *History of the Ojibway Nation* (Minneapolis: Ross and Haines, 1957), 34, 47, 88. Warren, the first Anishinaabe historian, was born May 27, 1825, at La Pointe, Madeline Island, Lake Superior. He was an interpreter, elected as a member of the Minnesota Territorial Legislature. He died on June 1, 1853. History of the Ojibway Nation was first published by the Minnesota Historical Society in 1885. The crane totem, *ajijaak*, is also known as the “echo makers.”
9. Warren, *History of the Ojibway Nation*, 368, 373. See also Gerald Vizenor, *Interior Landscapes: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 4–6. The Long Knife is a name for the Americans. The name is a translation of *gichimookomann* (*gichi*, big or great; *mookomaan*, knife), a descriptive metaphor of the first contact with white men who carried swords.
10. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 3, 193, 229, 235.
11. N. Scott Momaday, *The Names: A Memoir* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 3.
12. John Searle, “Metaphor,” in *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 93, 105, 123. Searle observes, “The question, ‘How do metaphors work?’ is a bit like the question, ‘How does one thing remind us of another thing?’ There is no single answer to either question, though similarity obviously plays a major role in answering both. Two important differences between them are that metaphors are both restricted and systematic; restricted in the sense that no every way that one thing can remind us of something else will provide a basis for metaphor, and systematic in the sense that metaphors must be communicable from speaker to hearer in virtue of a shared system of principles.”
13. Janet Martin Soskice, *Metaphor and Religious Language* (Oxford, UK: Clarendon, 1985), 15, 58–60.
14. James Welch, *Winter in the Blood* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 1–2.
15. Charles Woodward, *Ancestral Voices: Conversations with N. Scott Momaday* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 17.
16. N. Scott Momaday, *House Made of Dawn* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 31–33, 64.
17. Leslie Silko, *Ceremony* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1977), 132–33.
18. Louise Erdrich, *Tracks* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 10, 37, 54, 60, 89.
19. David Treuer, *The Hiawatha* (New York: Picador, 1999), 8.
20. Treuer, *Hiawatha*, 79.
21. Treuer, *Hiawatha*, 5.
22. Treuer, *Hiawatha*, 310.
23. Momaday, *House Made of Dawn*, 212.

24. David Treuer, *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual* (Saint Paul MN: Greywolf, 2006), 3–4.
25. Dorothy Lee, *Freedom and Culture* (1959; repr., Prospect Heights IL: Waveland, 1987), 60–61, 65.
26. Vizenor, *Manifest Manners*, vii.
27. Ernest Stromberg, ed., *American Indian Rhetorics and Survivance: Word Medicine, Word Magic* (Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 1.
28. Clifford Geertz, *Available Light* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 250.
29. George Steiner, *After Babel: Aspects of Language and Translation*, 3rd ed. (1975; repr., New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), xiv. The word survivance was not used in the first edition.
30. George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 209–10. Steiner observes that it is the “aesthetic which, past any other mode accessible to us, is the felt configuration of a negation (however partial, however ‘figurative’ in the precise sense) of mortality. Imaging to ourselves the fictive situation or personae in the text, recomposing perceptually the objects or visage in the painting, making audition resonant to the music via an inner complementarity, at once conceptual and bodily, we remade the making.”
31. Jacques Derrida, *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews* (Stanford CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 111–12.
32. Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 60.
33. Peggy Kamuf, ed., *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 59.