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addition to Revard, Point Riders Press puts out books by native writers Geary Hobson, Gogisgi/Carroll Arnett, Maurice Kenny, and Lance Henson. As New York publishing houses cut back their poetry and fiction titles, small presses are playing a crucial role in promoting literature written by Native Americans.

Denise Low

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Dead Voices: Natural Agonies in the New World. By Gerald Vizenor. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. 144 pages. \$9.95 paper.

When first published in 1992, Gerald Vizenor's *Dead Voices: Natural Agonies in the New World* presented readers with a text that was, in many ways, more accessible than his earlier novels. Its story of a cross-blood university professor who learns to hear and tell tribal stories from a "bear woman" living in the city recounts a linguistic pursuit that Vizenor had described previously in his novels and in his critical texts. But Vizenor's sometimes impenetrable prose is more poetically rendered in this text, and the humor of excess that often marks his novels is . . . well . . . less excessive and, to this reader at least, funnier. The paperback reprint of the novel should also make it more accessible for the classroom. All of this is to the good, because the book is pleasurable to read, and, as an exploration of how language can both constrain and liberate us, it could provide an illuminating addition to American Indian studies, literature, and writing courses.

The heart of the novel lies in the collection of stories that the bear-woman, named Bagese, tells "Laundry," the soap-scented university professor whose own stories—his lectures on tribal philosophies—are "dead voices"; that is, they are as sterile as the urine-reeking Bagese Bear's are ripe. Bagese's tales, which include a creation story about the Ojibway trickster Naanabozho and his brother stone, recall traditional tribal stories of transformation. In her stories, however, the voices of various tribal dwellers who have been pushed into the cities—among them bears, fleas, squirrels, crows, a praying mantis, and beavers—speak. Not transcriptions of an "authentic" tribal voice, these stories might best be understood as "simulations." Simulation, Vizenor tells us in *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of*

Survivance (1994), is not feigning; instead, it is a contemporary strategy for enacting the play of tribal consciousness, a means of ousting the invented Indian with "humor, new stories, and the simulations of survivance" (p. 5). In *Dead Voices*, tribal urban-dwellers tell these stories of survivance.

To hear the tribal voices of the urban dwellers—and to write them—is not an easy or simple task for Laundry; in fact, he has been forbidden by Bagese to write these stories down. Laundry's attempt to write Bagese's stories without turning them into "dead voices" is analogous to Vizenor's own attempt to novelize oral dynamics; and Laundry the university professor is also an analog of the reader whose experience of storytelling is removed from a tribal context. As such, Laundry's struggle gives readers insight into the problems of "reading" both transcribed oral texts and the traces of oral textuality in novels by American Indian writers: How can a written text evoke the whole consciousness that bears in storytelling? Must the written word necessarily become a "dead voice"? Like Paula Gunn Allen's essay in *The Sacred Hoop*, "Kochinnenako in Academe: Three Approaches to Interpreting a Keres Indian Tale," Vizenor's novel provides readers with a model for approaching oral textuality and responding to this question.

In Vizenor's version, this process involves both passion and chance. In an almost-parody of a lover's pursuit, Laundry obsessively follows Bagese, spying out her tiny Oakland, California, apartment to discover her storytelling secrets. His quest is not quite a parody, however, because the novel really is a story of a lover's initiation—into the "we" of tribal storytelling beyond the dead voices that can only lecture, recite, or fix definitions. After Laundry enters Bagese's apartment, his world is transformed: "Nothing in my life," he says, "has ever been the same since." Nothing is ever the same in the risky transformations of language that are literalized in "*wanaki* chance," the storytelling game Bagese teaches Laundry. A turn of the cards determines who she becomes—bear, flea, beaver, trickster—and whose stories she tells. *Wanaki* chance, which means a "chance at peace," provides an "invitation to animal voices in a tribal world."

The principle of chance flickering in Bagese's stories forms part of Vizenor's larger project of exploring language in the postmodern world. "The ironies and humor of the postmodern are heard in tribal narrative," Vizenor says in *Manifest Manners* (p. 68). Within the postmodern tribal framework of Vizenor's novel, readers also

get a chance to reconsider the too-easy dichotomization of this cross-blood, urban world into warring oppositions, a tendency the title itself ironically disrupts. The “dead voices,” for example, refer to written words, which seem to be pitted against the “authentic” living voice of the tribal storyteller. Ultimately, however, Laundry writes Bagese’s stories, and writing performs the transformative function of oral storytelling. Likewise, the “agony” of the animal tricksters pushed “down from the wild treelines” into the “cold and chemical” cities are anything but “natural.” At the same time, nature is something to which we do not really have access outside of these stories. And while Columbus’s “new world” was not new at all, the urban garden in *Dead Voices* is continually renewed by the voice of the storyteller who liberates the animals, birds, and insects in the city.

Vizenor’s focus on postmodern cross-blood ironies in *Dead Voices* does not, however, reduce storytelling to a language game with no representational status whatsoever. Instead, Bagese’s stories incorporate and comment on the present problems of the tribal urban dwellers. For tribal survivors, imagination is “enlaced with unusual limitations and political ironies,” Vizenor states in *The Trickster of Liberty* (p. 145). The constraints of history are likewise present in these “traditional” trickster tales. In fact, the best stories “include experiences of the present.” In the desperate fleas that take a stand against the exterminator, in the praying mantis that outwits a feminist scientist, and in the beavers and anthropologists entangled in a sewer, we get stories in which past and present resonate synchronically.

The ground that is often recovered in Vizenor’s work seems fresher in these stories, and so does the humor. The verbal ingenuity that at times renders Vizenor’s prose opaque is less intrusive here. When the bears, fleas, crows, squirrels, mantis, and beavers speak, we hear more of Vizenor the haiku poet than Vizenor the academic. The balance that the humor of excess is supposed to produce also seems clearer in this novel. Vizenor satirizes many of his usual targets—feminists, anthropologists, reservation entrepreneurs, blonds (metonymic for whites)—but they are treated with less sardonicism. In the “Mantis” chapter, for example, the outwitting of a feminist scientist who wants to eat the male sex seems to function as a story of balancing gendered power, as opposed to the more facile targeting of a character like Marbell Shiverman, the feminist professor in *The Trickster of Liberty*. Likewise, in the “Beavers” chapter, we get the bawdy

stuff—shit and beavers both—but with a clearer sense of the balance that such excesses aim for.

In this western pornographic culture, Vizenor's exploitation of the trickster's license in narratives like *The Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*, for example, could be, and has been, read as offensive. In *Dead Voices*, the gentling of the excess seems to be part of Vizenor's imagining of a female trickster-narrator. Although the trickster is, as Vizenor says, a "holosexual" figure, Bagese performs fewer of the functions of the male clown and more those of a tribal boundary-keeper. Like the "testick" fleas in *The Trickster of Liberty* that are trained to bite only the testicles of authority figures, the satire in *Dead Voices* seems to target deserving objects.

Vizenor's readers will find pleasure in these stories, as well as a useful starting point for considerations of oral and written dynamics, of context, and of the continuously transforming identity of the tribal urban dweller. In telling Bagese's tales, Laundry narratively evokes the communal play of identity. Chance flickers in the heart of these stories, including the chance for those "wordies" who, like Laundry, struggle to read "through the ear and not the eye."

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The Dream Seekers: Native American Visionary Traditions of the Great Plains. By Lee Irwin. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1994. 316 pages. \$26.95 cloth.

I have always been interested in peripheral, nontraditional topics. A study of such topics often unveils something about a larger, more fundamental reality. Perhaps my training as a phenomenologist leads me to the apparent marginalia. In any case, I was delighted when I was invited to review *The Dream Seekers: Native American Visionary Traditions of the Great Plains*, by Lee Irwin, because it focused on dreams—a nontraditional topic—with the aim of revealing their centrality to the Plains Indians' individual and collective existence. (This text is volume 213 of the *Civilization of the American Indian Series*.) I became even more enthusiastic after Irwin rejected a traditional psychoanalytic approach to his subject matter and instead promised to follow "the historical school of descriptive phenomenology . . ." in his investigation of