important contribution stands in the nineteen stories that feature Iktomi, the Dakota trickster character. These stories differ from most Iktomi stories in that they are told verbatim, without editing out the obscene parts:

> Once, when Iktomi was travelling along a trail he came to a lodge whence smoke issued from the top. He stopped and listened, and he could hear two women (raccoons) talking within. Then he took one of his testicles and tossed it through the smoke hole, and listened again. One of the women said, "Cousin, I am going to eat that plum" and she took it up and bit it in two and swallowed it. (pp. 132–133)

Although some readers might find these references offensive or bawdy, others will realize the fuller picture, the breadth of the humor, the deeper meaning, and the insight into how most American Indian stories are modified to fit certain audience expectations. The reader feels the authenticity of these stories—and the need to question the editing process of all American Indian stories.

*Being Dakota* is a rare find, a book based on a manuscript that was not even half-completed, but adds valuable information about the Sisseton and Wahpeton to the wealth of books and articles already in print. Oneroad's and Skinner's friendship lies at the center, with the highly valuable cultural information and the stories emanating outward. *Being Dakota* surprises and challenges its readers' expectations and widens their cultural knowledge about the Eastern Dakota—and that makes the book worth having.

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**Conversations with the High Priest of Coosa.** By Charles M. Hudson. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003. 222 pages. $34.95 cloth; $17.95 paper.

As a student and longtime associate of Charles Hudson, I have a close affinity with this book, and readers should be forewarned that I am a favorably biased reader of *Conversations with the High Priest of Coosa. Conversations* takes us to a unique place—the place where "the reach of archaeology and history ends"(p. xi). Hudson explains in his preface that has modeled *Conversations* after the anthropological classic *Conversations with Ogotemmili* (1965), in which anthropologist Marcel Griaule relays a series of conversations he had with the Dogon wise man, OgotemmLli, who revealed to Griaule the "inner nature of the Dogon world" (p. xiv). *Conversations*, then, is not so much historical fiction as it is a philosophical treatment of the worldview of the Southeastern Indian chiefdoms during the sixteenth century.

Using Griaule as a model, Hudson gives us a series of fictional conversations between a Spanish priest, Domingo de la Anunciación, and a Coosa wise man, the Raven. De La Anunciación is based on a real Spanish friar who was

with the Tristán de Luna expedition of 1559. This expedition also included some Coosa Indian women who evidently had been captured by the de Soto expedition and could translate from the Coosa language into Spanish. Hudson brings one of these women into the fictional account as Teresa, who serves as the translator between de la Anunciación and the Raven. The Raven is a fictional character, although his role as a priest with deep knowledge about the world and cosmos of the Coosas is real.

The conversations between Anunciación and the Raven are recorded in a journal written by Anunciación for his superiors in Spain. He begins these conversations as a skeptic but by the end he has gained an appreciation of the Coosa worldview and of the Raven as a knowledgeable theologian. Hudson begins the conversations with a known historical event: the story about the coming of the Nokfilaki, or "people of the ocean foam," in which the Raven relates de Soto's trek through the Coosa country. The Raven then tells a series of stories to de la Anunciación. The stories begin with tales about why animals are the way they are. As the conversations proceed, the Raven takes Anunciación deeper and deeper into Coosa beliefs and worldview. Anunciación learns about the "Master of Breath" and other divine beings. Raven tells stories about the Sun, Corn Woman, Lucky Hunter, the mythical warrior Tastanáke and the ball game, and the *posketa*, the yearly ritual of renewal, among other topics. Together, the stories flow in a readable, engrossing prose with a cadence reminiscent of collections of oral traditions. They are illustrated with some photos and line drawings, but especially notable are the lovely, vintage line prints of animals and plants that figure in the stories.

Hudson does not simply reiterate known oral traditions. Rather, he has taken bits and pieces of southeastern Indian stories derived from a variety of sources, added his own deep knowledge of Mississippian period southeastern Indian life (social, political, and cultural) and stitched the two together with threads of informed fiction. He is careful to mark which piece of the story is which in the endnotes. The result is a series of increasingly complex and theoretical stories, mostly set in the ancient past, that explain why the Coosa world is the way it is.

How are we to evaluate Hudson's reconstruction of these stories and this worldview? The book will certainly bring comparisons to *Black Elk Speaks* and other twentieth-century recordings of Native philosophers. In this case, however, no such conversation was ever recorded, and, although some Coosa beliefs might persist into the present, the whole system of these beliefs will never be known. Hudson states in his introduction that, since the full scope of the Coosa worldview remains unknown, he can only provide a reconstruction of what this sixteenth-century worldview might have been like. He calls it a "fictionalized ethnography" (p. xi). Despite the fragmentary nature of the evidence, Hudson understands that a reconstruction is still possible. As he explains in the introduction, the motifs from the prehistoric Southeastern Ceremonial Complex reflect something about the beliefs of the Mississippian people. Also, although the pieces of oral traditions and beliefs recorded in the seventeenth through twentieth centuries came from various Southeastern Indian groups at different times, they were all descendants of the people of

the sixteenth-century chiefdoms. And since there is some reason to believe that sacred myths are structures of the *longue durée*—that some parts of them endure through time and through social, political, and cultural changes—Hudson asserts that one can use the oral traditions from descendants who lived in later centuries "as a basis for writing disciplined fiction set in an earlier time" (p. xvii). Some scholars and Natives might be uneasy with conflating sources in such a way. In his introduction, Hudson addresses these concerns in a straightfoward and, to my mind, satisfactory way.

There is another question. What are we to do with the fact that *Conversations* is fiction? I spoke with Hudson about this as I was writing this review. He explained that he wrote *Conversations* because there are only fragments of Coosa beliefs left, and only the faintest evidence of how these elements were fully integrated into a coherent system. As an anthropologist, Hudson understands that beliefs form a coherent whole: a true *system* of interconnected beliefs integrated into daily life in ways that are sometimes quite foreign to literate Americans. Hudson brings this anthropological understanding to *Conversations*. He uses recurring themes and motifs found in the archaeological record, documentary evidence, and recorded oral traditions to tie the stories together in such a way that an animal story such as how the kingfisher got his white necklace becomes part of a larger tale about Tastanáke's rivalry with Lightning Bolt. This, in turn, becomes a profound story about mythical warriors engaged in "the clash of opposites" that moves the Coosa world (p. 138). Furthermore, Hudson has the Raven explain to de la Anunciación that the rituals of ceremony and the rituals of daily life always embed the meanings of the stories and reenact the most profound events of ancient time. When a Coosa hears a cardinal, she hears the daughter of the Sun speaking to her. The ball game is more than just a contest between towns—it signifies the ancient "clash of opposites" between Tastanáke and Lightning Bolt. And the rituals of the *posketa* symbolically reenact many of the ontological events of ancient time. In such ways as these, as the Raven explains, every Coosa man and woman exists in a web of undoubted meanings, and "the meaning of life is revealed to Coosa people through the events in their everyday experience"(p. 145).

Unfortunately, because of the fragmentary evidence of the sixteenth-century Southeastern Indian worldview, we will never know with certainty either the full structure and coherency of beliefs or the full meaning of life embedded in the sixteenth-century day. Hudson knows this—and that is why *Conversations* is fiction. Hudson takes the evidence available and by combinining his imagination with decades of thinking long and hard about the sixteenth-century Southeast, uses fiction to recreate a lost belief system as a working idea of what the Coosa worldview might have been like. *Conversations with the High Priest of Coosa* does indeed allow one to imagine what the world may have looked like from atop a Mississippian mound.

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