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UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA

GRADUATE COLLEGE

# WE STILL TELL STORIES:
# AN EXAMINATION OF CHEROKEE ORAL LITERATURE

A Dissertation

SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

By

Leslie D. Hannah
Norman, Oklahoma
2003

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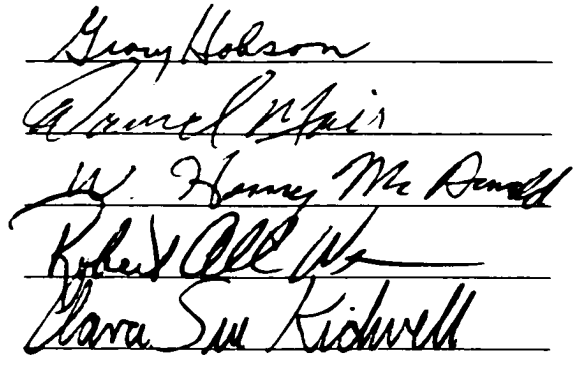
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WE STILL TELL STORIES:

AN EXAMINATION OF CHEROKEE ORAL LITERATURE

A Dissertation APPROVED FOR THE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

BY



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# Introduction

*"Knowledge was inherent in all things.*
*The world was a library ...."*
Chief Luther Standing Bear—Oglala Souix

Ohsiyo.

Before beginning this study, my plans were to examine some of the modern aspects of traditional Native American, primarily Cherokee, storytelling. For the first few weeks of my work, I held to that plan. However, as I progressed through the maze of information uncovered, especially during the field interviews I conducted, I found the research gravitating more toward a comparative study of traditional Cherokee folklore and how it is understood within a Cherokee community versus how it is often misrepresented by "popular," and even some academic books, and is thus misunderstood by the consuming public.

This is a misunderstanding that then feeds itself by filling the minds of many non-Native consumers with visions of Indian mysticism and ancient tribal secrets capable of saving the world from itself. Consumers desire more; more is

produced, often embellished beyond authenticity, until many want to become Indian. Or, it may have an opposite effect, that of terrifying the public into believing that Indians, and by association all things Indian, are evil and savage-like, thus frightening many into a false fear of Indians. In either situation, there are plenty of books written by non-Natives designed to perpetuate both images. There are also plenty of books written by those who claim to be Indian that are just as guilty of presenting as false an image as those by non-Natives. This study shall examine examples of both.

That being noted, I begin, then, with these points, a brief explanation of Cherokee lore, as examined within this study, and the consuming public's concept of "authentic" Cherokee lore. Cherokee tales, like the folklore of many cultures, are primarily oral—stories handed down from one generation to the next, much like sacred heirlooms. In this aspect, Cherokee lore differs from no other culture's lore. As this study promotes, the storytelling aspect of lore is a common thread binding all of humanity. This common thread of human kind is one aspect of folk lore repeatedly commented upon by storytellers and scholars of the genre.

Another aspect noted time and again, especially by those interviewed for this study, was the atmosphere of the storytelling event. Not being a total stranger to this, I recall that of which they spoke. A storytelling event in the traditional Cherokee manner often resembles a family reunion wherein older members of the

family speak of life as they have known it, a life that in many cases now exists only in their memories. The younger generations sit around attentively listening to the knowledge and wisdom contained in the anecdotes. Additionally, there is a healthy amount of socializing.

Lore familiar to the Western tradition is most often written down. Though its beginnings lie in orality, similar to the family gathering types of events, this tradition is now generally solitary—i.e, through the reading of a book. The reader engages with text captured on a page, reading either silently or aloud to no one other than him or herself.

Both paradigms, Native and Western, will agree that there is value in words, whether they are spoken or written. Likewise, this study makes no effort to claim words are valueless. Rather, the argument of this study will be to show that the value of the written word (and by association the commercial spoken word) so often attributed to Native Americans and their lore may frequently be misunderstood, when seen from certain Western points of view—primarily monetary. Additionally, the argument here is that the oral tradition is equal to the written tradition, in cultural value. One is no better than the other—they are simply different.

However, it is this difference that seemingly keeps these two worlds apart. As William M. Clements notes, Euroamericans and Native North Americans hold

"two diametrically opposed views on the value of [these words ....][1] What he means is not just the text, but also the *context* of the words, especially when considering cultural meanings and ethnopoetics. When considering the evidence uncovered during the research phase of this study, as well as many personal experiences, I must agree. With this study, then, I hope to create a juxtaposition of these two worlds so that those in each may see, and hopefully begin to understand, that we are all human and that we all share the love of a good story—no matter if it is spoken or written.

Being a mixed-blood Cherokee Indian—by which I mean part of my heritage is Cherokee and part is White—I have always lived in these two worlds, sometimes in the "neutral zone" separating the two, wherein I was "shot at" from both sides. I can easily see and understand the differences between these two worlds. I can also easily see the value in each world's paradigm. With this study, I shall try to illustrate some of these differences so that citizens of both worlds may gain a better understanding of each other's paradigm, at least when it comes to stories.

Historically, much has been said about the building of a bridge between the world of the Native Americans and the world of the Whites—building a bridge

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[1] William M. Clements. *Native American Verbal Art: Texts and Contexts*. Tucson: Arizona UP, 1996: 1.

that begins on both sides and meets somewhere in the middle. Homer Noley, a former director of the National United Methodist Native American Center, tells an anecdote that illustrates this concept well. He recounts it in A Native American Theology, co-written with Clara Sue Kidwell and George Tinker:

> The story is told of a construction company which was contracted to build a bridge across a major river. The company decided to start building from both sides of the river. The engineers calculated that the two sections of the bridge, starting from each side of the river, would meet in the exact center of the river where the bridge would be completed by joining the two sections. When the day finally came that the two sections were to be joined, it was discovered that there had been a slight miscalculation by one or the other side and the beams of the two sections did not arrive at the middle of the river at the same place. At least one half of the project had to be abandoned. (21)

The point of this story is that there is not true middle ground when trying to join two worlds, as one side will always see something a little different from the other side. Therefore, in order for the divide between these two worlds to be bridged one side must make the full effort to reach the other side. Native Americans were *forced* to make that effort long ago. Now, it is the Western

world's turn. Perhaps this study will serve as a guide for any who wish to try, and may help those who have been misinformed to find a truer understanding of the Cherokee, thus Native, world, for as Gerald Vizenor states in Kimberly Blaeser's book Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral tradition, "You can't understand the world without telling a story."[2]

It is the differences between the non-Natives' understandings, primarily those of Western civilizations, and Natives' understandings of stories that will be the leading focus of this study, and not so much the differences in the stories themselves per se. Western civilizations have had extensive studies and, in later times, expensive governmentally funded surveys to back them up. These studies certainly have well-documented case histories, with innumerable essays, books, and accounts committed to writing, locked away on paper, and most often written by non-Natives.

In the other world is the Native mind set, one that understands there are some things that humankind was not meant to know, one that still *tells* stories rather than *sells* them. Though I am a mixed-blood and have, out of necessity, lived in both worlds, I have willfully chosen a world view that comes from Cherokee stories, including stories that, to my knowledge, have never been written

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2

Kimberly M. Blaeser. *Gerald Vizenor: Writing in the Oral Tradition.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996: 3.

down. Much of my education and entertainment came from such stories. My favorites were the old folk stories: the lore, legends, and myths of the Cherokee people—tales my grandmother and her sisters would recount about when the family first came to the new country—the "Indian dumping ground" that would become Oklahoma—and tales about the old home country, the hills of North Carolina—or even just some comedic yarns about tricksters or people who acted foolishly and somehow paid for it.

Many scholars have noted that the storytelling desire is the "common thread" that all humans have, and that stories help us to understand one another's experiences and to appreciate our differences. "The common threads running through American Indian myth and non-Indian myth help us to appreciate the universal human experience in both."[3]

> The narrative impulse—the need to tell of or listen to experience and imagination structured into plot—is one of the traits that makes us human. For thousands of years stories were narrated strictly orally, the storyteller performing before an audience of family, neighbors, or patrons. As prime sources of entertainment and knowledge good stories were too precious a commodity to allow to die on the lips of

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[3] David Lemmings and Jake Page. *The Mythology of Native North America.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998: x.

> the originators. They were carried on within the community—and beyond—from one generation to the next, undergoing refinement and degeneration when narrated by successive tellers ....[4]

For Indians[5], especially those who have some degree of traditional upbringing, the orality is as much a part of being and heritage as food, clothing, language, and relations. "The American Indian has a highly developed oral tradition. It is in the nature of oral tradition that it remains relatively constant; languages are slow to change for the reason that they represent a greater investment on the part of society."[6] It is part of who we are, whether we are full-bloods living in a big city or mixed-bloods on a reservation or something somewhere in between.

So important is it that learning the tales is treated almost as a rite of

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4

John A. Burrison, Ed. *Storytellers: Folktales and Legends from the South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press/Brown Thrasher Books, 1989: 1.

5

By "Indians," I do not assume to speak of all Indian (Native American) people everywhere, and I by no means intend to characterize all Native North American people as a "one-size-fits-all" governmentally defined group. I write only from my own paradigm, that of a Wolf Clan Cherokee, born and raised in rural Northeastern Oklahoma. However, many of the things I write of in this study are common to Indian peoples of most tribes and clans, and it is this commonality of which I write in this study. By the same token, many of the things I write of in this study are common to all people everywhere—primarily because we are all human beings.

6

N. Scott Momaday. *The Man Made of Words: Essays, Stories, Passages*. New York: St. Martin's/Griffin, 1997. New York: St. Martin's/Griffin, 1997: 55.

passage. I remember my great-aunt telling me, many times, of a trip my family made back to the home country of North Carolina. I was only about three years old. She told me that we stopped to rest and eat near a creek, and I, as young boys will, went off exploring—of course, not so far that I was out of sight. During my mini-adventure, I apparently found a stone that resembled a tomahawk's head. I gathered it up and ran back to the car where the family was loading back up to continue. "Dida—Dida,"[7] she said I ran to her calling out, "Look what I found." She took the stone from me and looked it over, then handed it back and told me what a fine-looking rock I had. She said I then returned it to her and told her to hold it for me, giving it back to me only after I had become a man. I did not see that stone again until 1996—over thirty years after I initially gave it to her. To Dida, I did not become a man until I learned the old stories and was able to tell them as they had been told to her. Though I had written some of these stories, that did not matter. It was—and is—the telling that is the most important thing about stories, especially folk stories. "Oral tradition is the foundation of literature."[8] Dida is gone from this world now, and I hold that precious stone as I hold the stories she told me.

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7

Short for di-da-nv-wi-s-gi, closest English translation = doctor. My great-aunt, Opal Buckhorn, was a true believer in and practitioner of Cherokee medicine.

8

N. Scott Momaday. *The Man Made of Words.* 14.

This personal example is only one of many for illustrating the significance of storytelling among Cherokees, and for most Native people. "Unlike many traditions, the spiritual wisdom of the Native Americans is not found in a set of 'scriptural' materials. It is, and always has been, a part of the fabric of daily life and experience. One of the most poignant reflections of this spiritual message is found in [the] tradition of oratory."[9] These stories are our scriptures. Those who may argue against this point would do good to remember that, "[t]he Old Testament was once oral tradition until it was written down."[10]

Although it is very important, Indian people do not have a corner on the market when it comes to storytelling. Similarly, nothing included in the text of this study is intended to insinuate that Indians are better or more intelligent than any other race of people. We are all human. However, it seems that when certain races speak out on matters that concern their people, action is taken; yet, quite often, when Indians speak out on Indian matters, they are labeled as radical activists or racist reactionaries[11]—racist, in this case, meaning anti-White.

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9

Kent Nerburn. Ed. *The Wisdom of the Native Americans*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999: x - xi.

10

Vine Deloria, Jr. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997: 36.

11

Vine Deloria, Jr. writes in the preface of *Red Earth, White Lies* of an incident at the University of Colorado of when he was accused of being a racist reactionary because he

Nothing could be further from the truth. It is simply a matter of Indians finally voicing their opinions in matters that directly concern themselves.

An awareness of equality among peoples can perhaps be learned from the genre of folklore. In Chapter One, the term *folklore* is meant "folk learning," or knowledge that is generally transmitted from one generation to another.[12] This is not exclusively Native American. No culture is without this. Under this definition it might be said that *all* transmitted knowledge is therefore folklore. In a manner of speaking, this is indeed the case. The only thing that has really changed from 1492 to contemporary times is the manner in which knowledge is passed. People have not changed when it comes to the human experience of knowledge transference. We *need* to tell stories. It is a narrative impulse that is "...born of our natural longing to communicate our experiences, insights, and visions to others. Tales are instructive, funny, scary, fantastic, visionary, and factual. They

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spoke of his disbelief in the Bering Strait land bridge theory. Similarly, I have been called racist because of disagreements with White scholars. One incident in particular happened during a graduate history course I took at the University of Oklahoma. Some White students held that Native Americans had no "real" history because we "... never wrote anything down." When I and another Indian graduate student tried to inform them of their obvious error, the White instructor commented something to the effect that the only valid history American Indians have is that which was written by White historians. From then on in that class I was labeled as an Indian racist. The talk of my "racism" went on behind my back, until one day when the instructor slipped and called me a racist to my face.

12

This is similar to definitions commonly found in dictionaries and non-specialized encyclopedias. Likewise, many folklorists hold complementary definitions as the core of their work. Reference John A. Burrison's quote previously noted in the Introduction.

celebrate romance, bawdiness, the hero, the fool, the ordinary, and the extraordinary."[13]

> Like an old, old coin that has traversed continents, picking up something from each one, being passed down through centuries, and bearing the sweat and palm oil of millions who've handled it, these anonymous stories and yarns, legends and myths distill the collective experience of mankind. They are unquestionably universal. They are timeless. They are, one might say, our human inheritance, for no single man or woman can claim authorship .... [14]

As humans, we share that narrative impulse—the need for telling about or listening to experience and imagination structured into plot. What is promoted in this study is not simply a sort of pan-Indianism (although this certainly is an important concept), but something akin to pan-humanism, a concept that "...we are more alike, my friends, than we are unalike."[15]

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13

Catherine Peck, Ed. *A Treasury of North American Folktales*. New York: Book of the Month Club, The Philip Lief Group, Inc. 1998: xix.

14

Charles Johnson. "On the Nature of Tales." *A Treasury of North American Folktales*. Ed. Catherine Peck. New York: Book of the Month Club, The Philip Lief Group, Inc. 1998: xiii.

15

Maya Angelou. "Human Family." *The Maya Angelou Poetry Collection (Audio)*. New York: Random House, 1999.

There are many similarities in the folk tales of all cultures, yet no single voice can communicate a cultural heritage as deep and as broad as North America's. Although the world has gotten "smaller," and many nations are now products of cultural mixing, North America, particularly the United States, is considered the quintessential "melting pot" society. In the metaphorical jargon of this field, perhaps the "salad bowl" analogy is more appropriate. In a melting pot all signs of individual identity are burned away and the original pieces come together and are recast into a new, different being. This recasting erases cultural identity, a main concern. In the salad bowl, individual things—lettuce, onions, radishes, dressing, croutons—all come together to create something that did not exist before—a salad—while retaining their individual and cultural identities. I believe this to be true in relation to this study as well as in our daily lives.

While it is not the primary purpose of this study to try to compare/contrast (mix) every culture's oral tradition, I do, however, make some comparisons and contrasts with selected non-Native folktale traditions and that of the Cherokee Indians in Oklahoma. In doing so, I intend to show the centrality of literature to the Cherokees' minds. N. Scott Momaday's recent words on orality have validity here: "If I do not speak with care, words are wasted. If I do not listen with care, words are lost. If I do not remember carefully, the very purpose of words is

frustrated."[16]

Throughout this study of Native literature, the folklore, songs, stories, lives, legends, myths, prayers, spells, charms, omens, tales, riddles, jokes[17] of people who are indigenous to the United States of America are included. It will not limited to the "...total written output of a people."[18] Occasionally, references will be made to authors, storytellers, and teachers who are of Native cultures other than Cherokee, but this is in no way an attempt to canonize Native authors. When a work by someone other than a Cherokee is used, it will simply be because the quote fits the purpose at hand. Furthermore, when quotes by someone other than Cherokee and other than Native are used, it is not because any one author should be considered better than any other author.

**Chapter One** contains definitions of terms such as *folklore, folk tales, fairy tales,* and *myths*. Some definitions given are those accepted as standards in the field of literature, while other definitions listed are more layman in their meanings.

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16

N. Scott Momaday. *The Man Made of Words.* 55.

17

This is much the same list as N. Scott Momaday notes in chapter one of his book *The Man Made of Words.*

18

Jace Weaver: *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community.* Weaver notes that he "...defines literature as the total written output of a people." (ix) This is not intended as a criticism of Weaver for limiting his definition of literature to only that which is written, but rather to show that not even all Indians see the field of literature the same way. I see it as inclusive of the oral tradition.

Also listed are examples of each in an effort to clarify the definitions, with some analysis of each example. I also offer personal definitions of these terms. Sometimes these personal definitions are the same or similar to those accepted as the standards; other times, they differ from the standards. Finally, the chapter concludes with a comparative/contrastive analysis of literacy as viewed by a Native (oral) paradigm and a Western (written) paradigm.

**Chapter Two** notes the importance and roles of the stories and the tellers. In this chapter, similarities and differences in a Native way of thinking and learning (again, primarily the Cherokee) and a non-Native way of thinking and learning are also noted. Additionally, religious differences between, and commonalities shared within the two paradigms, are noted.

In **Chapter Three**, in an effort to establish the authenticity of storytellers and authors claiming to be Cherokee, analysis is made of certain published writings in an attempt to establish the authenticity of certain materials offered as Cherokee, and thus Native. This includes the stories and details that I, myself, offer during this study. It is my contention that some of the works currently on the market are merely "rehashed" works of previous authors or tellers or are very commercialized renditions of otherwise sacred materials, or they are commercial materials that portray Cherokees as all-knowing mystics who can solve the world's problems. Such books are usually commercially written for an audience who sees

Native Americans as New Age mystics. The focus of this chapter is limited to only those authors claiming to be Cherokee.

**Chapter Four** examines selected authors who are authentic Cherokee storytellers. It offers a comparative/contrastive basis of their works to those examined in Chapter three. Chapter Four also contains a small anthology of personal interviews conducted with Cherokee elders and storytellers in support of this study. These interviews were conducted for the same reasons of comparison and contrast. Many of the stories and accounts collected in these interviews were originally told in the Cherokee language. With the help of my mother, Georgia Lee Kent—a fluent speaker of the language—I have translated these stories into English and incorporated them into the study as a method of language, culture, and identity retention. The inclusion of these stories from the interviews is not an attempt to gather and catagorize for ownership or canonization, but rather it is primarily an effort of preserving an invaluable portion of Cherokee orality.

This chapter also contains folkloric tales and selected information from the Western tradition of literature for their comparative/contrastive value to some of the stories collected during the interviews. This information is included as a means of showing that Cherokee/Native literature is treated differently than other literatures and even some other minority literatures. Some European cultures have creatures and beings in their literatures more fantastic than any known in

Cherokee/Native literature, yet these European literatures are canonized while Cherokee/Native literature remains marginalized.

In the **Conclusion,** I sum up the parts into a whole—a whole that is not intended to be the all-knowing, all-telling voice for all Cherokee/Native lore and literature—but rather a totality of my studies in this realm of literature of a Cherokee paradigm.

# Chapter One

## This is How I See the World [19]

*"Much has been said of the want of what you term 'civilization' among the Indians. You say, 'Why do not the Indians ... live as we do?' May we not ask with equal propriety, 'Why do not the white people... live as we do?'"*
Old Tassel - Cherokee

## The Butterfly Effect [20]

It is a daunting task, researching any aspect of Native literature. So much remains untapped in this Comstock of indigenous literature. In dealing with

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19

The title of this chapter is inspired by a quote from Pulitzer Prize-winning Kiowa/Cherokee author N. Scott Momaday. The text of the quotes reads thus: "I know how my father saw the world, and his father before him. That is how I see the world."

20

The Butterfly Effect refers to the Concept of Chaos theory developed by Edward Lorenz. It holds that a very small change or disturbance can have an enormous impact on the course of events or minds. A version of the theory appears in Ray Bradbury's short story "A Sound of Thunder," in the collection *The Golden Apples of the Sun*. This was chosen as the title of this segment for its power to provoke thought; if but one person can see the world with different eyes—Native eyes—and that person convince another, then that person another, perhaps the future of Native people will be secured.

Native literature and lore, N. Scott Momaday believes that the mere enormity of the task causes researchers to wince in discouragement. He writes in The Man Made of Words:

> The native voice in American literature is indispensable. There is no true literary history of the United States without it, and yet it has not been clearly delineated in our scholarship. The reasons for this neglect are perhaps not far to find. The subject is formidable; the body of ... [material] ... in Native American oral tradition, ... is large, so large as to discourage investigation.[21]

It is, indeed, a demanding scholarly effort to study and interpret such a diverse field of literature as is the Native one. Though much work has been done, so much more yet awaits. Perhaps this is why commercial literature, that is books printed and marketed primarily for their monetary value, on the topic of Native Americans is so popular. It is this commercial literature that accounts for many of the misconceptions and misunderstandings of Native lore and customs.

The task is daunting, yes; however, much Native American lore has been studied in a scholarly manner, and by Natives themselves. Additionally, many Native stories are written in English, or have been translated into English. It is this

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21

N. Scott Momaday, *The Man Made of Words*, New York: St. Martins/Griffin Press, 1997: 14.

untouched vastness of literature and lore that must be properly explored and examined if Native literature is ever to be presented on the same plane as canonized American literature. By proper examination, I mean Natives themselves should be the primary researchers and scholars—more so than ever. This is not to say that non-Natives should never study Native literature and lore, but that Native people should—must—take the lead.

It has been only recently that a move to include Native tales into the canon of American literature has advanced. However, if as Momaday says, "[o]ral tradition is the foundation of literature," why is it that these works are so slow in being recognized? Perhaps it is as William M. Clements suggests when he addresses this issue:

> American Indian discourse began with two marks against it. First it was the speech of "savages," persons whose identity stemmed from the direct antithesis to civilization. Secondly, Indian discourse suffered from being oral rather that written. The juxtaposition of "oral" with "literature" simply had not occurred to the sufficient number of Euroamericans to encourage attention to esthetic qualities in Native American discourse. The notion that Native American discourse at best amounted to a pre-literature characterized the views of most Euroamericans throughout the nineteenth century and well

into the twentieth.[22]

There is much evidence to suggest that this mind set continues yet today. Creek/Cherokee author Craig Womack succinctly addresses such a mentalité in Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism. The following quote from that work sums up the Butterfly Effect perfectly—if there were no Native Americans, thus no Native American literature, there would be no America, thus no American literature:

> To take this one step further, the primary purpose of this study is not to argue for canonical inclusion or opening up native literature to a broader audience .... I say that tribal literatures are not some branch waiting to be grafted onto the main trunk. Tribal literatures are the *tree*, the oldest literatures in the Americas, the most American of American literatures. We *are* the canon.[23]

It is not merely the enormity of the task that precludes proper study of Native literatures. Sometimes, what can only be described by some as an imperial attitude may stand in the way of proper academic study. Leslie Marmon Silko

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22

William M. Clements. *Native American Verbal Art: Texts and Contexts*. Tucson: Arizona UP, 1996: 4 - 5.

23

Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999: 7.

notes that "[w]hite ethnologists have reported that the oral tradition among Native American groups has died out, because Whites have always looked for museum pieces and artifacts when dealing with Native American communities."[24] The oral tradition has not died out among Native American groups. We still tell stories. The oral tradition among Cherokees is perhaps more alive now than it has been in the past few decades. Many younger Cherokees are making strong efforts to recapture their oral traditions. Amateur storytelling organizations are present throughout much of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma.

Yet if, as Silko notes, White ethnologists are looking for museum pieces when dealing with Natives, and there are no actual museum pieces to be found—as with the living literature of such communities—what do the ethnologists do? Often times they will create their own "museum pieces" by displaying "...in an almost 'circuslike' atmosphere" ... [Native Americans and their cultures] as the passive objects of white scientists' studies "... in an exoticized vision of Native life for Western consumption."[25] A perfect example of this is the 1922 Robert Flaherty "documentary"[26] *Nanook of the North*. Many scholars, among them Shari

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24

Leslie Marmon Silko. *Storyteller*. New York: Arcade Publishing, 1981.

25

Shari M. Huhndorf. *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2001: 84 - 88.

26

The term "documentary" is set of in quotation marks here to note the context of the film

M. Huhndorf and Charles Nayoumealuk, note that much of Flaherty's film "... was staged to suit the demands of the Southern [white] imagination by dressing the Eskimos in bear skins and scripting many of the key scenes."[27] Additionally, Huhndorf lists the Native American collections of the Smithsonian Institute as major violators of authentic Indian imagery.

With such well-known cases as these, one may conclude that if the task of a scholarly study of Native American literature is so formidable as to discourage proper investigation, that "experts" rely upon their imaginations to fill in the blanks, or cater to the consuming public's imagination. These "expert findings" are then published or displayed as authoritative, scientific data, sold to the highest bidder, who in turn passes it on as commercial literature. Thus books filled with inaccuracies and misrepresentations fill the market, and the general public's minds with false images of Natives.

So why are not the stories of the Indians, even those written in English, seriously considered? Vine Deloria, Jr. answers this question thus in Red Earth, White Lies:

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within the understood definition of the term. The word "documentary" connotes scientific objectivity. However, it is well known that Flaherty staged many of the scenes in his film, or, as Huhndorf notes in chapter two of her book *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination*, "Flaherty doctored scene[s] so that the image[s] would fit the [American] imagination." (123)

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Shari M. Huhndorf. 123.

> The stereotypical image of the American Indians as childlike, superstitious creatures still remains in the popular American mind—a subhuman species that really has no feelings, values, or inherent worth. This attitude permeates American society because Americans have been taught that "scientists" [experts] are always right, that they have no personal biases, and that they do not lie, three fictions that are impossible to defeat. The Indian explanation is always cast aside as a superstition, precluding Indians from having an acceptable status as human beings, and reducing them in the eyes of educated people to a prehuman level of ignorance.[28]

Much of the time it indeed seems as if the Native voice is the first one silenced, or the one first ignored. This phenomenon can be likened to a crayon box, in which there are many colors representing the various peoples of this nation. However, the two most predominant crayons in the box are black and white, to the exclusion of the others. Much, of course, has been written about the struggles of Black people to find and establish their voice. In "Perspectives on the Intellectual Traditions of Black Women Writers," Jacqueline Jones Royster writes, "When we look with an informed eye at the ways in which black women have

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Vine Deloria, Jr. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997: 7.

used writing over time, it should be immediately obvious that there was a struggle for basic literacy."[29] Although Royster is writing here of literacy, the struggle for recognition of this minority's voice holds much the same truth for other minorities. Blacks finally have their crayon in the box. And the crayon that represents the Native Americans?—that is the color invisible.

With much the same goals that Leonard Peltier conveys in Prison Writings, this study is an effort to balance the colors in the box: "I write this book to bring a greater understanding of what being an Indian means, of who we are as human beings. We are not quaint curiosities or stereotypical figures in a movie, but ordinary—and, yes, at times, extraordinary—human beings. Just like you."[30]

It has been said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step. A thousand-mile journey is indeed a formidable task. A thorough study of the vast amount of untouched Native American literature is also a formidable task. However, this study is not the journey—it is merely the first step: the first of many steps that must be taken. It is the Butterfly Effect. The small difference that this material might make today will hopefully return more vast results tomorrow.

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Jacqueline Jones Royster. *"Perspectives on the Intellectual Tradition of Black Women Writers." The Right to Literacy.* Eds. Andrea Lunsford, Helene Moglen, and James Slevin. New York: Modern Language Association, 1990: 103 - 104.

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Leonard Peltier. *Prison Writings: My Life is My Sun Dance.* New York: St. Martin's/Griffin, 2000: 44 - 45.

## Lingua Franca

"*When I use a word ... it means just what I choose it to mean—neither more nor less.*" Humpty Dumpty
from Chapter VI of *Through the Looking-Glass*
by Lewis Carroll

One difficulty in defining *any* aspect of folklore—not just Native lore—is that the term has acquired so many and varied meanings over the years. Indeed, it seems as if there is a different definition for almost every person who uses it. Even scholars in the field of folklore, it would seem, cannot agree on a single definition of the term. Many use the term to mean anything from children's stories to hearsay. Jan Harold Brunvand, in The Study of American Folklore, holds that a general definition of folklore is "those materials in [a] culture that circulate traditionally among members of any group in different versions, whether oral form or by means of customary example."[31]

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Jan Harold Brunvand. *The Study of American Folklore: An Introduction.* New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 1968: 5.

Yet even further variety of the word's meaning may be found in Barre Toelken's The Dynamics of Folklore, wherein the author approaches the term from a deconstructionist point of view:

> Still another problem ... is that many folklorists today do not even feel the word *folklore* itself adequately identifies or defines the area they are talking about. For one thing, they voice sincere doubts that there is any such static group as might be implied by the [term] *folk*, [which] means a genetically similar group. Further, the word *lore*, even though it does indicate something about learning or knowledge, does not cover the wide range of communicative expressions and experience and performance that has become the focus of the professional folklorist. ... [A]ctually, *folklore* is a word very much like *culture*; it represents a tremendous spectrum of human knowledge and expression that can be studied in a number of ways and for a number of reasons.[32]

Indeed there are many ways in which folklore may be studied. With the vast amount of Cherokee lore and the numerous ways there are to study it, there is no wonder that so many erroneous and blatantly false conclusions are being

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Barre Toelken. *The Dynamics of Folklore*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 1996: 31 - 32.

drawn. Who does one believe when non-Native "experts" get it wrong and native "experts" mislead? For that question I have no answer—other than to say rather than reading about Indians, go spend some time with them. One week spent among Indians is worth a ton of "expert" opinions about them. This is active learning, rather than passive reading.

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, I hold, as noted in the introduction, to some combined aspects of the previous definitions of folk lore: "...the term *folklore*, ... means folk learning." This simple definition seems the best for the aims of this study. One might also add that it is not only folk learning via oral tales and customary example, but it is also learning from daily modeling—role-modeling.

Role-modeling, that is human life, as folk lore, and thus literature, should not be such a difficult concept to accept. In fact, many researchers are looking more closely at human life as literature, coining the phrase "family literature" to describe the daily role modeling that occurs within the relationships of a family.[33] Many people in various cultures still incorporate this type of customary learning into their daily lives. For example, in an essay by Andrea Fishman, "Becoming

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Literacy researchers such as Shirley Brice Heath: *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms*, and Denny Taylor: *Family Literacy*, and Gordon Wells: *The Meaning Makers*, examine this practice of reading the human life as literature, role modeling for the next generation.

Literate: A Lesson from the Amish," the author examines the daily lives of a typical Old Order Amish family and describes how the members of it, the Fisher family, "read" each other in an effort to learn the ways of the Amish. Fishman quotes Paulo Friere: "It is possible to ... 'read the world.'" This theory holds that children have the ability to "read and understand" the context of the world and those around them long before they can read text on a page.[34] Additionally, the famous Sojourner Truth quote comes to mind: "You know, I don't read such small stuff as letters, I read men and nations."[35] Still, some may argue that a human life cannot be read, that only a biography of that life can be, but before the biographer sets a life onto the page the life itself must be "read" in order for the words to come.

A scientific or academic understanding of such a concept is not unattainable. However, not every one will likely agree with such a rudimentary comprehension of the term *folklore*. "The beginnings of the academic discipline of folklore date back to the 19th Century when the German philologists Jacob and

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Andrea R. Fishman. "Becoming Literate: A Lesson from the Amish." *The Right to Literacy*. Eds. Andrea Lunsford, Helene Moglen, and James Slevin. New York: Modern Language Association, 1990: 34.

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From the Sojourner Truth speech "Ain't I a Woman." Bert J. Lowenberg and Ruth Bogin. Eds. *Black Women in Nineteenth Century American Life: Their Words, Their Thoughts, Their Feelings*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1976: 239.

Wilhelm Grimm began gathering German folktales in the field."[36] The stories collected and categorized by the Grimm Brothers would eventually come to be known as *fairy tales*. They are also called by the German name *Märchen*, which literally means "wonder tale." They are stories of adventure, often filled with magic and even romance. They usually involve a heroic figure, commonly one who is an adolescent and who at first may seem naive or unpromising, but who usually succeeds in displaying characteristics of generosity, kindness, helpfulness, and even wisdom. These stories may also be considered a type of *morality tale*, as they are often told to children as a model of how to behave.[37]

Contemporary Americans may (mis)understand these to be the "Disneyized" full-length animated motion pictures. Even some of the beloved *Looney Tunes* cartoons display aspects of this type of tale. Such cartoons and full-length animated movies are mass-produced for the public. The goal of such productions is not necessarily to educate children in the ways of their culture or society; rather, the aims appear to be entirely commercial—today, even more so than ever before. Any morals that may have at one time been contained in these tales are now little evident in moral form. Additionally, any morals that once

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Charles Wagley.

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John A. Burrison, Ed. *Storytellers: Folktales and Legends from the South*. Athens: University of Georgia Press/Brown Thrasher Books, 1989: 5.

existed in such tales are too often quickly dismissed because, perhaps, of another understanding the term *fairy tale* has—that of a misleading statement, or even a blatant lie. This is a common secondary definition for this term in many dictionaries.

Apparently, the *folk tale* fares only slightly better in believability than does the fairy tale. The genre of folk tales contains many sub-genres: legends, fables, humorous tales, tall-tales, and belief narratives. All of these usually have one thing in common. In most instances, there is some basis of authenticity involved, such as the person depicted in the story at one time did exist or the setting of the story is a real place. The more dramatic representation of this type of literature may be another reason these stories are more readily believed. (This will be examined further later on.) Usually, however, that is the limit of "authenticity." Numerous folk literature experts do not take this set of stories seriously, and many have dubbed these as "fakelore."[38] The following is a typical definition of folktale:

> Folktales are stories that often use animals that act like humans, and that live in a world of wonder and magic. Most of these stories convey a message or moral to the reader, or explain something in a

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Brunvand: 2 - 3.

creative, fantastic way. Folktales are often passed down and retold from generation to generation.[39]

This definition implies that folk tales have the verisimilitude of authenticity, that is an appearance of truth, because of the aspect of explanation, but this appearance is easily dismissed because of the fantastic nature of the tale. Similar dictionary definitions add to the dismissability of folk tales as more fiction than fact. Such tales are also sometimes called "fish stories." This colloquial phrase alludes to a fisherman who indeed did catch a fish—in reality, a small one that he threw back before anyone noticed him with it, but when he recounted the narrative to his buddies back at the lodge, the fish was much bigger than in reality. With each retelling, the fish was again bigger than even before, and by the time the story circulates throughout the fishing camps it has become a fantastic tale of "the big one that got away."

Legends, fables, belief narratives, and all of the other subsets of folk tales are fascinating—not cartoon fantastic, but fascinating—perhaps awe inspiring—is a more appropriate descriptor. The art of the story is what holds the fascination. Stories of great feats of strength or heroic deeds performed by ordinary people are examples of legends. The legend of William Wallace, as portrayed by the actor

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[39] "Folk tale." *Scholastic.com.* Teachers' Resource Center. Available at http://teacher.scholastic.com/writewit/mff/folktale_allfolktale.htm. 7 December 2002.

Mel Gibson in the movie, Braveheart, is an example of such a legend. Contemporary chronicles of William Wallace's time substantiate that he did indeed exist around the era portrayed the movie. In circumstances such as this, modern-day researchers try desperately to prove the feats of such people. It is as if they are saying, "Fantastic deeds such as these cannot exist unless we prove their existence." If unproven, the accounts are dismissed as unreliable, thus further damaging the reputation of the legendary tales. One might argue inversely and say that though researchers have not been able to prove such legendary feats happened, they also have not been able to disprove them.

Vine Deloria, Jr. expresses a similar conviction in Red Earth, White Lies when he writes:

> Some efforts have already been made in a number of fields to investigate the knowledge of tribal peoples and incorporate it into modern scientific explanations. Thor Heyerdahl was one of the first people to show, by repeating the event, that ancient peoples could have traveled by sea to various parts of the globe. Polynesian voyages of considerable distance have now been duplicated, giving credence to the idea that Hawaiian tales of sea voyages were not superstitious ways of discussing ocean currents. Critical in this respect is the fact that Hawaiians would not be believed until a white

man had duplicated the feat.[40]

This passage refers to Deloria's disbelief in the Bering Strait theory. In essence, this theory states that Native Americans came to the North American continent from the Asian continent via a land bridge—one that is now sunken. Deloria contends that the land bridge theory is false, that Native Americans traveled in boats. This boat theory was dismissed until the Heyerdahl project.

Lloyd Arneach, a North Carolina Cherokee, illustrates Deloria's point about resisting belief in tales until science makes them credible. In an interview with John A. Burrison, chronicled in Storytellers, Arneach tells of the Cherokee Little People:

> What the Cherokees call the Little People are similar to Ireland's leprechauns; and there are stories of Little People throughout the different nationalities of the Earth.
>
> The Cherokee's Little People were good people. The old people of the tribe, when I was a child, would occasionally leave bowls of milk at their back doorstep. In the morning the milk would be gone. Now I would assume that some wild animal came down and drank the milk.

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[40] Vine Deloria, Jr. *Red Earth, White Lies: Native Americans and the Myth of Scientific Fact*. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1997: 33 - 34.

> Until recently, I considered this a legend, as did many people. But around Franklin, North Carolina, small caves were found. The caves were definitely manmade. Artifacts were found in them that would fit in a child's hand. And yet they were definitely fashioned by skilled craftsmen. And these caves were found to be hundreds of years old. The caves were so small that an adult had to get down on all fours to navigate them, and even then some of the caves were too small, which indicated people of a very small stature. This gives some doubt in my mind as to whether this is really a legend, or is it a story based on fact?[41]

These examples demonstrate how folk tales are perceived as questionable by non-Native experts, and by extension the general public, and even by some who are inside the culture. With the advent of the urban legend, any story of legendary proportions is more often than not seen as a fabrication. Although such stories could happen, there is always some academic/scientific explanation—according to experts—to prove the folk tale false, or the inverse of this: there is no academic/scientific evidence that prove such tales to be true—therefore, they must

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[41] Lloyd Arneach. "The Little People." *Storytellers: Folktales and Legends from the South.* Ed. John A. Burrison. Athens: University of Georgia Press/Brown Thrasher Books, 1989: 135.

be false, thus making the folk tales their property by way of academic/scientific default through eminent domain.

Some may point out that science cannot both prove and disprove the factual foundations of many folkloric tales. On the contrary; science does this daily. For example, the Thor Heyerdahl project that proved Natives could have traveled to the Americas via boat. This method of migration was not considered possible, even though people of indigenous descent had been saying it for decades, until a White scientist "proved" it. Conversely, the Cherokee Little people have not been proven, by Western scientists, to exist; therefore, they must be fiction. These outside experts might be quick to dismiss the caves noted by Lloyd Arneach as merely small caves and no direct evidence of the existence of Cherokee Little People.

Another sub-genre of folk lore is perhaps the most "American" of stories: the *tall-tale*. Born on the American frontier, these stories of jest are full of exaggeration and boastful absurdities. And this becomes the whole point. It is the one art that flourished on the American frontier because illiteracy—that is the academic definition: the inability to read and write—was not a barrier. All that was necessary was the imagination, a bit of articulation, and the earnest desire to entertain or be entertained. This holds true even today. Contemporary comedians thrive on the tall-tale.

Tall-tales tend to be narrated in first person and are often decorated with local amenities—that is, people or places specific to a given region. Many of America's more well-known authors spring from this genre. Thomas Bangs Thorpe and George Washington Harris are two such tall-tale authors from the 19th century, but perhaps the most famous of all is Mark Twain. Tall-tales fabricated by these authors and others like them are certainly entertaining and very creative, but they are, by their very nature, wild exaggerations. Most likely, it is these beloved and entertaining tall-tales that consign all other similar literature of this field to be so easily dismissed.

*Myths* are differentiated from folk tales by being less entertaining, more supernatural, and less rational and logical, more awe-inspiring in a fearful sort of way. Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language notes that myths are "invented stories, ideas, or concepts involving some superhuman being or some alleged person or event, usually without a determinable basis of fact or explanation."[42] Whereas the folk tale may contain a sliver of factual basis, myths are considered wholly fictional, although they are usually of a serious nature. Although this is a lay definition, it, nonetheless, is dismissive of this narrative form.

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"Myth." *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary of the English Language.* New York: Grammercy Press, 1996: 946.

Even some experts in the field of mythology define the object of their affections as unbelievable. Donna Rosenberg states in the introduction of World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics, "[a]lthough most of the myths in *World Mythology* were created by people who lived in societies that were much less complex than our own, they address fundamental questions that each thinking person continues to ask."[43] If by "less complex," she means unencumbered by the tribulations of a modern Western civilization, perhaps there is some truth to it, but one can also infer that she means inferior.

Rosenberg also states that myths "...were created as entertaining stories with a serious purpose."[44] This serious purpose, she notes, can be one of many things, and sometimes combinations of these: explaining the nature of things, instructing community members, depicting the origin of the people or the Earth. This is in fact the purpose of many Native American folkloric tales.

As with other genres of literature, this category of folklore, the myth, has several types of subcategories. There is the hero myth, usually about an ultra-virtuous human being who unselfishly saves people from evil; the deity myth, about a god or a servant of the gods who descends to save people; and the bestial

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[43] Donna Rosenberg. *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics*. 2nd ed. Lincolnwood, IL: NTC Publishing Group, 1994: xv.

[44] xvi.

myth, about a fantastic monster with features unheard of in reality. The bestial myth is, perhaps, one of the more common found in Native American folklore. Contemporary examples of bestial myths are those stories associated with such creatures known as Bigfoot, the Abominable Snowman, or the Loch Ness Monster. Though these creatures are mythical, they are not without their supporters. Some eccentrics and scientists have established *monsterology*: the study of mythical monsters. The architects of this "science"[45] are quick to note that monsterology is not monster hunting.[46] It is, they say, a search for the foundation of these tales—the origin of the oratory assigned to these monster conjured up by the mind.

These monstrologists and their counterparts in more readily accepted fields of science are, perhaps, serious about their craft. However, one can just as easily claim that these researchers have more imperialistic motives—that is, to claim dominion over vast amounts of untapped materials. American history books used in public schools across this land have long borne out the childlike, superstitious nature of the Native peoples of America. It is not just the genre of public school history. This attitude has pervaded the American psyche for decades—that is,

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This word is set off in quotation marks not to diminish its meaning nor to sarcastically undermine its legitimacy. It is done so to note that many contemporary peers of these monstrologists do question the legitimacy of such a field of research.

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W. Haden Blackman. *The Field Guide to North American Monsters: Everything You Need to Know About Encountering Over 100 Terrifying Creatures in the Wild.* New York: Three Rivers Press, 1998: xii.

until the arrival of the pseudo-sciences, which made it known to the world that evidence had been discovered to at least foundationalize certain oral accounts rendered by Native peoples. This is much the same as the Deloria quote noted previously concerning the Heyerdahl Project. Folkloric subjects are given legitimacy in the name of ownership.

Craig Womack iterates much the same point:

> ...[t]he idea of a Native consciousness interests me. The critics of Native literary nationalism have faulted Native specialists with a fundamental naïveté, claiming we argue that Native perspectives are pure, authoritative, uncontaminated by European influences. This misses the point. Native viewpoints are necessary because the "mental means of production" in regards to analyzing Indian cultures have been owned, almost exclusively, by non-Indians.[47]

One need only recall the quote, cited earlier, to see this. Native Americans, and by association their folklore, it would appear considered superstitious—unless the lore has been collected and categorized by White experts.

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[47] Craig Womack. *Red on Red*: 5.

## Uktens and Skilis and Tsunstis

*Up the airy mountain, Down the rushing glen,*
*We dare not go a hunting, For fear of little men.*
Street vender in *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*

In the previous section, it was noted that myths oftentimes focus on monsters. Dragons and goblins, trolls and gnomes, witches and wizards: these are some of the creatures imagined when thinking of myths and legends. Native myths and legends often conjure up far worse images in the minds of non-Native people who ask to hear such stories from Cherokee lore.

There are creatures and monster-like apparitions found in Cherokee lore, to be sure, but there is not present the all-intrusive evil that many imagine when hearing such tales. Likewise, there is not the ever-present allegory that listeners often assign to a story. Perhaps the assignment of evil or allegorical aspects comes from the historical views contemporary Americans hold of Natives. By this I mean the classical stereotypes of "savage" or "noble." From the "savage"

perspective comes the evil, and from the "noble" comes the allegorical.

It is true that many Native stories are allegorical in nature, but not all of them are. An example of a tale that is allegorical is one that my grandmother told of a giant serpent called the *Ukten*. She said for an Indian to even see it approaching meant certain death. She said it would devour those Indians who did not learn the ways of the *Ukten* and learn to live with it, sometimes in its shadow, but always learning and living. She told me that many wise men of the Cherokees were destroyed by this giant serpent, but those who finally learned how to survive were the children; they survived by learning the ways of the monster—the monster known as civilization. They survived in much the same way as the arrowmaker survives.

"The Arrowmaker" is a short story in N. Scott Momaday's collection *The Man Made of Words*. It tells of a Kiowa man who, along with his wife, is sitting one night in his tepee making arrows. When he notices a shadowy figure just outside, he speaks in a normal voice telling the figure "If you understand me, speak your name." Ths figure does not answer and the arrowmaker shoots. The figure is afterward revealed to be an enemy from a people of a different speech than the Kiowas. This tells much the same story in essence as the *Ukten* stories. Understanding is the key. Understanding comes through stories.

Some creatures in Cherokee lore that are of the more frightening, or awe

inspiring, nature are *Skilis* and *Kolans*, who are witches. Additionally, there are shape-shifters—people who can change from one physical form to another with relative ease. Gene Leroy Hart, the accused Girl Scout killer in the 1970s, is said by some Cherokees in Eastern Oklahoma to have been a shape-shifter. Also, there exists tales of spirits who are not necessarily ghosts or specters or poltergeists. An example of this is the Deer Lady stories—accounts of half-woman, half-deer apparitions. Deer Lady stories are popular at "49s," or young people dances. They are often told in somewhat of an urban legend format: "I have a friend who knows this guy who saw a Deer Lady." Then the story will begin. Most often, the tale is based at a dance, much like setting where it might be told, and involves a young man who sees a beautiful young woman, whom no one knows. He dances with her, and is very strongly attracted to her, and when she leaves the dance, he follows her—only to discover that when she is in her true setting she is the half-deer, half-woman creature.

In Friends of Thunder: Folktales of the Oklahoma Cherokee, the chapter called "Tales of Monsters" contains stories about Stoneclad, Flint the Terrible, and *Uktens*. However, these are not the terror inducing monsters, such as those found in the literature of the Western civilization. These are tales meant to inspire awe, entertain, or teach. An example of the teaching aspect of these tales may be found

in the story "Tseg'sgin Destroys Flint."[48] The story tells how one might outwit a much larger and more formidable foe.[49] Likewise, in James Mooney's collection of Cherokee myths, there are no fanged, undead creatures hell-bent on the total destruction of the human race—no wolfmen, no Frankensteinian chimera, no extra-terrestrial, tri-headed, acid-blooded creatures.[50] There are, however, numerous tales of awe and inspiration and teaching.

Even one of the most dreaded creatures in Cherokee lore, the *Kolan*[51] (also called Raven Mocker, Raven-copier, Raven Imitator, or even Raven Maker) is not presented in such a manner as to terrify. In most such stories, *Kolans* wait until the death of a person and take the remaining life force. *Kolans*, although they may be the harbingers of death, are not the bringers of death. They simply await death's arrival, take the remaining life force of the departed person and add it to

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An interesting note to the name Tseg'sgin is that this is one of the names often assigned to Andrew Jackson by Cherokees. Many of the Tseg'sgin stories may be an allegorical rendition concerning the man responsible for the Trail of Tears.

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Jack F. and Anna G. Kilpatrick. *Friends of Thunder: Folktales of the Oklahoma Cherokees*. Southern Methodist University Press, 1964. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995: 59 - 76.

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James Mooney. *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*. Nashville: Charles Elder – Bookseller/Publisher, 1972.

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The spelling of the word Kolan in this study is a variation of the Cherokee word for raven, which is Colanuh, or Golaneh, depending on dialectical variations. K-o-l-a-n is the most common spelling associated with the Raven Mocker.

their own. *Kolans* are not killers, but more like opportunistic "scavengers."

The terror found nowadays in Cherokee lore, and in perhaps most Native lore, is, most likely, a contamination of Western civilization. Certainly, such tales as those of the *Skilis* and *Kolans* are, to say the least, dramatic, and even suspenseful. Additionally, each individual teller of such tales may customize the story and dramatize it to suit the audience at hand. A tale told to Cherokee children may differ from the same tale being told to White adults. Whereas Cherokee children may merely gasp in awe, White adults may become terrified. Often, but not always, this is the case. The reaction of the audience is as unique as the dramatization of the teller, but this is the beauty of such tales. Like fingerprints, each individual storyteller's tales, though they may in essence be the same, are unique and adaptable to the audience. The teller "reads" the audience and adjusts the performance of the tales accordingly.

Many Cherokee storytellers have turned such adaptability to an advantage.[52] Storytellers, like libraries, have their stock of tales. The literature on the library

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As a teller of stories myself, I often get invited to organizations to tell stories, especially around Halloween. During this time, people wish to hear horrifying stories. In the spirit of the season I oblige them with selections of Cherokee lore, which some find frightening. These stories are many of the same ones I heard as a child, but was not terrified by them. However, not every story I tell is one based in Cherokee folklore. Many are traditional Western civilization ghost stories, and telling these stories in combination with one another may somewhat skew the audience's reaction in the direction of being frightened.

shelves remains a constant. One may check out a book today and read that book, then check out the same book a year later and re-read it. The story will not change. However, the living literature of the Cherokee storyteller adapts to fit a given situation. One may hear a story today, then hear the same story by the same teller as much as a year, or even as little as a few hours later, but something will be different, not necessarily better or worse, but nonetheless different. Some may think this disadvantageous since for a story to change constantly creates no consistency for the audience. Quite the contrary. How the story changes is a story within itself. It is an example of adaptability, much as the lives of elders are examples, or stories, to the younger generations. One must understand how to "read" this story. This is a living example of reading a life, not the biography of that life, but the life itself.

Most often, when people think of Cherokee myth, one of the first things that comes to mind is the Little People, or the *Tsunsti*.[53] As Lloyd Arneach has mentioned, *Tsunsti* are comparable to leprechauns of Irish folklore. The Little People are perhaps the most misunderstood beings in Cherokee myth and lore. Many traditional Cherokee people have been known to become so terrified at the mere mention of Little People that they literally shake. Others will not even speak

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[53]Pronounced jūn-stē.

of the *Tsunsti*. Inversely, there are traditional Cherokees who welcome the *Tsunsti* into their lives, leaving food items and jewelry for the Little People, and who even sing to them. These diametrically opposite understandings among the Cherokees is perhaps a reflection of the nature of the people telling the stories. By this I mean those who tell warm and friendly stories of the Little People are good natured at heart. Those who tell stories of the Little People being evil are perhaps themselves evil and have incurred the wrath of the Little People.

With such a polarly opposite reaction among the Cherokees themselves, it is no wonder that non-Cherokees are confused, and even frightened, by the *Tsunsti*. One example of why the *Tsunsti* are perhaps so misunderstood by non-Cherokees can be found in a written product of the "science" of monsterology. In A Field Guide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels, and Other Subversive Spirits,[54] there is a listing for the Cherokee Little People. It paints a rather grim picture indeed, casting the Cherokee Little People as devilish imps determined to destroy humankind. The Cherokee Little People certainly can be mischievous; any Cherokee will admit this, but the arbitrary atrocities attributed to the *Tsunsti* by this text are misleading. Many traditional Cherokees consider it fortunate to have Little People around. The Little People are not devils.

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[54] Carol K. Mack and Dinah Mack. *A Field Guide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels, and Other Subversive Spirits*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1998: 77 - 78.

To catagorize so many creatures of Native American lore as "subversive" spirits is much the same as the federal government lumping Native peoples together and calling them the same. Similarities do indeed exist in both cases, but the diversity is often ignored, which leads to a reductionist position that fosters a false superiority and an imperialist point of view. This categorization leads to marginalization and further misunderstanding, to the point of bias and hatred. These are the grim results of misunderstanding—much the same as racism among people.

Apparently, the *Tsunsti* have "cousins" all over the world. Many other countries and cultures have their "little people." This same book of monstrology compares the Cherokee Little People to the Huldrefolk, or "Hidden People," of Norway. Note the similarities. The first description is one of the Cherokee Little People:

> Ordinary humans rarely see the Yunwi Djunsti.[55] It is considered bad luck to see them and is always a portent of death. They are normally invisible, yet it is possible occasionally to see them. [They] are arbitrarily mischievous, delighting in tripping people, making household items disappear or drop and break, and wreaking general

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[55] An alternative spelling; the pronunciation remains the same.

> havoc. ...[T]hey often lure children away from their families. As in most fairy abduction situations, time spent with the Little People leaves the victim insane. Sometimes, for no apparent reason, the Little People pick on one person and make his livestock sickly, ruin his roof, and generally make his life a misery. Conjurors have to be called in to help.

Now a description of the "Hidden People" of Norway, from this same book:

> The Huldrefolk are invisible fairies. They are omnipresent, but always hidden behind a veil of invisible vapor. They very closely resemble human beings. On rare occasions, when the veil lifts, the Huldrefolk can be glimpsed. They are said to be Adam's children by Lilith, veiled in secrecy by God, thus their mean spirit. They are said to burn down houses if someone builds in their domain without asking permission, and are generally mischievous even when granting cohabitational permission to humans. Huldrefolk are known for their hidden treasure. They are the owners of all wild game, and reside in the forest with the animals. They love peace and quiet, but will take deadly revenge if disturbed. (61 - 62)

There are many similarities between the Huldrefolk and the *Tsunsti*, according to this book of monsterology. However, the authors seem to be focusing

only on the negative aspects of the Little People. A science with the name "monster" in its title is, perhaps, bound to this frightening negativity. Certainly, the thought of deadly revenge and the burning down of one's house is frightening. Yet, there is one aspect of the Little People seldom mentioned by the authors and which they need to expound on. In both the entries, that of the Cherokee *Tsunsti* and the Norwegian Huldrefolk, it is mentioned that the creatures are very much like human beings—only smaller. They live in societies, marry, have children, raise crops, and generally want to be left alone. The authors compare these little people with the "qualities" of humans, but starkly contrast the evil they are said to possess. The comparison remains. Humans are capable of far worse than the Little People. Much of the information contained in books of this sort seems to be sensationalism for the sake of capitalism—the selling of books.

As with the stories of other beings from Cherokee lore, most Cherokees do not perceive the *Tsunstis* to be evil, and probably would not view the Huldrefolk in that way either. Most often, Little People are presented as helpful beings, within a Cherokee context. Many times, they take in lost travelers or children, feed them, help them back to their families, rather than to lure them away or to abduct them. They are desirous of peace and quiet and wish to be left alone. Though they can be mischievous, mischief itself is not, by Cherokee ways, evil. Human children can be mischievous, but that does not make them evil. According to some tales,

the *Tsunstis*, when aggravated, may take personal possessions, such as keys or important papers, and hide them until they are satisfied that the person who has upset them has learned a lesson. They may untie one's shoes or somehow cause one to trip, but no evil is intended. Little People are here to teach Cherokees to be careful and respectful at all times. Certainly, there are no stories in print about the Cherokee *Tsunsti*, the Norwegian Huldrefolk, nor any other species of known "Little People" committing rape or mass murder or acts of suicidal terrorism.

Similarly, the Kilpatricks note in Friends of Thunder the misunderstanding which many non-Cherokee have toward the Little People. "The Oklahoma Cherokee do not appear to believe that anything untoward is likely to accrue from seeing, or even conversing with, the Little People."[56] Some of the stories they collected reflect the helpful nature of the *Tsunsti*, by taking in lost hunters or travelers. Similar stories are included in a later chapter. Additionally, there is a *Tsunsti* story similar to a Huldrefolk tale wherein the Cherokee Little People are said to have hidden treasure.[57]

The Little People are also said to be wonderful artisans: skilled craftspeople, gifted artists or potters, and fine musicians. Some of the stories

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[56] Kilpatricks, *Friends of Thunder*: 79.

[57] See Chapter Four of this study, the sections on Nancy Pritchett and Elsie Vann.

detailed in the Kilpatricks' book also tell of the creative aspect of the *Tsunsti.* Many of the stories I heard as a young boy are similar. For example, the *Tsunsti* are beautiful singers. Many times, when one is alone in the woods, what may at first seem to be only the wind whistling through the trees may indeed be the *Tsunsti* singing or playing their instruments.

An example of the *Tsunsti's* singing skills was a regular occurrence in the Garner Buckhorn household of Pumpkin Hollow. Just off the Illinois River near Tahlequah, Oklahoma, each Sunday the family gathered for a meal and music. While the meal was being prepared, the musicians occupied the living room with an old, somewhat out-of-tune piano, their guitars and a small drum kit at the ready. Everyone would sing. People canoeing the river would hear the music and often drop in, and they were welcomed to pull up a chair for a plate of food and some fine music. However, there was always one small bench that no one was ever allowed to sit upon, nor even place their feet upon. This bench was reserved for the *Tsunsti* musicians that would come and join in. Food was also saved for them—not the scraps after everyone else had eaten, but plates served as if they were invited guests.

The intimate knowledge I have of these events does not come from an interview, but rather from personal experience. Garner Buckhorn was my great-uncle—my mother's uncle. I participated in this weekly event many times before

Garner's death. Both my younger brother and I are musicians; we both played that old piano. After Garner's death, my brother obtained the piano, which he still has today. There are markings carved into its wood as if someone had taken a sharp knife and etched them. They appear to be an archaic form of the Cherokee syllabary along with some pictographs. Garner would always say that it was a list of the *Tsunsti's* most beloved songs. Among the favorites, "Amazing Grace."

The *Skilis*, however, are a bit different. *Skili* traditionally means a witch. This type of Cherokee witch should not be confused with the witches of Western tradition, that is, the decrepit hag, the bride of Satan, the scourge of Hansel and Gretel, the riding-her-broomstick-about-the-countryside or stirring-a-potion-in-a-bubbling-cauldron type of witch. Alan Kilpatrick, son of Jack and Anna, notes a similar descriptive contrast in The Night has a Naked Soul: Witchcraft and Sorcery Among the Western Cherokee.[58] In the chapter "The Cherokee Witchcraft-Sorcery Complex," Kilpatrick notes the "... Christianized view of the witch as a woeful creature who sells his or her soul to do Satan's bidding." (3) He describes this concept as one "... wholly alien to the Cherokee." (3) Continuing the contrast, Kilpatrick juxtaposes the Christianized and Cherokee concepts of witches by noting several distinct differences. Cherokee witches can be either male or female,

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[58] Alan Kilpatrick. *The Night Has A Naked Soul: Witchcraft and Sorcery Among the Western Cherokee*. New York: Syracuse University Press, 1997: 3 - 5.

young or old; whereas, the Christianized concept of witches holds that they are traditionally old women—"hags." Cherokee witches may, with relative ease, assume any shape in an attempt to disguise themselves, for they are fearful of being publically exposed. They are solitary creatures, never banding together in "covens," as witches of a Christian paradigm are purported to do.

Alan Kilpatrick also notes that the term *Skili* has various meanings. It is known to mean "witch" in addition to "owls," of various types. (8 - 9) *Skili* stories of a more traditional witch variety hold that the *Skilis* are shape-shifters and often transform between their human shape and that of a screech owl, hence the use of the term, traditionally, to mean both "witch" and "owl." An additional form that some *Skili* witches have been known to take is that of a dog or a wolf. A specific breed or type of dog is not mentioned, but they are often described as dirty-looking, perhaps mangy, as a "throw-away" dog might look. Some Cherokees have been known to have dogs "doctored" (that is, conjured by a Cherokee medicine person) to recognize *Skilis*, and use these conjured or doctored dogs to stand watch over their homes.

An interesting side note to the *Skili* is that association of the name exclusively to witches seems to be changing. While doing the research for this study, I came across several Cherokees who used the name *Skili* to refer to "boogers." In traditional Cherokee lore, the *Skili* is indeed a witch, but in more

contemporary renditions of Cherokee tales, some tellers use *Skili* and "booger" almost interchangeably. This is not always the case. Some elders still use *Skili* to mean a witch, but there are others who are known to use it for "booger." Many younger Cherokees use *Skili* almost exclusively to mean "booger." A "booger" is a ghostly figure, a spirit of sorts. It can be nearly any form: animal, human, or other-worldly. This use of "booger" should not be construed to have the same meaning as Western civilization's image of the "Boogy-man," or the Devil.

This multiplicity of meanings may come from the belief that Cherokee witches have been known to keep a variety of pets. Alan Kilpatrick notes that even lizards are known to be kept by some witches. (4) Perhaps this association with various animals is why some Cherokees are now using *Skili* to mean a "booger." Boogers, in a Cherokee context, are more what Western civilization might call a ghost or specter—not the Casperesque humanoid semi-transparent type of ghostly figure, but more of an inexplicable anomaly, often times in an animal form. There are some tales of *Skilis* that are headless specters of some sort; in fact, my mother tells one such story, which is included in Chapter Four of this study.

Often, with stories of *Skilis*, (that is, the booger definition of the term) there is usually a violent death associated with the specter. This death precedes the sightings of the *Skilis*. In other words, when someone is violently murdered, and

sometime after the murder, the visions of *Skilis*, or the "boogers," begin to occur. In doing the field research for this study, I encountered two such tales—the one told by my mother, and a similar story told by Elsie Vann. Both tales involved a headless animal: one a hog, and the other a dog. Why they were animals and not a human figure (as the murders were of humans), the storytellers either did not know or would not speak of it.

One thing to be noted here is that in all of the *Skili* stories researched for this study, the specter did not appear to be "evil" in the sense that it was trying to kill anyone or even avenge the murder. Though they were indeed frightening, they were not deliberately malicious. I got the sense, as these stories were told to me, that these specters were perhaps trying to scare the person away from the place where evil had happened. *Skilis* apparently stay fairly close to one location, and their presence is perhaps a warning that something happened in this place and it is to be avoided. This is not told by any of the storytellers, but in the manner in which such stories are rendered one might understand this to be the case. One may surmise this by recalling how many of the Little People stories are told. Though the *Tsunsti* can be helpful, people can easily get into trouble by becoming mesmerized by them, since they do wish to be left alone. A similar warning is found in Friends of Thunder: "But although they are benign, there is a danger of becoming fascinated by them [Little People] and following them off to

unpredictable adventures." (79)

Another type of witch in Cherokee lore is the *Kolan*, or "Raven Mocker," as they are more commonly known. The Raven Mockers are often described as balls of light that appear to float about just above the ground. Modern science does recognize such a phenomenon but rather dismisses it as supernatural, calling it "ground" or "ball lightning." To Cherokees, these are *Kolans*, who are vampiric creatures. Not known to suck the blood, as do vampires of Western lore, *Kolans* feed upon the life force of human beings. However, they are comparable to the *nosferatu* of Romanian folklore in that they do add to their lives by taking the remaining life force of those near death. As mentioned previously in this section, *Kolans* await the death or near death of a person in order to feed upon the remaining life force in the dying person's body.

*Kolans* are among the more frightening of creatures in Cherokee folklore. Some Cherokees, in describing the sounds *Kolans* make while traveling, tell that there is nothing else like it in the world. The sound of a *Kolan* coming can scare a man to death. One Cherokee storyteller describes the sound of a *Kolan* traveling as "what Hell might sound like."[59] Another notes that it sounds like three or four

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[59] Elsie Vann. Personal interview. 11 March 2000.

steam train whistles, all out of tune with each other.[60]

The vampiric nature of *Kolans* certainly makes for interesting stories, and not exclusively from Cherokees. Dr. Carl Farinelli, professor of English at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, tells a story of an encounter not long after he first moved to Tahlequah in the early 1970s:

> We had just moved into a small two-bedroom house near the river. It had a porch, which I loved to sit on during the early evening hours and listen to the sounds of the country. Early one evening, just after it got good and dark, I noticed in the distance through the woods a bluish hued light. I know it was not car headlights because the road was in the opposite direction. I thought it might be someone out hunting on my property, so I grabbed my gun and flashlight and went to investigate. When I got to the area where I last saw the light, I could not see it anymore. But I did hear a strange sound, like none I've ever heard before or since. And there was a rancid smell—something like the rotting flesh of a dead animal. I returned to the house and went to bed. For three more nights in a row I saw

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Archie Stayathome. Personal interview. 7 February 2000.
More descriptive accounts of Kolans by these tellers, Elsie Vann, Nancy Pritchett, Archie Stayathome, and Jennie-May Smith are contained in Chapter Four of this study.

> that same light. On that last night, instead of trying to find it after it was already on the move, I positioned myself near where I had seen it on the previous nights and waited for it. Sure enough, about the same time as before the light appeared. It appeared to be about the size of a basketball—an off-white center of light with a blue tint around the edges, floating just about two feet above the ground. I watched as it circled a small area near the center of a small clearing in some trees. There I watched it lower itself to the ground and disappear into the dirt.[61]

Dr. Farinelli concludes his story by telling that he reported all of these strange goings-on to the sheriff the next day, and the sheriff wasted no time in asking Dr. Farinelli's permission to search the area for the body of a young girl who had been missing for over a year. The badly decomposed body of the missing girl was found in the precise spot where Dr. Farinelli had watched the ball of light enter the earth. He admits that at the time he had no idea of what he had witnessed. After thirty years of living in Cherokee country in northeastern Oklahoma, Dr. Farinelli now knows what he saw that night was a *Kolan*.

This account of an encounter varies somewhat with accounts told to other

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[61] Dr. Carl Farinelli. Personal Interview. 20 January 1998.

researchers. Alan Kilpatrick notes in The Night has a Naked Soul that Raven Mockers (*Kolans*) are of either gender, and often make a sound like that of a raven, hence the name Raven Mockers. (9 - 10) However, in all the stories told to me during this research, the *Kolans* were always thought to be female and made a sound nothing similar to that of a raven—at least not as described by the tellers of the tales. In Kilpatrick's account, the *Kolans* torment sick or dying people, thus hastening death. In stories told me, this was never the case. *Kolans* would wait patiently around until death came naturally. Only then would they feed upon the remaining life force of the departed. This is not to say that Kilpatrick's research is erroneous, but rather that different interpretations of encounters with such folkloric creatures exist.

## Six of One—Half-dozen of Another

*"The test of a first-rate intelligence*
*is the ability to hold two opposing ideas*
*in mind at the same time and*
*still retain the ability to function."*
F. Scott Fitzgerald

Thus far, the terms *lore* and *literature* have been used interchangeably within this study, and will continue as such. However, some scholars in this field distinguish greatly between the two: primarily, lore is oral, and literature is written—two very antithetical mediums. The lay definitions found in dictionaries also thus distinguish between the two. This study makes no claim that scholars and dictionaries are wrong in separating the two, but rather takes the position that lore and literature are one and the same, at least as seen from certain points of view.

Some may ask how can the stories of an oral culture be considered

literature until they are written down. It is this one-dimensional form of thinking that subjugates oral tales to the realm of the genres previously noted. Many researchers hold that for a source to be valid, it must be in writing. If it is not in writing, often it is categorized as unreliable or even false.

Oral tales—no matter into what category they may fit—are literature for the ear—i.e., *ear-literature*. Stories that are written down are *eye-literature*. Is this a novel idea? No. Though it is not a common theory, there are some who hold that the oral tales of one culture are just as much literature as are the written stories of another. John A. Burrison, a folklorist at the University of Georgia, uses the terms *ear literature* and *eye literature* freely in his book titled Storytellers: Folktales and Legends from the South. He further comments on the durability of oral tales:

> When a folk narrative is recorded and then reduced to writing, the resulting text represents a mere shadow of the actual telling. Oral tales are not designed to be read; that some hold up and can be enjoyed under visual scrutiny is thus remarkable, suggesting that oral narrators possess verbal skills akin to those of creative writers. Unlike the static medium of the written page, however, oral storytelling is a dramatic and dynamic performance mode hinging on

face-to-face interaction with a live performance.[62]

Yet, there are experts who hold fast to the notion that literature *must* be written to be valid. For example, I. J. Gelb has written in A Study of Writing, that "... as language distinguishes man from animal, so writing distinguishes civilized man from barbarian."[63] From Gelb's words one may conclude that he sees the oral tales as "less than," and until an oral story is written down it will be marginalized.

Recalling the Clements quote from the Introduction wherein he notes that Native orality has "two marks" against it, Clements expands upon the second mark by noting that "'Texts' continue to be central to the study of Western Literature. In fact, some schools of criticism have emerged from the idea that text is *all* that one effectively needs. Simply put, for the study of literature, the text is the thing."[64]

It is, perhaps, people who subscribe to this school of thought who collect, categorize, and write down oral tales in an effort to legitimize them to the populace. Oftentimes, the literatures collected in this manner are mislabeled and

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John A. Burrison, ed. *Storytellers*: 19 - 20.

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I. J. Gelb. *A Study of Writing*. University of Chicago Press, 1952. 221 - 22.

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William M. Clements. *Native American Verbal Art: Texts and Contexts*. Tucson: Arizona UP, 1996: 6.

arbitrarily thrown into the wrong category. This is what David Bartholomae refers to as [literary] "imperialism." He suggests in his essay "Producing Adult Readers: 1930 - 50" that " ... defining others in terms of what they lack...", in this case a written form of a story, is imperialism.[65]

Such a narrow understanding of what literature is and is not may be a side effect of the strict academic definition of literacy—reading and writing:

> Being 'literate' has always referred to having a mastery over the process by means of which culturally significant information is coded. The criterion of significance has varied historically with changes in the kind of information from which power and authority could be derived.[66]

A mastery over the process may be provided by education. Being able to take something from the lessons being taught and to apply it to daily life in order to better oneself and the community of which one is a part is the essence of learning, and this does not always come from a process. True, many people learn a great

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David Bartholomae. "Producing Adult Readers: 1930 - 50." *The Right to Literacy*. Eds. Andrea Lunsford, Helene Moglen, and James Slevin. New York: The Modern Language Association, 1990. 16.

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Suzanne de Castell and Allan Luke. "Defining 'Literacy' in North American Schools: Social and Historical Conditions and Consequences." *Perspectives on Literacy*. Eds. Eugene R. Kintgen, Barry M. Kroll, and Mike Rose. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1988: 159.

many things through the educational process, yet some receive the finest education money can buy but learn nothing. This concept is explained well by Doris Lessing in The Golden Notebook:

> Remember that for all the books we have in print, are as many that have never reached print, have never been written down—even now, in this age of compulsive reverence for the written word, history, even social ethic are taught by means of stories, and the people who have been conditioned into thinking only in terms of what is written—and unfortunately nearly all the products of our educational system can do no more than this—are missing what is before their eyes. For instance, the real history of Africa is still in the custody of black storytellers and wise men, black historians, medicine men; it is a verbal history, still kept safe from the white man and his predations. Everywhere, if you keep your mind open, you will find the truth in words *not* written down. So never let the printed page be your master.[67]

On a similar note, C. H. Knoblauch, in an essay entitled "Literacy and the Politics of Education," refers to the "... timeless cultural values inscribed in the

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[67] Doris Lessing. *The Golden Notebook*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1962. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 1994: XXV.

verbal memory ... " of a people.[68] Thus giving credence and validity to orality. Knoblauch continues: "language is not a mere tool in this view but is, rather, a repository of cultural values and to that extent a source of social cohesion." (77) Knoblauch's phrasing is very descriptive of folklore.

Rhetorician Kathleen Welch seems to stray a bit from a strict academic definition of literacy in Electric Rhetoric when she notes: "Any current definition of literacy must account for changes in *mentalité* ...."[69] Primarily, what Welch maintains is that with all of the changes being brought about by the new electronic medium, the definition of literacy must be flexible, must be willing to accept forms of communication other than that which is written on a page. This is an idea which seems to be gaining acceptance. With the obtrusive nature of the Twenty-first Century's electronic technology, one cannot help but accept "electric rhetoric." However, it might all be a case of "the more things change the more they remain the same"—or, perhaps, in this way of phrasing it, a reversion to oralism. The "cutting-edge" of technology today is voice recognition. "Type-by-talking" word processing programs for computers, voice recognition cars, talking

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C. H. Knoblauch. "Literacy and the Politics of Education." *The Right to Literacy*. Eds. Andrea Lunsford, Helene Moglen, and James Slevin. New York: The Modern Language Association, 1990. 77.

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Kathleen E. Welch. *Electric Rhetoric: Classic Rhetoric, Oralism, and a New Literacy*. Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1999: 8.

personal electronic assistants: electric rhetoric is fastly bringing validity to oralism where it did not exist before, though it is somewhat different from oral cultures. Or is it?

Welch gives a succinct, but encompassing, definition of literacy in the modern age: "...literacy [might be defined] as an activity of mind/bodies/ intersubjectivities that are conditioned within specific cultures/ideologies, all of which have oral/aural features of discourse ...." (8)

To those quick to dismiss lore as not being literature—literature being a child of literacy—one might ask is not a storytelling event the very embodiment of the Welch definition of literacy? An activity of minds—the tellers and the audience engaging in exchange. An activity of bodies—the tellers and the audience engaging in exchange. An activity of intersubjectivities—the tellers and the audience engaging in exchange.

Welch states that "[i]n our time there is no speaking without writing." (8) That much is true. It is also true that before our time there was no writing without speaking. Provincialism in the age of electric rhetoric dictates oralism's inclusion in any definition of literacy, and therefore lore's inclusion in literature.

However, those who still insist that "the text is the thing," should take note of contemporary Cherokee, and other Native, authors working in the field of lore and literature. For example, Alan Kilpatrick, son of Jack and Anna Kilpatrick, has

continued his parents' groundbreaking work in the field of Cherokee folk tales and legends. Alan Kilpatrick is a renowned Cherokee scholar and university professor, trained in the ways of academia, educated in the ways of the Cherokees. In his book, The Night Has a Naked Soul, he expands upon his parents' work by examining Cherokee witchcraft and the orality of it (chants and spells) in a very scholarly manner. He does not treat it as third worldly black magic, rather as a legitimate field of study.

Additionally, there are collections of stories published by Cherokees who have respectfully gathered the tales of authentic Cherokee storytellers into book form.

# Chapter Two

## The Significance and Roles of Stories and Tellers

*"You don't have anything*
*if you don't have the stories."*
Leslie Marmon Silko, *Ceremony*

### Stories

John Burrison's quote from Storytellers, cited in the introduction of this study, bears repeating here because of its impact on the pan-humanism concept being promoted. "The narrative impulse—the need to tell of or listen to experience and imagination structured into plot—is one of the traits that makes us human." (1) Indeed, we are all human, and though there may be many differences between races and cultures, or for that matter within any single race or culture, we all narrate, whether by oral, visual, or written means, the stories of our lives. The nonmonetary value of stories may be seen in the eyes of children.

So many different cultures tell stories to their children. One may safely say

*all* cultures, and it is stories that help children develop and mature into, hopefully, well-balanced adults. "Storytelling is a fundamental aspect of culture, and stories are used in a number of ways and for a multitude of purposes."[70] Raising children is one of these purposes. The narratives told by parents to their children serve many purposes: bonding—spending time together in a shared or cultural activity, discipline—giving examples of what might happen to one who disobeys authority, modeling—displaying desired behavior for when the child becomes an adult. The value of stories here cannot be measured in a commercial mind set of dollars and cents. It is best seen in a different way: scholars and sense.

An example of the bonding aspect of stories is found in Robert J. Conley's Mountain Windsong. In the novel, LeRoy, the narrator, tells of the time when he first heard of the Mountain Windsong. LeRoy's grandfather, who calls LeRoy "*Chooj*" (Cherokee slang for boy), takes LeRoy for a walk. "There was no reason—no practical reason, I mean. We weren't gathering grapes or berries or wild onions. We weren't going hunting," LeRoy says in the opening paragraphs of Chapter One.[71] Though there may not be a practical reason for the walk, there is

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Greg Sarris. *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts.* Berkely: University of California Press, 1993: 4.

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Robert J. Conley. *Mountain Windsong: A Novel of the Trail of Tears.* Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992: 5.

certainly a cultural reason—that of bonding. The grandfather and the grandson spend time together, what contemporary society likes to call "quality time." In moments of bonding such as this, the story is not, in itself, the most important part of the equation. Rather, it is the telling. In situations such as this, conceivably, any story can be told, whether it be a trickster tale or a narrative about the legendary feats of a heroic figure.

In Mountain Windsong, the narrative that Grandpa tells LeRoy—the story within the story—is the primary focus of the novel. Conley frames the account of Oconeechee and Whippoorwill within the lazy afternoon spent with the two narrators. However, the outside story, that of Grandpa and LeRoy, can easily be overlooked because of the power of the inner narrative. Yet it is this outside story that vividly portrays the bonding aspects of storytelling and is displayed in Grandpa and LeRoy. The bonding is poignantly depicted in the Epilogue:

> Grandpa leaned back against the tree. I could tell that the story was over, and even though it had a happy ending, I was kind of sad. ... I sat and stared at Grandpa. What he had just said made me realize for the first time for real that one day Grandpa would die. Grandma, too. I didn't want to grow up then. The breeze picked up a little more, and the leaves above began to rustle. Then the breeze became a wind, and I stood up and went to the big tree Grandpa was leaning

> back against. I stood by Grandpa's shoulder and put my hands up high on the tree trunk and looked up into its branches and listened, and the wind pick up some more, and then I heard that sound again. "Grandpa," I said, suddenly excited. "Grandpa, I can hear them. They're singing." (217 - 218)

A disciplinary purpose may be found in many trickster tales. Though these may not be scoldings as understood by Western civilization, the message is certainly clear to the children of Native parents. Unacceptable behavior is often depicted through the actions and attitudes of the trickster. Many times, when ending such a tale, the parent will tell the child not to be like the trickster, lest the same fate befall the child. Many Native cultures will have formulaic endings to such tales that go something like this: "Now you don't want to be like ... " and then the name of the trickster figure of that respective tribe will be inserted. Many such tales are of times when the trickster acted foolishly, or perhaps got greedy or lustful of the possessions of others. Perhaps pride may be the trickster's downfall. There are so many tales such as this that to list them all would be impossible, but each one plays a vital role in the rearing of the children of that particular culture.

An example of the disciplining of undesirable behavior can be found in the

Iroquois account of "Why the Owl Has Big Eyes."[72] This account holds that Raweno, the Everything-Maker—the Iroquois equivalent of the Christians' God—is busy forming the animals. He is working on Rabbit when Owl, who is at the time yet unformed, grows impatient and begins to interfere with Raweno's work. "I want this, and I want that," Owl cries. Raweno scolds him, but to no avail. Owl continues to interrupt until Raweno's nerves are pushed beyond their limits. He grabs Owl and pushes down on his head, then shakes Owl until his eyes grow large with fright. Raweno condemns Owl to sleep by day and stay awake all night so he may no longer interfere with Raweno's work, which happens during the day. The unacceptable behaviors of impatience, greediness, and interference are demonstrated and the results of these are anthropomorphically contained within this narrative. This account also contains some explanations as to why some animals are the way they are, though it is not always the case with such tales.

Not always, however, is the traditional trickster figure of the particular tribe the one engaged in undesirable behavior. Many tales of this kind are anthropomorphic, in which animals are characters. Such stories may also have attached, along with the allegory of discipline, an explanation as to why an animal is the way it is. An example of this is noted a bit later in this segment.

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Richard Erdoes and Alfonson Ortiz, eds. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984: 398 - 399.

The inverse of undesirable behavior tales are also many times the subject of Native storytellers. An example of a story recounting desirable behavior is found in the collections of James Mooney.[73] In a brief narrative called "Incidents of Personal Heroism," the teller recalls a time during the Cherokee-English War of 1760 when a small band of warriors became trapped in an abandoned cabin. Surrounded by Whites who had pursued them all night, the Cherokee warriors face a certain death when the Whites set the cabin afire. Either by bullet or blaze, they seem sure to die, but one warrior devises a plan. One warrior proposes to the others that he will run out into the hail of gunfire that will surely come, and as the Whites reload their spent muzzle-loaders. the remaining warriors escape. The volunteer runs from the cabin in a zig-zag fashion, assuring that every gun is fired in his direction. Once every gun is spent, and just before the burning cabin consumes them, the remaining warriors flee into the forest.

The desirable behavior of selflessness modeled in this account is an extreme example. It is a highly esteemed Cherokee custom for one to give rather than to receive. It is felt that the giving of one's most precious possession is an honor and among the most desirous behavior.[74] The sacrificing of one's own life

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James Mooney. *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees.* Nashville: Charles Elder – Bookseller/Publisher. 1972: 394 - 395.

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This is by no means exclusively Cherokee. or for that matter Native American. Many

in order to save companions is the ultimate example of giving. There are many other example stories wherein the things given are less than life; however, the message is the same.

Perhaps the example most relevant to this study's argument is the giving away of knowledge by way of storytelling. The members of many tribes, not just Cherokees, pass on their accumulated knowledge and wisdom freely via stories. They are educators, just as any public school teacher, any college professor, any esteemed researcher. These tribal educators feel compelled to pass on their knowledge, not solely for financial gain, but for the benefit of coming generations. Knowledge and wisdom are the most precious of possessions, true—what Western societies call "intellectual property" and will divulge for profit. Yet, in the midst of all this knowledge for sale, Native cultures still tell stories.

If, as has thus far been promoted by this study's argument, storytelling is a common thread of all humanity, how is it that two vastly different paradigms, those of Western and Native societies, have developed? Perhaps these paradigms are the learned behaviors. Certainly, humans are not born believing that everything has a price. However, even babies react to stories.

Some may say that storytelling is a learned behavior, learned by the

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philosophies hold to this, at least in theory.

example one's parents demonstrated when relating narratives for one of the reasons previously noted, or for some other reason important to the individual's parents. Many who dismiss the inherited concept of storytelling seemingly contradict themselves when they note that storytelling is one of the few things that all of humankind, no matter what culture, has in common. It stands to reason then, that if storytelling were a "learned" behavior, not everyone would learn it, or it would be learned in so many different ways that it could not be seen as a common element of humanity.

Perhaps storytelling is a learned behavior, something along the lines of "monkey see—monkey do." The possibility exists. However, there are many who hold that storytelling is not necessarily a learned behavior but rather an inherited one. Granted, many of the subtleties of the art of storytelling *must* be learned: timing, gauging audience reaction, building suspense, comic relief, etc. And as with any skill these must be practiced and honed to perfection. As for the desire, it seems to be something that one is born with, and passed from one generation to the next, not by way of modeling, for it is "in the blood," so to speak. Some scholars refer to it as "a natural longing."[75] Natural is inherited, and if it is inherited, this could be the explanation as to why every culture and race of humanity has

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[75] Catherine Peck, Ed. *A Treasury of North American Folktales*. New York: The Philip Lief Group, Inc. 1998: xix.

storytelling in some basic, common form.[76] With this study I hope to advance further the most basic of claims that every life has a story to tell, and tells it to someone, thus storytelling, that is the story of a life, is in the blood of all. This is a story that cannot be sold, but must be told. All one must do to "read" it is know how.

With eyes closed, one can envision story time at a pre-school almost anywhere in the world. Gathered around the teachers are children of many different cultures, all eager to hear the next tale. As the teachers begins, the children become spellbound by the account unfolding before them. Eager for more, they urge their teachers ever onward to the conclusion of the mental drama. As the teachers read it from a book, it is eye literature, but for the children listening it is ear literature. (For those "reading" the story of a life, it may be either mind or spirit literature.) As far back in history as one chooses to look, scenes such as this may be found. Those of us who remember story time from our childhoods, even though we are now adults, still long for the art of a good story. Though nowadays our medium is no longer only the teacher with a book of

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[76] The science of genetics may disavow the inherited storytelling ability. Certainly a gene recognized and known at the "storytelling" gene does not exist. Science deals in the cold, hard facts of matters and often fails to consider the "magic" of things. It tries to explain away the magic. Being human is not an experiment. It is an experience. There are possibly some things that humans are simply not meant to understand, but rather are expected to accept.

fairytales, but rather more likely the movie theater, one's desire for the story is still there, and we do not have to spend money to get the story—merely time.

In many cultures, and not only Native American ones, story time is not only for family bonding, but also a time for the important lessons future generations must learn in order to continue the line. In Chapter One of this study, the aspect of allegory in Native American stories is addressed. As noted therein, not all Native American stories are always allegorical in nature. Yet many are. It is these allegorical stories wherein the lessons of life for future generations reside. Stories such as these contain vital information about social order and how people must behave in society. Models of how to act, and just as importantly how not to act, can be found within many trickster tales. What to do in certain situations may be found in tales of legendary hero figures. Explanations of how things came to be or why things are the way they are can also be located in many Native American tales. These are etiotic, or causation, tales.

Allegorical stories instilling ethic, such as work ethic, may also be found in many Native cultures. An example of such tales from the Cherokees can be found in the Kilpatricks' book, Friends of Thunder. The story, "The Rabbit and the Image" (35), tells of the Cherokee Trickster, Rabbit, and his laziness. While other animals are setting about to dig a water well, Rabbit refuses to share in the work, claiming that he can get all the water he needs from the morning dew. At night,

however, while the others sleep, Rabbit sneaks to the well and drinks his fill. The others notice that water is missing from their well and suspect Rabbit, so they set a trap for him. They construct an image and coat it with a sticky substance. They then place the image near the well so that Rabbit will see it when he sneaks to the well the next night. That is indeed what happens, and Rabbit fights the image and gets stuck fast to it. The others capture him and threaten to punish him, but Rabbit is tricky. He talks the others into throwing him into the briar patch, wherein Rabbit is able to escape.

This story is reminiscent of "The Tar Baby," an Uncle Remus tale made popular by Joel Chandler Harris. The Harris version of this tale was originally published in 1904; however, Cherokee versions of this tale predate the publication of the Harris story. It is generally assumed by noted Native American scholars, such as Dr. Geary Hobson, that Harris came by such Cherokee stories from local Black people in his native Georgia, who in turn had gotten them from the Cherokees.

The allegory attached to this story may be understood to mean equal work reaps equal reward. If one does not share in the labor, one cannot share in the fruits of the labor. Another allegory that may be deciphered is that a life of deceit will lead to a life of banishment. It is also possible that other allegories, depending upon which version one hears, may be extracted from this tale. This example, and

the genre of tales it represents, are not only entertaining but very educational.

Also found in the Kilpatricks' book is an example of the legendary hero figure. These heroes are not necessarily big and strong mortals with superhuman powers. Although there are such stories as this in Cherokee lore, most often the hero's only real power is that of extraordinary wit. For example, in Friends of Thunder (110), the legendary Tseg'sgin' utilizes his wits to win a wife. What aspect of heroism could there be in the winning of a wife? When the potential mate is a melancholy lady, one who has not laughed in ages, the wit of the hero must be sharp to conquer her despondency. Tseg'sgin' proves himself worthy; with his intellect he devises a plan for foolishness that causes the laughless beauty to chuckle at his antics. This is one time when acting the fool is the appropriate behavior, and Tseg'sgin' knows this. He uses his tailor-made mixture of insight and idiocy to conquer his bride's melancholy.

The moral one might take from such a story is that the battle does not always go to the strongest, and also that the race is not always won by the fastest. Additionally, one might infer that sometimes it is better to put the feelings of others before one's own. Setting aside pride and acting the fool for the benefit of another, Tseg'sgin' is likewise rewarded. Critics may counter by saying that he would not have done such a thing had not the prize been the beautiful woman's hand in marriage, but as the story is told, this aspect of selfishness is not present,

certainly not within this Cherokee tale.

A comparable story is the Biblical account of David and Goliath. Goliath, the giant, had defeated all others warriors who had previously fought him. Where these combatants had tried to match Goliath weapon for weapon and move for move, David fought primarily with his wits. The stones and the sling certainly helped, but one easily sees the strategy in David's less-than-bellicose approach to battling Goliath. In a battle of wits, it helps when one's opponent is unarmed.

Many Native American trickster tales have similar plot lines wherein the trickster steps out of his traditional role as the foolish agent of change and takes on more of a hero persona. One in particular that comes to mind can be found in various tribes' lore. The first account I heard of this story was a Kiowa rendition called "Sandae Tricks the Cowboy." Sandae[77] is the name of the Kiowa trickster figure. In this story there is a cowboy dressed in what can only be described as Hollywood attire: large white hat, sequined shirt, leather vest, fine leather and silver gun belt with ivory-handled pistols, fuzzy chaps, hand-tooled boots, with bright silvery spurs. He rides a valiant steed. The cowboy is looking for Sandae, because he has heard that Sandae is the trickiest of the tricksters, and he, the cowboy, is out to prove that Sandae cannot trick him. Before long, Sandae has the

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Pronounced sān - dā.

cowboy tricked out of not only his horse but all of his fine Hollywood cowboy clothing as well, and rides off leaving the cowboy standing out in the middle of nowhere with only his underwear left. There are similar versions of this Kiowa tale found in other tribal lore wherein the trickster figure is either Coyote or Rabbit or other animal.

Such stories are primarily for entertainment, perhaps a way to make children laugh at the hubris of such people as the cowboy, but a small bit of a moral, with a heroic twist, may be found within. No matter how strong or clever one thinks himself or herself to be, there is always someone stronger or more clever, and in this tale the more clever just happens to be the wily trickster. In essence, this is a joke with a bit of allegory.

Other types of stories are explanation tales, telling of why things are the way they are or how something came to be. Stories such as these are widespread in Native American lore. Such stories, though not necessarily the most educational, are certainly entertaining. Almost always they also will have a moral or allegory attached—often, but not always.

In Friends of Thunder, (16) there is a version of one of many accounts of why the opossum's tail is bare. This particular version is told by a person identified as Yan'sa, who was 81 years old at the time of the Kilpatricks' work.

He spoke almost no English.[78] This version begins as do many similar tales of opossum. Opossum has a tail full of long, beautiful, flowing hair. He is so proud of it, perhaps too proud. He dances about as he combs and brushes the hair on his tail, singing all the while as to the beauty of it. The other animals tire of Opossum's touting of his tail, so they hire Cricket to cut all the hair off his tail, which Cricket does, and now Opossum's tail is bare because of his hubris. This story is not only entertaining and somewhat comical, but there is also an educational element to be found, the moral being, perhaps, of pride going before the fall. Opossum's extreme pride of his beautiful tail hair brought about his current condition.

Sometimes stories can be found in a somewhat conjoined form. In other words, an etiotic tale may have elements of a trickster tale wherein the trickster figure, who traditionally is an agent of change, brings about some manner of change, usually positive for humans and animals, but somehow pays for it. Such tales are not exclusive to Native American cultures, as with many of the aforementioned narratives.

An example of a narrative combining several elements—those of trickster tales, heroic legends, and explanation narratives—can be found in Catherine

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Biographical information contained within the "Contributors" section of the book: page xviii.

Peck's A Treasury of North American Folktales [79] This account of how "Opposum Steals Fire" comes from Mexico. It is found in the traditional lore of the Mixe, Nahucand, and Tepehua tribes. In this story, there is an old woman who has gathered all the fire in the world for herself. The animals are cold, but none dare to face the old woman, because she is ferocious. Opossum finally steps forward and declares that he knows of a way to get fire from the old woman, so he volunteers to do so. He makes his way to her house where she hordes all the fire in the world. He convinces her that he is harmless and talks the old woman into letting him warm himself. In this narrative, Opossum has the same tail full of long, beautiful hair as does the character in the previous account. When Opossum gets close to the fire, he "accidentally" lets his tail drop into the flames, thus setting his tail hair afire. The old woman is startled as Opossum runs from her house screaming with his tail ablaze. However, this is all part of his plan. He runs to his animal friends and shares the fire with them. Opossum is the hero, but his beautiful tail hair is gone forever. Notice the similarities between this story and the one of the Cherokee warriors noted earlier in this segment.

This story serves multiple purposes. First, it is entertaining. The style of anthropomorphism utilized is similar to many of the tales collected by the Grimm

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Catherine Peck, Ed. *A Treasury of North American Folktales.* New York: Book of the Month Club. The Philip Lief Group, Inc. 1998: 10 - 11.

brothers and also found in Native American tales; it also contains many anthropomorphic aspects found in contemporary cartoons. It is almost mesmerizing in its use of animals as human-like characters. Secondly, as with the story of the opossum and the cricket, it explains why the opossum's tail is bare. This particular tale also serves notice as to how fire came to be distributed. This narrative also characterizes the legendary, self-sacrificing hero figure in the lowly little opossum, in much the same manner as the Tseg'sgin' account noted earlier.

It is interesting to note the similarities between this Mexican narrative of "how and why" to the Greek myth of Prometheus, in which Prometheus, a Titan, defies the gods by stealing fire from them and giving it to humans, whom he has created from clay. Prometheus has no tail of beautiful hair to burn away, but is instead bound to a rock by a chain, his punishment from the gods whom he defies. In the "Aeschylean version [of] *Prometheus Bound*, Zeus has Prometheus chained to a rock on Mount Caucasus, where an eagle ate away at his liver, starting afresh each day after the liver had grown back during the night."[80]

This comparison lends credence to the common thread postulation. Although these accounts, the Cherokee warriors, the Mexican Opossum and Prometheus, come from different times and different cultures, they are very

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[80] "Prometheus." *Bulfinch's Mythology*, by Thomas Bulfinch. New York: The Modern Library, 1998.

similar. Some critics might argue that the Mexican Opossum story and all those like it sprang from Prometheus, since the account of the Titan was obviously written long before the narratives of Opossum. The written version appears always to hold more value to Western civilizations than do the oral accounts of very similar tales. However, these same critics would do well to remember Deloria's remark about the orality of the Old Testament. "The Old Testament was once oral tradition until it was written down."

Stories and our love of them—our need to tell them, to listen to them—bind humanity: past, present, and those yet to come. No matter what culture or race or religion, human beings posses the same inherited desire for narrative. This desire for the narrative, whether it be spoken or written, is a true common thread. We would do well to understand the value of this common thread, whether it be written or spoken, and that no amount of money can replace the value of a good story.

## Tellers

*The storyteller is the one who tells the story.*
*He exists in the person of the storyteller*
*for the sake of telling the story.*
N. Scott Momaday - *The Man Made of Words*

If, as has been thus far suggested by this study, the innate desire to tell stories is one of the true common threads of humanity, what, then, is the role of the storyteller? In keeping with the metaphor of thread, it might be said that the storyteller is a garment maker of sorts, a tailor for the cloth that binds us, warms us, protects us, covers our wounds so that they may heal. These, and so many other roles, belong to the storyteller.[81]

Much like a tailor of clothing, the storyteller takes the natural fibers of humanity and weaves them into the plotted narratives that we, as listeners and

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I extend my gratitude here to Mary Mackie, my good friend, for allowing me to utilize her dissertation and notes as an aid in my search for information on the topic of storytellers and their craft.
Mackie, Mary. "The Art That Will Not Die: Storytelling in the Works of Greg Sarris and Thomas King." Diss. University of Oklahoma, Norman, 2001.

readers and watchers and storytellers ourselves, love so much. The storyteller fulfills the role of educator, enlightener, entertainer, and exampler, among others.

The role of educator is when the tellers demonstrate by way of their stories how to behave, what actions to take in certain situations, and how things came to be. Traditional Western civilization's paradigm of schoolbook learning is not the only means of education. Everyday occurrences—how people live—can also be informative. A good example of such a narrative that is primarily educational is the contemporary television documentary, as may be seen on The Discovery Channel, The Learning Channel, or even on HBO. Such shows give glimpses into cultures and lifestyles that the ordinary citizen might never encounter otherwise. For example, I cannot foresee that I will ever travel to Somalia and immerse myself in its various cultures, but thanks to such documentaries I can at least obtain some understanding as to what life for Somalians is like. A spot of time, such as provided by these narratives, can both educate and enlighten those of us who would otherwise remain forever ignorant of such things.

Similar to the educator, yet slightly different, is the role of the enlightener, telling not necessarily for the sake of instruction, but to cast a different light on a subject that may already be known. An example of this from a Native American perspective is an account of Turtle Island, how many Indian cultures, such as the various bands of Sioux and the Iroquoian league, refer to the Earth. This

particular story is the type known as an Earth Diver tale. It tells of when a Christian missionary came to an Indian village to tell the people about how the world was formed. When he finished his tale, the people "oohed" and "ahhed" in amazement. The missionary was impressed that the people obviously liked his story. However, his sense of accomplishment was soon stymied when the chief of the village stood and addressed him: "That was a good story. Now let me tell you how it *really* happened." At this point the chief begins his rendition of what is know as an Earth Diver tale in Native American circles. This type of story holds that before the Earth was formed as we know it, there was nothing but water everywhere.[82] All the animals had already been formed, but had no place to rest; they must either keep flying or swimming. One by one, various animals attempt to dive to the bottom of the water and bring up some mud so earth can be created, but all fail, that is, until Turtle tries.

The chief continues his narration: "Turtle is a good swimmer and can hold his breath a long time. He is successful. He brings up mud and Earth is created,

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Accounts of Earth Diver tales will vary in the animals that they utilize for the diving. Cherokee lore has similar tales, also using various animals. However, the most commonly told rendition I have heard utilizes a water beetle as the successful diver. Additionally, some tellers may say "blackness" while others use "water." These, too, may vary depending upon the tribal lore and the individual teller. For this example I am using a version that says water and the successful diver is a turtle. Similar tales may be found in Greek mythology. Though they are not Earth Diver tales, these myths do tell of how Earth was created out of Chaos.

and now Turtle carries Earth across the sky vault on his back." Of course, the missionary is flabbergasted by this. He retorts, "That's crazy." The chief cannot believe this. After he and his people had shown the greatest respect for the missionary's account, he dismisses theirs. The missionary continues: "If Turtle is holding up the Earth, what is holding up Turtle?" To this the chief enlightens the missionary: "Why, you silly little man; it's Turtles all the way down."

The narrative rendered above certainly is entertaining, too, in its account of the missionary's enlightenment. Entertainment is a motivation behind the telling of many stories, and this is, perhaps, where one of the greatest differences between how Native Americans and Whites see storytelling lies. Whereas a Western paradigm may see stories and their telling as primarily entertainment, a Native paradigm sees so much more.

A prime example of the Western paradigm in the American movie industry, wherein the storyteller—in other words, the writer, director, producer, actors, or any combination thereof—is merely the entertainer. The value of stories rendered into film is judged by movie critics, so-called experts in the field, but more so (almost exclusively) by how much money the film earns. However, Natives hold a fellowship with one another during story telling events. At storytellings, large or small, the kinship of the tellers and the audience alike creates a sense of comradery—almost as if these events were family reunions. Young tellers

practice their craft before elders, who absorb the contemporary renderings, and, in turn, offer tales and wisdom to their proteges. The value of the stories told at such gatherings is immeasurable.

This division of paradigms is well-summed up in the following quote from Ohiyesa (Charles A. Eastman):

> Ah, exclaimed an old man, such is the strange philosophy of the white man! He hews down the forest that has stood for centuries in its pride and grandeur, tears up the bosom of Mother Earth, and causes the silvery watercourses to waste and vanish away. He ruthlessly disfigures God's own pictures and monuments and then daubs a flat surface with many colors, and praises his work as a masterpiece.[83]

Such is the Western philosophy in relation to stories, not akin to the garment maker, but more the factory owner. The true garment maker, the true storyteller, the true artisan is not interested in only profiting from his or her work. Of course, the garment maker wants to earn a decent living—who would not? Yet exclusive ownership is not the bottom line. The art of the story is the key.

With that being said, the question "Are storytellers made or are they born?"

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Ohiyesa (Charles A. Eastman) "The Appreciation of Beauty." *The Wisdom of the Native Americans*. Ed. Kent Nerburn. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999.

holds relevance. The answer is, simply, both. Storytelling is both an art and a skill. The finest clothiers are considered master craftspeople, lauded by all who seek to wear their finest creations. Crafting is a skill. Skeptics of the inherited narrative might use this statement as ammunition to fight for their paradigm: "If storytelling is a skill, it cannot be inherent, for skills must be learned." Those skeptics are certainly correct—within their limited scope of awareness. However, others, such as professional athletes, musicians, and even military leaders, retort that skills are "in the blood;" that they come naturally and are merely fine tuned. Skills are often referred to as instinct by such people as previously mentioned, and instinct is certainly inherited.

Understanding that the telling of stories has not much in common, at least on the surface, with the aforementioned professions, it is recognizable that critics of the inherited narrative theory will be quick to point out this lack of commonality. However, as with the many other aspects of story telling, one must look deeper than just the obvious surface traits. One very important trait all of the aforementioned professions share with storytelling is timing. A sense of timing cannot be taught—it can be honed and perfected, but not taught. This is a much valued skill among these, and other, professions.

It is at such events as previously mentioned that storytellers, old and new, practice their craft, their art, and perfect their sense of timing, along with other

necessary skills, such as reading the audience (or in some cases the opposition), gauging response, and adjusting strategy accordingly. These events are to the tellers what the playing or battle field or, perhaps most closely analogous, the stage is to these other groups.

An often over-looked and under-appreciated aspect of the storyteller is that of historian. The storyteller, in a traditional Native American culture, is seen as living history. This is not to be interpreted as a "legend in his own time," but a walking, talking, living, breathing volume of historical events.

Academicians, historians and anthropologists for example, may be quick to dismiss or discount storytellers as living history. An axiom of their discipline may claim a people's history is not valid unless it is written down, much the same as the naysayers of Polynesian boat travel before Heyerdahl's project. Additionally, these same academicians often purposefully downplay, if not entirely remove, emotions from their accounts of events, for they wish to give a purely objective rendering of the narrative. Emotions taint the truth, is another of their axioms.

This study should not be interpreted as an indictment of the disciplines of history and anthropology; rather, it should be seen as an expression of bewilderment over an apparent misunderstanding these disciples hold as to the value of oral traditions by posing these valid questions: "What was it before it was

written down? From where did this written information originally come?" The answer is a walking, talking, living, breathing human being—that is from where *all* history comes. The Doris Lessing quote from the end of "Chapter One" bears review here. "The real history ... is still in the custody of ... storytellers."

An additional question of valuable information may also be asked here concerning the methods of those noted academicians, that being "Are not the emotions—the fear, bravery, excitement, depression, glee, anger, pride, shame—of any race of people valuable information to study and impart to others?" Such academic stoicism is as tainting—if not more so—as are emotions claimed to be, for without these emotions the whole truth is not being told.

It is within individual narratives where the natural inclination toward the inherited narrative begins to grow. Rather than thinking of storytelling in a scientific manner, something to be dissected to see how it works, put it in a natural context and step back and watch it work. It might be said that these narratives are the seeds that grow into the bigger, more historical accounts. Within each human being, regardless of cultural affiliation, these seeds wait—they wait to grow and make each of us the storyteller we are to become:

> "Who are you?" someone asks.
>
> "I am the story of myself," comes the answer.
>
> It is true that man invests himself in story. And it is true, as

> someone has said, that God made man because He loves stories. In his traditional world the Native American lives in the presence of stories. The storyteller is one whose spirit is indispensable to the people. He is a magician, artist, and creator. And above all he is a holy man. His is a sacred business.[84]

If, as N. Scott Momaday claims, the storyteller is holy, does it then cheapen the role of the teller to claim, as does this study, that everyone is a storyteller by nature? It does not, for each of us, in our own unique way, is the magician, the artist, the creator, the historian, the garment maker to someone somewhere. Everyone, to various degrees, performs the roles of the storyteller in our daily lives. We cannot help but do so, for if storytelling is one of our true common threads, it stands to reason that a common role we all perform is that of storyteller.

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[84] Excerpt from the Foreword written by N. Scott Momaday to Joseph Bruchac's *Native American Stories*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Press, 1991.

## It's In the Blood

*White man's pictures all fade,*
*but the Indian's memories last forever.*
Unknown Indian guide to Tom Wilson, 1882.[85]

Since Natives and non-Natives most generally see things differently in their interpretative world views, it is relevant to note that even where it would seem that the two cultures should easily see alike, there yet exists a great divide. What follows in this section is an example of the value a Western traditional perspective assigns to the poetics of orality versus the value a Native traditional perspective assigns.

Chapter One notes an understanding of literature and the things that qualify as such. Perhaps one of the most controversial items listed is a person's life, controversial because there are no pages with words to read, nor is there even an oral tale to which one may listen. A paradigm of Western civilization holds that a

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[85] Kent Nerburn, Ed. *The Wisdom of the Native Americans*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999: 71.

person's life cannot be read, only the account of that life, i.e., an autobiography or biography written in a book, most likely in English. However, a Native American paradigm holds that a person's life is as much literature as the finest of books, thus creating, in a sense, an inherited narrative. That thought is reenforced throughout Chapter Five of Greg Sarris' Keeping Slug Woman Alive.

In noting autobiographies, Sarris gives conflicting interpretations of the term, "The autobiography, whether narrated or written, is not the life, but an account or story of the life."[86] This is a classic Western civilization exposition of the term. Sarris then goes on to distinguish a Native interpretation: "A narrated American Indian autobiography then is in actuality an account of an account, a story of a story; the name of the self is hardly the Indian's own." (85) A story of a story. A person's life as literature. The simile "I can read you like a book," takes on a whole new meaning under this paradigm.

Sarris quotes Arnold Krupat, "... who refers to narrated Indian autobiographies as Indian autobiographies rather than autobiographies (written) by Indians." (84) According to Sarris, Krupat alleges that the narrated Indian autobiography—that is, the Indian orating his or her life's story to a White writer—"...is the ground on which the two cultures meet. The textual equivalent

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[86] Greg Sarris. *Keeping Slug Woman Alive: A Holistic Approach to American Indian Texts.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993: 85.

of the frontier." (84) This textual meeting on this metaphorical frontier is the same as was an actual meeting on the real frontier—with much the same results. If ever the mountain range between us is to be conquered, what is needed is not a meeting on a frontier, but a grasping of the common thread. Indians already know what happens on the frontier. What is needed is for the frontier mentality to become just as invisible as it has made the Indians. Only when there is an integration of the hearts and minds without the frontier mind-set, the mentality of "we know what is best for you," can the wall between Indians and non-Indians come down, not only in the literary aspect, but in all aspects of life.

Furthermore, Sarris states that Krupat also argues for a historic approach to Native autobiographies by examining various narrated accounts and comparing them to historical periods. "But the historical period Krupat discusses in detail is, in point of view, distinctly Euro-American." (88) In other words, Krupat is reading Native literatures with White eyes. Krupat is looking at Native lives only with the kaleidoscope of White historians and literary scholars—seeing only what he wants to see or can comprehend—and not examining the lives with the Indian microscope of understanding. Sarris affirms this when he questions Krupat's point of view in presenting Geronimo as "...no different from any captive or prisoner of war...." Sarris notes that Krupat refers to Geronimo as "...just another vanishing type." (88) Sarris then questions Krupat's view of the Apache leader:

> But what about Geronimo and Apache history, culture, and language? What about the ways Geronimo may have accommodated or resisted such a presentation of his life? Krupat does not see or discuss how he also has denied Geronimo context, in this case as a collaborator in the making of a composite text. (88)

Krupat himself affirms his reading of Native lives under the rubric of White literary theory in For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography when he notes "An adequate reading of these texts [Native lives] requires consideration of the language, culture, and history of Native Americans and Euro-Americans; yet, I will contend, such a reading must be centrally a *literary* reading ...."[87] He further writes that the texts, Native American autobiographies, must be read under the "... four modes of employment—romance, tragedy, comedy, irony—by which Western authors (or editors) must structure narrative."[88]

What Krupat is doing and promoting is a trained or taught reading of texts. Throughout this study, it is noted that storytelling is inherited, though some aspects are learned the desire is natural. So it is for "reading" the lives of others as

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[87] Arnold Krupat. *For Those Who Come After: A Study of Native American Autobiography.* Berkely: University of California Press, 1985: xi.

[88] Arnold Krupat. xii.

well. The autobiographies of lives, that is the printed texts, may certainly be read as Krupat has been taught and promotes—within the four modes of Western literature. However, the reading of lives is not that scientific. Reading lives cannot be fairly compared to reading books. When the book method of reading is applied to the reading of lives, of course there will be misunderstandings and divisions.

In That the People Might Live, there is a phrase credited to N. Scott Momaday— "memory in the blood." In this section of Weaver's book, "memory in the blood" is compared to culture, heritage, and identity as passed from generation to generation via stories. Weaver notes H. David Brumble, III and his interpretation of the phrase: it is an evocative synonym for culture. Weaver also notes Paula Gunn Allen's use of the phrase in Spider Woman's Granddaughters; "No Cherokee can forget the Trail of Tears." Weaver admits this to be true: "The Cherokee *can* never forget the Trail of Tears—not because of some genetic determinism but because its importance to heritage and identity are passed down through story from generation to generation." Weaver expands upon this when he comments, "I would contend that what writers like Momaday and Allen mean is the multiplicity of cultural codes that are learned and go toward shaping one's

identity."[89]

Perhaps a more literal description, and one that may be a bit more acceptable, of what Momaday means by "memory in the blood" might be "memory in the air." Something akin to the aroma one might smell while driving past a café and picking up a scent that triggers a memory of Mom's home cooking. These memories are not literally passed on through the blood, even Momaday admits he is speaking metaphorically in this sense. However, these memories are absorbed through continuous exposure to them in the form of stories and the example portrayed in the lives of elders and family, much like the memory of home cooking is absorbed via sensory perceptions.

Another metaphorical comparison may be made to looking at an old photo album. Perhaps, on a cold winter's day when there is nothing worth watching on television, a child may sit with a parent and look through a collection of photos from the parent's past. Occasionally, the child will "recognize" someone in one of the photos. However, this "recognition" is not possible as the person in the photo has died several years before the birth of the child. The recognition, although chronologically impossible, is authentic. It is "inherited" through the parent's familiarity with and fondness of the person in the photo.

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[89] Jace Weaver. *That the People Might Live: Native American Literatures and Native American Community.* New York: Oxford UP, 1997: 7.

It is much the same with stories, the recognition or memory of something into which we are born. This is, perhaps, a better way of understanding this phenomenon of memory in the blood. Looking at it not as if it is a part of us, but as if we are a part of it. Our lives are but another chapter in a continuing story, and we are born into this story with a basic understanding of the chapters that came before us. We hone this basic understanding, perfect it as we grow older and "read" the lives of those around us. This "reading," though it is not of a tangible text—that is words trapped on a page, captured in a book—is just as genuine, and it is this reading that is the inherited portion of the narrative desire referred to as memory in the blood.

A personal example of this is that neither my great-aunt, my grandmother, nor my mother ever told me any stories of the Trail of Tears. They knew a great deal, since my grandmother and great-aunt were only a couple of generations or so removed from that catastrophic event. Yet I never heard such tales from their mouths, but somehow I picked it up from their demeanor. Later in life, when I started asking questions about such things, I was told by Dida (my great-aunt) that I did not have to be told—that I already knew. She was right.

Weaver notes a deriding of Momaday's use of this phrase by Krupat, who, according to Weaver, "professes an ignorance as to precisely what the author [Momaday] meant but states that the evidence from his writing is that it is

'overwhelmingly if unfortunately' and 'absurdly' racist." (7) Krupat responds to Weaver's charge:

> I have a feeling Jace Weaver may not have accurately conveyed what I said in several (published) places. So let me just put this much in writing to you. To speak of something like "memory" as residing in something like the "blood" is to employ racialized language. There is no gene for the memory of stories or myths, what Momaday is usually talking about when he speaks of things like this. Most critics have understood M. to be speaking metaphorically, not literally: the memory FEELS so deep or powerful that it's AS IF one inherited it biologically, "in the blood." Or, more simply, that M. is talking about a kind of cultural "memory"—it feels like it's remembered although it must really be learned. In other words, it isn't REALLY "in the blood."[90]

Momaday is indeed speaking metaphorically, in a common phrase. Many people use this very terminology to describe such things as talents or skills. Much the same argument may be made that these things, talents and skills, are also learned or absorbed and not passed genetically.

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[90] Arnold Krupat. Email to Leslie D. Hannah. 25 January 2001. Copy on file.

Krupat, in the same email from which the previous quote was taken, makes a comparison of radical proportions:

> Obviously if German right-wingers spoke of memory in the blood we would immediately think HITLER and a very bad use of very bad racial thinking. M. of course in not a German right-winger, and, because of the complex history of "Indian blood" in America (Indianness determined on the varying degrees of "blood"), M. doesn't have any of the bad intentions of racists who use that kind of blood language. But there is—and this is what I have said in writing—a considerable danger in perpetuating that kind of racialized thinking, and M. might be a bit more careful about how he employs it.

When N. Scott Momaday responded to Krupat's email, his answer, though short, agrees with the common thread concept of the inherited desire to narrate:

> I believe in a cultural memory. It lies in the blood and is passed from one generation to another. On my better days I can remember things that happened before I was born, even before my grandparents were born. This happens especially within a cultural framework, but it happens to everyone, and it is not racist. What an ugly and defensive term is "racist." With reference to what I write, the term

cannot be taken seriously.[91]

It is obvious that these two men differ in the mind-sets on cultural memory. It is not necessarily that they disagree that the memory exists, but more accurate to say that they disagree on how the memory is passed from one generation to the next. This is a matter of science versus art—the scholar versus the poet. Neither is necessarily wrong in their respective argument, and neither argument is necessarily better than the other. They are simply different, as they are seen from different perspectives.

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[91] N. Scott Momaday. Email to Leslie D. Hannah. 13 February 2001. Copy on file.

## O, the difference of man and man [92]

*Can we talk of integration until*
*there is integration of hearts and minds?*
*Unless you have this,*
*you have only a physical presence,*
*and the walls between us*
*are as high as the mountain range.*
Chief Dan George

In the previous segment, it was noted that Native Americans and Whites generally understand things quite differently. This statement is not an indictment of the Caucasian race, nor of any Native race—nor any other, for that matter. The same differences can be found in many cultures. The Euro-American paradigm, what has been thus far referred to as Western civilization, seemingly clashes with most every other cultural paradigm. This segment is not intended to perpetuate any "great divide" that may exist between Native Americans and Whites; rather, it seeks to develop an understanding of perhaps why these cultures seemingly clash

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[92]
Goneril, from Shakespeare's *King Lear: Act Four, scene two.*

on almost every front.

Some divisions of the minds have already been noted in previous segments. This segment will juxtapose what is, perhaps, the most fundamental reason for this great divide: religion. Many people do not even refer to Native American religion as religion. Rather, they often call it "spirituality" and often do so with a diminishing intention. When speaking of it they change the tone of their voices and speak the word in a mocking manner as if ours is something less than theirs. Oftentimes, Native American religions are referred to as pagan or heathen, with both terms used in a derogatory manner.[93]

"Long before I heard of Christ or saw a White man...I knew God. I perceived what goodness is. I saw and loved what is really beautiful. Civilization has not taught me anything better!"[94]

There is no Indian Bible—that is to say, no book by which all Indian people profess to live. Yet, if asked to name an Indian "Bible," I would have to say Ohiyesa's The Soul of the Indian. Christians should read this book with half the

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[93] The events described in this paragraph come from personal experiences. Often, non-Native people who discuss such things with me refer to Native religions as "spirituality" and will even make the physical gesture of quotation marks by raising both hands and curling the index and middle fingers of both hands. They will also change their voices to speak in what I can only perceive as a mocking tone.

[94] Ohiyesa (Charles A. Eastman) *The Soul of the Indian*. 125.

fervor they spend on their Bible. Half is all it would take for Christians to understand the soul of the Indian. "Our religion is an attitude of the mind, not a dogma." This quote from Ohiyesa in essence summarizes Native religions perfectly.

What is perhaps the most obvious division of religious paradigms is the manner in which Natives and Christians believe in creation. The Christian biblical account of the creation of Earth is well-known. One account of a Native perspective was noted earlier, the Earth Diver narrative. These stories of creation are certainly diverse, but many tales of the two paradigms are also very similar. In Starr's History of the Cherokee Indians,[95] stories similar to the biblical account of the Great Flood are noted. Additionally, tales of Earth's creation are also documented throughout Chapter One, "Origin, Religion, Characteristics."

Additionally, both paradigms view humans as cast in the image of their creator. Physically, we look somewhat like the entity who created us. Though there are some variations, this is fairly common. However, the Christian view holds that people are "born out of original sin." That is to say that contemporary humans are the descendants of wrongdoing. It is the Christian doctrine, then, that

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[95] Emmet McDonald Starr. *Starr's History of the Cherokee Indians*. Indian Heritage Edition. Jack Gregory and Rennard Strickland, eds. Fayetteville, AR: Indian Heritage Association, 1967.

human beings are, by birth, evil. This is the rift. Native American religions hold that humans are not evil by birth, not born of original sin. Whereas the Christian religion dictates a lifetime of atonement for the sin of being human, Native religions view the condition human as a miracle in and of itself. Of course, there are variations in attitudes from one tribe to another, just as there are variations from one Christian denomination to another, but this is fairly common.

This is not to classify Native religions and Christianity as an epic struggle of Good versus Evil, for Native religions also have their tales of being cast out. One such tale is a Navajo account of the creation of the First Man and First Woman.[96] This is a story of the ascendance of the people from a lower world into this present realm. The account holds that the first people in this world came up through three previous worlds and settled in this, the fourth world. They had been cast out of each previous world for arguing with one another and for committing adultery or incest. In such accounts it is significant that there is not the element of original sin—that is, a sin so ominous that all humans for every succeeding generation are condemned at birth.

Just because the aspect of original sin is not so omnipresent in Native religions as it is in Christianity does not make Indians any better than Christians.

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[96] Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, eds. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984: 39 - 41.

That is not what this segment is promoting. Indians merely see sin from a reverse angle, of sorts. Simply, we are created in the image of whatever our god may be called, and from creation we are godly. This godliness can, however, be tainted and lost due to our actions in this realm. It is then that atonement becomes a factor. Indians are not god-like. They simply see this matter of original sin with a different set of eyes, if they accept it at all.

What, then, is to be said of the many, many Native people who practice Christianity? As noted in a previous section, never will one find more devout Christians than those who are Native Americans. Christian Indians follow their faith with a devotion unseen in many other races. "Thus we see no need in setting apart one day in seven as a holy day, since to us all days belong to God."[97]

The basic concept of the Christian faith, at least as it is preached, is very appealing to a Native spirit:

> There was undoubtedly much in primitive Christianity to appeal to this man [an Indian], and Jesus' hard sayings to the rich and about the rich were entirely comprehensible to him. Yet the religion that is preached in our churches and saw practiced by our congregations, with its element of display and self-aggrandizement, its active

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[97] Ohiyesa. *The Soul of the Indian.* 93.

> proselytism, and its open contempt of all religions but its own, was for a long time extremely repellent.[98]

Having thus noted the fundamental differences between the two religious mind-sets, what effect does this have on Native American stories and their tellers? It is, perhaps, the Christian contempt noted in one of the Ohiyesa quotes that relegates Native stories, especially those with religious aspects, to the genre of myth, and the tellers thereof to the title of pagan liar. It is well-documented in American history, even in that written by White historians. It is one of America's darkest chapters. That mentality exists yet today. Under the banner of objectivity, Christian America subjugates Native American religions and all narratives and narrators associated with it. By default, all other Native tales are subjugated as well. Is this solely the fault of Christianity in America? No. It should not be implied that it is. There is a great combination of factors. However, Christianity has, for a very long time, been a delicate subject in many Native American circles. It is associated with great tragedies and many injustices against the native people of North America. Therefore, the Christian religion cannot be dismissed as a major contributing factor to the relegation of Native American stories and tellers to a level of "less than."

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[98] Ohiyesa. *The Soul of the Indian.* 19 - 20.

# Chapter Three

# Caveat Emptor

*It does not require many words to speak the truth.*
Chief Joseph (Nez Perce)

## The Quick Fix

Within this chapter certain materials offered to the public as "authentic" Cherokee shall be analyzed and scrutinized. Additionally, other materials that *are* authentic Cherokee are included, but these materials are included because of their "rehashing;" that is to say, these stories have been established by people other than those who present them to the public in the works analyzed within this chapter. What this chapter contains is not a dipstick nor gauge to measure the Indianness of a person. The very thought of a standard of measurement in determining how much a person is of *anything*—especially Indian—is dehumanizing. This chapter is not about how to recognize an Indian or the Indianness of things. What is this

chapter then?—a warning. "We have men among us, like the whites, who pretend to know the right path, but will not consent to show it without pay! I have no faith in their paths, but believe that every man must make his own path!" – Black Hawk, Sauk.[99]

It is important that the consuming public be made aware of such people who would misrepresent Native Americans and their worlds for the sole purpose of financial gain. Shari Huhndorf, in her book Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination, issues a similar warning. She uses as her example the publications of Lynn Andrews, in particular one titled Medicine Woman. "Andrews pens narratives catering to the New Age fascination with Native America," writes Huhndorf, "specifically to those readers who look to other cultures in search of alternative gender models." (178) Huhndorf notes that Andrews' claims her "authority" to teach "traditional" Native American secrets comes from her experiences with Cree elders. Huhndorf also notes the controversy surrounding Andrews' career as a Native "authority."

> Native activists and leaders have publicly and vigorously criticized Andrews for the fakery of her "Indian" message as well as for her impropriety in positioning herself as a teacher of Native spirituality.

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[99] Kent Nerburn. Ed. *The Wisdom of the Native Americans*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 1999: 35.

> These protests, however, have had little effect. Nor has her popularity suffered. One after another, her books have landed at the top of various bestseller lists, earning her both substantial wealth and the role, however absurd, of spokesperson for Native America. (178)

Up to this point this study has been an attempt to induce people to see the world, if only for a moment, through Indian eyes, but even such a momentary glimpse takes work, and most people would rather have a more quick and convenient fix, a magic wand, so to speak, of Indian understanding. A comparison can be made between the using of one's eyes to look though a kaleidoscope to receive instant gratification and the using of a microscope to look deep within and find true beauty. For those seeking to buy an "Indian" kaleidoscope, there is always someone willing to sell.

This chapter makes no effort to portray as fraudulent anyone who claims to be Cherokee, and thus Native. Typically, if someone claims to be Cherokee, I take that person at his or her word, (actions will eventually tell the truth), so this chapter in no way is claiming that the authors noted herein are lying about their heritage. What is being called into question are some of the things written in their books and pamphlets. To an Indian paradigm, there is no universal "One Way;" it is an individual thing. Enclosing "One Way" in quotation marks is not a belittling

of how these authors view their brand of religion or their understanding of Indianness, because the doing of such would also belittle how I view mine. It is simply to be noted that certain written materials offered as Native may seem appealing to non-Natives who are seeking something "Other" and are pressed for the time required to make a more thorough study. The achievement of these things—peace, love, happiness, balance—is not like a Quick-lube oil change—in and out in fifteen minutes, with a 3,000 mile guarantee. The achievement of these things takes several lifetimes, and still there is no guarantee of success.

Many publications offered as "Native Spirituality" can create in one's mind an image of "spiritual Mentos."[100] With a quick read, one can attain spiritual balance, say the authors of such books. Many of these publications read as if they are "how-to" guides for stressed corporate executives on weekend retreats in upstate New York or at some California resort trying to gain a quick fix to their worldly problems. Reading more often like a Yoga manual than actual Cherokee teachings, these books make it seem that the obtaining of thousands of years of traditional wisdom and spiritual balance is an overnight process. If it were as easy

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I refer here to the television commercials of the candy called Mentos®. In these commercials, people of various ages and cultural backgrounds are portrayed in daily situations wherein trouble of some sort arises: they are blocked in by traffic, or sit in wet paint, or tear their clothing. However, within an instant of popping a Mentos® into their mouths, all their problems are solved and the silver lining of the cloud turns to a block of purest gold, and thus alchemy for the challenged soul.

and as glamorous as these authors make it out to be, why is not everyone Cherokee?

In a Cherokee way, there is no "quick fix" to any problem; there is no alchemy for the soul. It is not simply a matter of reading a book and suddenly all becomes well. The ways of the Cherokees run much deeper than words in a book. One book, which is examined in more detail a bit later in this chapter, notes a ceremony that truly does exist in the Cherokee system of beliefs, as do many books that purport to be Cherokee. Such authors exploit and diminish authentic Cherokee rituals and beliefs. For example, the ceremony just alluded to is "Going to the Water," a ceremony wherein Cherokees traditionally go to the edge of a river or creek to pray. This book notes that Cherokees "Go to the Water" but once a year. Do Muslims pray but once a year? Do Christians pray but once a year? Hardly. In reality, many Cherokees who go to the water every day—some several times a day. These devout Cherokees are similar to what is mentioned in the previous chapter about the Indians who are Christians. Nowhere can more devout Christians be found than those who are Indians. Native Christians have faith deeply rooted in their beliefs, and they practice their faiths accordingly. They are not "half-way" Christians, and neither are the Indians who practice more Native forms of prayer and religion "half-way." Going to the water but once a year is not the Cherokee way.

"But what of those Cherokees who live in metropolitan areas and have no river to go to?" one may ask. It is not necessarily a "river" that is needed for Cherokees to pray in a traditional manner. Flowing water is what is needed, and there is flowing water in the shower each morning and each night. "Then that's not really Cherokee—using the shower," critics may argue. There could be nothing more Cherokee than saying prayers in the shower. Cherokees adapt to utilize what is available so as to keep those parts of them that are Cherokee—the heart, the mind, the soul. Respected Cherokee medicine men have been known to utilize garden hoses and even lawn sprinkling systems in Going to the Water ceremonies. They have no fear that their medicine or prayers will be lessened by using these things, so there are no worries for other Cherokees who pray in their showers. It is the power of running water—life blood of the Earth—that is considered sacred and holy. No matter where it is that the water is running, whether it be in a river or in plumbing, the fact that the water is running is what matters.

Still, some may argue that this is not a traditional way for the Cherokees to practice their faith and may dismiss this as merely a token effort to hold onto a dying tradition. Nothing could be further from the truth. A tradition need not be static to remain a tradition. Traditions are ever-evolving, like the people who hold them. In order to continue as a people, Cherokees—and for that matter, any

race—must adapt to survive; therefore, it is inevitable that traditions must also adapt to survive.

Another issue that bears addressing before this chapter moves on to specific materials is that of faith. Christians claim to be people of great faith and base their every decision upon stories contained in the Bible. Many times, First Year Composition students use the superficial argument "Because the Bible said so, that's why," as grounds for a claim advanced in an argumentative essay. Such an "appeal to authority" method of argumentation may work in Sunday School, but its absolute authority to all people everywhere is fallacious. So many times I wish I would have been able to say, "Because my elders said so, that's why." But that was not "The Way." "Well, what, then, is the 'The Way'?" one might ask. That question cannot be effectively answered except by the one asking it. Faith is an individual thing. As I tell the student writers in my charge when they wish to use the Bible as support for a paper, "It's not what you take out of that book, but what you put into it—your faith." The same principle applies to Cherokee, and most Native, teachings.

As previously noted, the wisdom of elders does not come by way of a book, so there is no print resource in which one may find solace in times of trouble. There is no reference book in which to look up the solution. However, there is the great faith in all that the elders teach. The stories of their lives and their decades

of wisdom are "in the blood," in the soul, and only through the faith of generations can one "read" those stories to get through times of trouble.

It is with this experience in mind that this caveat chapter is issued to the at-large consuming public. Faith is not a commodity to be found in books with fancy leather-binding and gold-trimmed pages. It can only be found deep within oneself. This is by no means a denunciation of the White man's Bible. I rather like reading it myself; it is filled with many good parables. In a more Cherokee way, it is not as simple a matter as reading a book to gain the wisdom of innumerable Native lives. Thousands of years and thousands of lives have gone into writing the "book" of Native wisdom—a book that cannot be found in print anywhere—only "in the blood," only in the soul. One cannot reach spiritual peace by following a how-to guide written for the express purpose of pocketing the money of those seeking a quick fix. A physician would not slap a Bandaid® on a bullet wound, and neither should non-Natives read a book about Indian spirituality in an effort to heal a wounded soul.

## Voices of Our Ancestors [101]

Dhynai Ywahoo's book is selected for examination in this study because of the questionable, some might say ridiculous, claims it makes. Additionally, the author has a website with corresponding materials that will be examined. The materials contained within are said to be authentic, traditional Cherokee teachings, many generations old. An additional claim is that the teachings contained within the book will "bring ... peace and harmonious relations to all beings."[102]

Ywahoo claims that hers are practical ways of bringing peace, happiness, and good relations into one's life, thus giving it a sense of fulfillment and purpose. She purports that the information she provides will help one to clarify mind, body, spirit, and emotions, thus bringing harmony to troubled individuals, and ultimately a troubled world. An additional claim is that this is the first time the sacred

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Dhyani Ywahoo. *Voices of Our Ancestors: Cherokee Teachings from the Wisdom Fire.* Boston: Shambhala, 1987.

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Dhyani Ywahoo. xi.

teachings of the Cherokees have been committed to writing. Her purpose in committing these sacred teachings to writing (paraphrasing the author's own words and summing them into a phrase) is to make the world a better place. She claims that her sacred, authentic, and traditional Cherokee teachings are the way—the one and only way—for world harmony to be achieved.

What this examination of Ywahoo's work will show is that the teachings contained within her book are not pure, authentic, traditional Cherokee teachings, but more a hybrid of some things Cherokee and some things Buddhist—actually, more Buddhist than Cherokee. Some things noted within the book are indeed from a Cherokee mind set. However, there exists within the book many cross-contaminations with several other mind sets. The author's promotion of the "Cherokee way" as being the "One way" for all beings will also be examined. This is not a Cherokee paradigm. Spirituality, in a Cherokee way, is seen as a private matter, thus there are as many ways as there are people, and not a "one size fits all" brand of religion or spirituality.

There is no doubt that Ywahoo has some Cherokee teachings. At the very least, she appears to have been exposed to some Indian wisdom during her lifetime. There are many things in her book that are indeed Cherokee—many good things, elements of wisdom that can certainly help all people no matter the culture from which they come. Likewise, there are also many things that are *not*

Cherokee to be found in the text.

A good place to begin with the book is the ending of it. In the biographical information contained on the back cover of the book, Dhyani Ywahoo, the author, states that she is of the Etowah Band of the Eastern Cherokee. She also claims she was trained by her grandparents, and is the twenty-seventh generation to carry the ancestral wisdom of her lineage. Her duty is to "...rekindle the fire of clear mind and right relationship in these changing times." Continuing from information noted on the back cover, the author claims to teach practical ways of transforming obstacles into happiness and ways to fulfill one's life. The author is noted as being the founder and director of the Sunray Meditation Society in Bristol, Vermont.

Additional biographical information contained on the author's web site notes that the author now holds the position of Spiritual Teacher in a Tibetan Buddhist Dharma temple. She now answers only to "The Venerable Dhyani Ywahoo."

Now to the beginning of the book. Suspicion is cast upon the author on the first page of the preface when she notes that throughout the book she will use only the Cherokee word for Cherokee, which is *Tsalagi*, when referring to her teachings. This might lead the reader to think that she is at least semi-fluent in the Cherokee language, as should one be who purports to be the twenty-seventh

generation to keep the ancestral wisdom of the Cherokee people. The suspicion intensifies on the very same page when she tries to use the Cherokee language for the phrase: "*Igidotsoiyi Tsalagi Gadugi*," which she translates as "Three Sisters Gadugi." In this phrase, she uses the word *Tsalagi* incorrectly to represent "sisters," when, only three paragraphs previously, she used it correctly. The word *gadugi*[103] is close in pronunciation to the Oklahoma dialectical word *agidoi*, which is what a male would call his sibling of the opposite sex. However, it is exactly the same as an Oklahoma dialect Cherokee word, *gadugi*, that means "community." In fact, when using the Oklahoma dialect to translate this simple, three-word phrase, native speakers of the language may easily be confused: "Standing in place three Cherokee communities."

Still in the preface, the author notes that the "... teachings and medications shared herein are based upon the traditional *Tsalagi* teachings, teaching stories, and games passed to me by my grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-aunts."[104] However, only four paragraphs further, she notes that the materials presented in the book are based upon lectures and teaching materials from the

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[103] This is not the form of the word as spoken in Northeastern Oklahoma, the area where I grew up. It is close to a Cherokee word that does in fact mean sister, so allowances are being made for possible dialectical differences.

[104] Dhyani Ywahoo. xi.

years 1978 - 1985.[105] One may ascertain that she has taken the materials passed to her and given lectures on these things, but one may also conclude this to be a contradiction, especially in light of several other contradictions that are revealed later in the book.

The author notes that in 1969 a decision was made to share the sacred teachings of the *Tsalagi* tradition. These traditions were, according to the author, held in secrecy for many generations. Traditional Cherokee teachings are not secret, per se. They are, however, personal. Missing from this revelation is any mention of the decision makers. Who are they? In a traditional Cherokee way of doing things, the few do not decide for the whole. Yet, the text reads as if that is exactly what happened with this decision which occurred in 1969, but which took another ten years to be implemented by the author. A parallel may be drawn to the fraudulent Doublehead treaties of 1805. These treaties were fraudulent land cession treaties wherein sacred Cherokee lands were given away by one Cherokee who purported to speak for all Cherokees. Ywahoo appears to do the same in this book with every claim she advances.

One of many contradictions appears on the second page of the preface. Ywahoo notes that traditional teachings of the Cherokees are done by way of

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[105] Dhyani Ywahoo. xi.

diagramming things into the earth and placing ten natural objects into the center of a triangle while drumming and chanting.[106] These, she claims, are significant to the learning of the Cherokee ways. Although Ywahoo notes drumming, chanting, diagramming in the earth, and placing of objects into the diagrams as significant to learning these Cherokee teachings, she presents these materials in a book, which by its very nature prohibits the drumming and chanting and diagramming she claims to be so integral.

This study noted in a previous segment that traditions need not remain static to remain traditional; however, that is not the case here. What Ywahoo is presenting as traditional Cherokee teachings are not so in the first place. Example: the triangle. This three-sided geometric shape is not traditionally part of the Cherokee paradigm. The three-sided figure more closely represents a Christian paradigm—the holy trinity: father, son, holy spirit. If a geometric shape is considered, the circle traditionally comes to mind. Additionally, the ten natural objects placed inside of the triangle represent nothing from a traditional Cherokee ceremony. Ten is not a Cherokee sacred number. Drumming, however, is indeed a part of Cherokee ways. However, chanting is not. Cherokees sing; they do not "Ahm."

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[106] Dhyani Ywahoo. xii.

Some of the materials she presents are indeed Cherokee in their basis. An example of this may be found also in the "Preface" where she notes that the Cherokee worldview may be found within a circle.[107] However, this is not exclusively Cherokee, as she leads the reader to believe. The circle is a primary geometric shape to many Native American peoples. Some may argue that to say the circle is a primary geometric figure of so many people rings of the same type of absolutism this study attributes to those whom it criticizes. Further, they may point out that among Southwestern tribes the square is a primary shape. However, those who would criticize this statement as hypocritical absolutism would do well to remember that the circle and the square, though they are different shapes to a scientific mind set, represent the same thing to a Native American mind set: the Earth. In such a mind set, the square is a circle with corners; the circle is a cornerless square.

Ywahoo claims that her book is the first time that Cherokee teachings have ever been "conveyed in writing."[108] This is not true. Many things have been written concerning Cherokee teachings, and many long before Ywahoo. The works of James Mooney immediately come to mind: Sacred Formulas of the

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107
Dhyani Ywahoo. xiii.

108
Dhyani Ywahoo. xii.

Cherokees, Myths of the Cherokee, and The Swimmer Maunscript. Mooney's work was done from 1887 to 1890. Additionally, the excellent comprehensive works of Jack and Anna Kilpatrick, compiled and published between 1955 and 1975, a generation before Ywahoo's book, defeat her claim of first. Plus, there is Alan Kilpatrick, Jack and Anna's son, who has published several fine works on Cherokee teachings and formulas in the 1990's.

Throughout the preface, Ywahoo repeatedly refers to the sacred number "three." Three is not a number sacred in traditional Cherokee beliefs. Seven is the most sacred of numbers in a Cherokee mind set, with four being a secondarily important number. There are seven clans in the Cherokee Nation. Sevenstar is a traditional Cherokee name, which refers to tales wherein the Cherokee people are said to have originated. The first mention of the number seven comes late in the preface where the author notes that each teaching "gives at least seven reminders of how these primary principles manifest in our lives."[109] Even then, the number seven is not absolute. The wording "at least" indicates that there is more than seven in some cases, but seven is the minimum in any one case.

A glimmer of truth appears in the preface when Ywahoo notes that Cherokee teachings and ceremonies are "... as sacred to us as is the mass to

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[109] Dhyani Ywahoo. xii.

Roman Catholics."[110] Such a comparison is made in the early pages of this chapter concerning the prayer ceremonies. However, the author claims that these ceremonies are intended for Native people only, which contradicts the claim she makes throughout the book and numerous times on her website about the Cherokee ways she teaches as being good for everyone.

The "Introduction" contains primarily historical information, much of it allegedly of the Ywahoo lineage. This shall not be disputed, for there is no way to verify such information. Dhyani Ywahoo opens the "Introduction" by stating that the Cherokees traditionally called themselves "The Principal People." While this is true, it is not exclusively Cherokee, since many, if not most, Native American nations refer to themselves as the "principal" or "first" people—or, oftentimes simply "The People." Additionally, Ywahoo notes that the Cherokee words for "Principal People" are "Ani Yun Wiwa." These Cherokee words translate to "Indians," meaning any person of Native American heritage. The phrase is not tribe specific.

Beginning in the "Introduction" and continuing throughout the remainder of the book, Ywahoo repeatedly refers to the teaching and miracles of the "Pale One." This is the only manner in which this person is identified. However, from

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[110] Dhyani Ywahoo. xiv.

much of what is written about the "Pale One," the reader might conclude that Ywahoo is writing of Jesus Christ. Example: he is "... a great teacher ... born in a miraculous manner."[111] This, combined with the author's repeated usage of the number three as sacred and the reference to spiritual leaders as priests, may been seen as a mixture of the Cherokee and Christian religions. As previously noted, there are many Cherokees who are of the Christian faith, and they often practice their commingled faiths without conflict. They do not, however, declare to the world that their commingled faiths are sacred Native teachings, hundreds of years established. Additionally, they are able to recognize what is essentially Cherokee and what is essentially Christian.

In the closing words of the "Introduction," Ywahoo repeats her contradictions of the teachings being appropriate for all people, but specific to selected people. Thus having generally confused the reader, she moves into specifics in Chapter One.

Chapter One, "The People of the Fire," opens with Ywahoo's account of the beginnings of the Cherokee People. She offers a brief rendition of a Seven Star story, but then commingles it with what can only be understood to be the

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[111] Dhyani Ywahoo. 2.

Christian Holy Trinity: "Three in One."[112]

Very quickly, Ywahoo moves into a detailed accounting of the twelve original tribes of the Tsalagi Nation. This information is not accurate. The Cherokee Nation currently has seven *clans*—not tribes. There are stories of an eighth clan, a lost clan. Some of these tales note that the lost clan was eventually found in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Other tales hold that the missing clan became disenchanted with life as humans and its people were transformed into bears, thus are now known as the "old men of the woods." There is no mention of any twelve tribes in any Cherokee lore I know of. There were twelve original tribes of Israel, but not the Cherokee Nation.

Rather than naming her twelve tribes, Ywahoo numbers them and lists their attributes. From her descriptions, it is easy to draw the parallel with the Twelve Tribes of Israel. Note the similarities in the following comparison.[113]

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Dhyani Ywahoo. 9.

113

Information for the comparison was taken from Dhyani Ywahoo, pages 10 - 11, and from *The Twelve Tribes of Israel*. "Doctrines." Available at http://www.angelfire.com/on2/ttoi/ttoidoctrines.html

| Ywahoo | | Israel | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Tribe | Attribute | Tribe | Attribute |
| 1 | Will | Levi | Will |
| 2 | Healers (a matter of faith) | Simeon | Faith |
| 3 | Understanding of things sacred | Asher | Understanding |
| 4 | Builders and administrators | Zebulon | Order and compassion |
| 5 | Scientists and teachers of the future | Joseph | Imagination |
| 6 | Those who manifest ritual form | Judah | Praise |
| 7 | Sacred warriors | Benjamin | Elimination |
| 8 | Ambassadors with planetary understanding | Dan | Judgment |
| 9 | Those who bring forth new plants to feed the people | Gad | Reproductive power |

Though the wording that describes the attributes of Ywahoo's tribes differs somewhat from that describing the tribes of Israel, the parallel is clear. She stops short of describing the full twelve, noting that the function of final three is so sacred that "... it cannot be cognized."[114] This is most likely one of the most major contradictions of the entire book. The author purports to be the keeper of most sacred traditional Cherokee teachings that have been kept secret for hundreds of years, yet now she has taken it upon herself to dispense this information to any who are willing to pay for it. Then, rather hypocritically, she withholds information because she claims it is *too* sacred. For critical readers, this may be

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[114] Dhyani Ywahoo, 11.

taken as an insult to their intelligence, or it may be seen as pure laziness: the author simply could not or did not want to describe the remaining three tribes. Is this a legitimate commingling of the Cherokee/Christian religions, or an illegitimate cross-contamination of religions? Most likely, it is a gauge of her extremely limited knowledge of Cherokee lore and wisdom. Whatever the situation, the analogous relationship to the Twelve Tribes of Israel is obvious. Additionally, in either case, Ywahoo is attempting to promote fraudulent teachings as sacred Cherokee wisdom.

Closely following the description of the "Twelve Tribes" is a metaphorical comparison of humans to the salmon. This is a good metaphor in its description of the cycle of human life.[115] However, Ywahoo, in a later chapter, takes this metaphor to absurd length when she implies that the salmon is a sacred animal in the Cherokee worldview. This will be attended to more specifically during the review of that chapter.

Another amazing contradiction occurs early in Chapter One when Ywahoo notes that great sufferings, such as the Nazi Holocaust, are seen as unnecessary in a Cherokee worldview, and "they are the result of pride, the idea that one is better

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[115] Dhyani Ywahoo. 11.

or more important than another."[116] This may indeed be true, yet this is exactly what the author herself is doing with this work—promoting Cherokee teachings as appropriate to all beings, thus better or more important than any other.

A true Cherokee worldview does not promote these teachings as appropriate to all people, nor better than all other religions. It is a paradigm of balance, understanding that other religions and ways are necessary to the continuation of the Earth. A Cherokee worldview knows community, but also understands individualism. Also important is the concept of responsibility; with that comes sacrifice. Many more concepts go into composing the true Cherokee worldview, concepts that are not exclusive to the Cherokees, nor even Native Americans; many of the world's major religions have similar thoughts. Yet, at the center of a more Cherokee worldview is one prevailing thought: Do what you know in your heart to be right.

For the next few pages, Ywahoo cites historical information that may be verified by the works of others, such as James Mooney, Rennard Strickland, Vine Deloria, and N. Scott Momaday.[117] However, she presents the information in such a general a manner that its inclusion is no more than name-dropping of authentic

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116

Dhyani Ywahoo. 12.

117

Dhyani Ywahoo. 12 - 15. Bibliographic endnotes for Ywahoo's sources for this section are found on pages 269 - 270.

Native authors.

Ywahoo segues from her name-dropping to mention a creature prominent in Cherokee folklore—the *Ukten*. She refers to it as the Uk-kuk-a-duk, or the *Ukdena*, and describes these creatures as "... great dragons that used to protect this land."[118] In traditional Cherokee lore, *Utkens* are not protectors of the land. There are many folkloric tales that describe the *Ukten* as dangerous to Indians, since to see one approaching, or even one asleep is a sign of certain death for Indians.[119] Ywahoo notes that the last of the *Ukten* dragons were seen in the Smokey Mountains in the 1700's. Actually, the *Ukten* is alive and well today, and inhabiting all of North America. The *Ukten*, for some, is a metaphor for encroaching White civilization.

In the second half of Chapter One, Ywahoo notes teachings of the "Pale One." Specifically, she details seven reminders of honor and nine precepts that she calls "The Code of Right Relations."[120] The elements of this code bear close resemblance to the Ten Commandments of the Christian tradition. Information

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118

Dhyani Ywahoo. 15 - 16.

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I call the reader's attention to Chapter One of this study, the section titled "Uktens and Skilis and Tsunstis," for a discussion of the Cherokee Ukten see James Mooney's *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*. Nashville: Charles Elder – Bookseller/Publisher, 1972: 297 - 300.

120

Dhyani Ywahoo. 19 - 21.

concerning this "Pale One" and the teachings that are listed is scant at best in the book, so for further information I turned to the author's website. A little more information is listed here. However, Ywahoo notes that the "Pale One" and his teachings are common to all Native American peoples.[121] Though it is true that many Native American nations have many things in common, it is an utter falsehood to claim that every Native American everywhere shares any one thing in common. It is absurd. Native Americans are as diverse in their religions and customs as are the peoples of Europe. The remainder of this portion of the author's website is merely a repeat of the vague and minimal information detailed in the book. For the importance attributed to the "Pale One" and his teachings, less than four pages of text are devoted to him, and it is of such a generalized nature as to be easily dismissible.

The remainder of Chapter One is dedicated to explaining the Cherokee Priestcraft, something that Ywahoo claims has been a part of Cherokee life from the beginning of time. Ywahoo advances this claim in spite of the fact that the Cherokee tradition is renown for its shamanistic tradition. The author claims that Cherokee priests are not made but born, as children who are destined will display their priestly traits at an early age. When these traits are first displayed the child is

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121

Dhyani Ywahoo and the Sunray Meditation Society. "Teachings of the Pale One." Available at http://www.sunray.org/Wisdom_Teachings. 6 December 2001.

fed a " ... special diet and given special training to ... channel the energy of their minds."[122] This all seems more like science fantasy, something from a George Lucas movie script, rather than Cherokee fact.

Ywahoo details a ten-step program for the training of these priests that reads more like traditional Taoist teachings than any traditional Cherokee teachings. Ywahoo's detailing of these steps to priesthood closely parallel the path to enlightenment for Tao.[123] Devotion to ideals, transformation of energy, interphasing, and temple studies are a few of the steps detailed by Ywahoo. In contrast with this, traditional Cherokee teaching embodies a mentors/apprentices relationship that may last for years.

Following her listing of these ten steps to priesthood, Ywahoo details a further sixteen "minor" steps before one may move from being a priest to becoming a planet.[124] Honestly—I have no idea what is meant here. This (to me) is the most confusing portion of Chapter One—confusing to the point of leaving me in a position of not knowing how to respond. This confusion is apparently a rhetorical trait of cult leaders, which I will address in more detail at the conclusion

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122

Dhyani Ywahoo. 21.

123

Center for Traditional Taoist Studies. "The Path to Enlightenment." Available at http://www.tao.org/origins.htm. 13 January 2002.

124

Dhyani Ywahoo. 24 - 27.

of this examination.

Chapter Two, entitled "Voices of Our Ancestors," opens with a bit of folklore. Ywahoo renders an "Earth Diver" tale, although it is one that does not follow traditional formulas of this Native American genre. The lore of many Native American nations contains such tales. It is said that before the Earth was made into its present form, water was everywhere, and all the animals either swam or flew. The animals held a council and decided that someone should dive to the bottom of the water and bring up mud so that land could be made and they would then have a place to rest and call home. In these Earth Diver tales, many different animals served as the divers, most of them unsuccessfully. For example, one teller may begin with a duck as being the first unsuccessful diver, then a water beetle tries and fails, then water spider, and so on until the successful diver, in most cases a turtle, dives to the bottom and brings up mud. Then, a large bird flies over the turtle's back, drying and spreading the mud, thus creating Earth. In traditional Cherokee lore, it is always Buzzard.

Ywahoo holds true to this formula, with the exception that she has added a falling Star Maiden. In her account, Ywahoo notes that the Star Maiden dug a hole through the floor of the sky and fell to Earth. Turtle caught her on his back, and the animals saw fit to make her comfortable in this lower level. This is a commingling of two stories not traditionally told together as one. The Star Maiden

aspect is Iroquoian, while the turtle catching her on his back is Algonquian.

From this, Ywahoo returns to information about the "Twelve Original Tribes of the Tsalagi." However, at this point she refers to them as "clans." Tribes and clans differ in their composition and are two distinctly different units. Tribes may be composed of various clans; whereas, clans are composed of family groups who share the same lineage.

The information Ywahoo notes here concerning the Twelve—whatever she calls them—concerns the precious and semi-precious gems and stones associated with each. She lists a power attributed to each. These powers coincide directly with the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

Ywahoo shifts religious gears yet again when she notes the Dark Twin and the Light Twin. She could be making reference to Iroquoian lore here. However, it is clear, with all other evidence considered, that a metaphorical representation of Yen and Yang from Taoism is what she has in mind. She notes a brief story of how these two must be kept in balance with " ... sacred songs and formulas of balance ... amplified through quartz crystals."[125] Though "balance" is a traditional Cherokee concept, it is not achieved strictly in this manner, as the reader is led to believe. She shifts gears once again into a Christian view when she partially lists

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[125] Dhyani Ywahoo. 31 - 33.

the Seven Deadly Sins—reworded of course—and rephrases the opening lines from the book of Genesis of the Holy Bible.

This commingling of religions can be seen as manipulating the language of various mind sets in a effort to recruit new membership. This is a common characteristic of cults and New Age Spirituality communes, offering potential new members something familiar so as not to alienate them immediately.[126] Other characteristics noted in this chapter include an overcoming of discord and an "us versus them" mentality.[127] There will be more on this at the end of this examination.

Ywahoo notes a metaphor common to many cultures, and not those only Native American. She writes of the cycle of life as compared to the course of a day: sunrise, midday, and sunset. However, Ywahoo completely rearranges the metaphor directionally to make it from South to North. "From the South arises a line to the North, completing the road of birth, life and death."[128] The direction contained in her metaphor is contrary to every similar Native American, and even Western Tradition, metaphor, leading the reader to think that Ywahoo is claiming

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126

Cult 101. "Checklist of Cult Characteristics." Available at http://www.csj.org/infoserv_cult101/checklis.htm 13 January 2002.

127

Dhyani Ywahoo. 36 - 37.

128

Dhyani Ywahoo. 37.

single authority in this descriptive passage on life.

Throughout the remainder of Chapter Two, other confusing and contradictory metaphors appear. These confusing metaphors are self-serving devices to solidify Ywahoo's implied claim of single authority. Having offered something familiar with the commingling of religions, a more true representation of motives now begins to appear. She is positioning herself to have unique understanding of sacred Cherokee teachings—that are in fact not purely Cherokee at all.

During this building of single authority, Ywahoo notes a very sacred ritual that is purely—but not exclusively—Cherokee. It is not exclusive to the Cherokees since other Native American cultures have similar rituals. This ritual is known the Cherokees as "Going to the Water." Ywahoo calls it by the correct name. However, she describes it completely wrong:

> We have a ritual once a year where everyone goes down to the water's edge and we throw water over our backs seven times. In that moment we are washing away those thoughts and actions that we recognize as no longer necessary or beneficial for our continued growth and evolution. We wash aside that which has separated us from clear communion, we wash away the illusion of loneliness so

that we can hear again the voice of truth in our hearts.[129]

As this quote reads, it may be interpreted that the entire community partakes in this ritual, a mass baptismal of sorts. Possibly, Ywahoo is commingling religions here again, since what she has described resembles the Hindu ritual of Purna Kumbha, a month-long festival wherein millions of Hindu pilgrims travel once every twelve years to symbolically wash away their sins by bathing in the sacred Ganges River.[130] A recent Purna Kumbha was held from January 9, 2001 through February 21, 2001 and involved more than 80 million people. It dates back to the 10th Century when pilgrims thronged to India for the symbolic bathing. According to beliefs of such pilgrims, this dip in the Ganges will wash away the sins of an entire lifetime.[131] The event is well-planned and highly organized, as is the actual pilgrimage to the event.

For Ywahoo to suggest that such a sacred ritual as Going to the Water is merely symbolic is blasphemy for Cherokees. Going to the Water for the

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Dhyani Ywahoo. 41.

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"Ganges," *Microsoft® Encarta® Online Encyclopedia 2000.* Available at http://encarta.msn.com © 1997 - 2000 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.

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"Purna Kumbha." *Festivals of India*. Ed. www.indiawomanpower.com Available at http://www.indiawomanpower.com/heritage/selheri.php3?teaser=305&val=22&sid=7. 24 December 2001.

Cherokees can be one of two things, sometimes both. For one, this ritual is prayer. For a Cherokee to go to the Water is the equivalent of a Christian going to the alter. Do Christians pray only once a year? Additionally, there is symbolism within the ritual, but there is much more. This is a serious, sacred ritual, perhaps the most important to Cherokees. Secondly, this ritual is medicine. It also is the equivalent of an ill person going to see a physician. A good description of this aspect of the ritual may be found in Chapter Four of this study in the interview with Elsie Vann.

Personal experiences of the Cherokee Going to the Water ritual validate the dual definitions. Though prayer and medicine oftentimes seem in conflict with one another, they do have one major thing in common—faith. Both are matters of faith. As stated in the opening of this chapter, these acts of faith are not reserved for but once a year—certainly not once every twelve years as with the Purna Kumbha. People have been known to go several times per day. The primary time is early in the morning, when the sun is first coming up, as that is when the power of the ritual is most potent. As for going in masse, to my knowledge that is not done. This is a private thing—as faith should be. Oftentimes, even husbands and wives will not go to the water together since it is seen as so individual. However, it is not unheard of for more than one at a time to Go to the Water; sometimes

medicine makers go with their "patients,"[132] but that is more the exception than the rule. Personally, I have never known whole communities, bands, or tribes to Go to the Water en masse.[133]

"Illness is an illusion," declares Ywahoo.[134] This "mind over matter" concept works great for pre-game pep-talks, but to Cherokees illness is very real. It is more accurate to say that Cherokees see even the illusion of illness as real. For example, "When one dreams of being bitten by a snake he must be treated that same as for an actual bite ...."[135] To trivialize the illness is to trivialize the medicine used to treat it. Cherokee medicine is very serious.

The final pages of Chapter Two concerns crystal meditation and ten sacred stones. Here, the author again contradicts herself, in particular with regard to her claim of illness being an illusion. Concerning the sixth stone, which she says is

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I set off patients in quotation marks not to indicate a diminished meaning, but to note that this relationship is not to be compared to the relationship that a physician of the Western civilization has with his or her patients.

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Historically, it is not unheard of for entire families or even communities to Go to the Water en masse. However, these occurrences were generally in times of widespread disaster, such as infections of small pox. Those were extraordinary times that called for extraordinary measures, measures typically not found in traditional Cherokee medicine.

134

Dhyani Ywahoo. 53.

135

James Mooney. *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees.* Nashville: Charles Elder – Bookseller/Publisher, 1972: 295.

the rose quartz, she has this to say: "Medicines are made from these stones in a careful manner, some preparations taking twelve years to complete."[136] Twelve years of preparation for an illusion seems excessive.

Ywahoo offers directions to the reader on how to effect the crystal chant. Her instructions call for the lighting of candles and incense, items more common to Buddhist ceremonies than Cherokee. The purpose of this chanting ritual, according to Ywahoo, is to draw upon the energy of the crystal to purify oneself. All of this is to be done in a shire, and since the ordinary person would most likely not have a shrine sitting around, one may assume that Ywahoo means for people to come to hers.[137] The Peace Village at the Sunray Meditation Society's Bristol, Vermont location has such a shrine.[138]

Chapter Three is titled "Renewing the Sacred Hoop." Much of the information contained in the first few pages of this chapter is repetition from the previous two chapters. It is still not traditional Cherokee teachings, but rather clever tautologistic hyperbole. The repeated material will not be rehashed here.

However, one message that Ywahoo rephrases bears re-examination

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Dhyani Ywahoo. 60.

137

Dhyani Ywahoo. 62 - 64.

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Dhyani Ywahoo and the Sunray Meditation Society. "Odali Utugi the Peace Village." Available at http://www.sunray.org/Village/village.html. 6 December 2001.

because of the ends she seeks. The "us vs. them" polarization rhetoric introduced in the earlier chapters is intensified when the author mentions commercialization. She talks about trends and the "Buy this, buy that" school of American consumerism.[139] She offers condemnation of this mentality, all the while ignoring the hypocritical aspects of her own agenda, most notable the total un-Indian way of selling her "healing." Ywahoo portrays capitalistic consumerism as tainting, yet one is to understand that offering money to her cause is purifying. Though her book does not spell this out, the message is clear on her website. One of the links on the Sunray website is a donation form. In amounts of $25.00 up to $1,000.00, one may contribute to the building of a "Peace Stupa."[140] This message of "peace and harmony for sale" is again rephrased a few pages later when Ywahoo writes of alchemy for the body and soul.[141]

As part of this alchemical process, Ywahoo once again notes chanting as part of a Cherokee ritual. However, this chant is a very unique one—or perhaps it is more accurate to say a very common one. Ywahoo instructs to chant three times

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Dhyani Ywahoo. 74.

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Dhyani Ywahoo and the Sunray Meditation Society. "Peace Stupa." Available at http://www.sunray.org/Stupa/stupa.html. 6 December 2001.

141

Dhyani Ywahoo. 84.

the vowels of the English alphabet: *A-E-I-O-U.*[142] This chant, in particular, is disturbing. For first, if this were a traditional Cherokee chant, twenty-seven generations old, there would be no concept of the vowels of the English alphabet, as this chant would be approximately thirty years older than the first recorded contact with Whites and the English language. Secondly, as mentioned previously, Ywahoo's use of the number three as an intricate part of Cherokee medicine is erroneous. The number four, in honor of the four cardinal directions, is a number more associated with traditional Cherokee medicine. Three is the Christian sacred number in honor of the Holy Trinity.

She again uses the term alchemy when she notes, "There is an alchemical process occurring in this deep, compassionate exploration of all that we are."[143] In the opening segment of this chapter I wrote of alchemy for the soul. I wrote that segment before I even began reading Voices of Our Ancestors. It is ironic that Ywahoo uses the exact terminology in praise of her claim that I used to condemn such a claim. There is no alchemy for the soul in the manner that is being portrayed in Ywahoo's book.

Chapter Four is called "The Family of Humanity." This chapter's title does

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Dhyani Ywahoo. 94.

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Dhyani Ywahoo. 103.

suggest a belief that is common to Cherokee people—that all people are related, and in fact, Ywahoo does mention that several times in this chapter. However, this is not exclusively Cherokee. Many, if not all, Indian Nations have a similar concept— that all life, not just human, is related.

Like the previous chapter, many things found in "The Family of Humanity" are merely cleverly reworded repeats. This holds true for the remainder of the book, so these remaining chapters will be examined in sum. They include Chapter Five: "Generating Peacekeeper Mind," Chapter Six: "A Living Vision of Peace," and Chapter Seven: "Diamond Light."

One thing from Chapter Four that is not a repeat is Ywahoo's mention of musicology and its relation to the healing of human anatomy. "In North America, the musical note A feeds the liver .... C feeds the heart and small intestine .... D flow[s] to spleen and stomach, while kidneys receive the note G .... The note E feeds lungs, and mind cognizes, recognizes, serenity in the flow."[144] She describes the notes selected as the natural primary tones of the crystals used in Cherokee healing.[145] As with the chanting of the English alphabet vowels, traditional Cherokee medicine would have no use for this pseudo-science. More

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Dhyani Ywahoo. 114

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Dhyani Ywahoo. 129.

traditional Cherokee medicine would be herbal, formulaic and ritualistic.

An additional anomaly of Cherokee teachings may be found in Chapter Four. Reading more like a George Lucas science fiction movie script than any Native teachings, this segment refers to an omniscient "presence" that Ywahoo refers to as "The Source." "The sacred rituals of the Native American peoples and other peoples about the world are derived from original instructions from the Source ... ."[146] This "Source" may be with Ywahoo, but as for all Native peoples there is no monolithic presence common to all. Native Americans are as diverse in their teachings, customs, and rituals as are the different peoples of the European continent. The natural diversity of Native peoples makes such a claim as Ywahoo's "The Source" utterly ridiculous.

In Chapter Five, Ywahoo includes a segment titled "Journey to the Temple of Understanding." She notes that this is a mental realm " ... accessible to those who are committed to living in truth and generating harmony...."[147] Yet on her website, she displays the Temple of Understanding as a physical place to where one must make pilgrimage in order to achieve true understanding, presumably of

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[146] Dhyani Ywahoo. 129.

[147] Dhyani Ywahoo. 174.

her traditional Cherokee teachings.[148]

Additionally, on her website Ywahoo names two clans of the Cherokee that do not now exist—nor ever have. The Earth Clan and the Turtle Clan are repeated throughout the site. The Seven Clans of the Cherokee are Wolf, Deer, Wild Potato, Long Hair, Blue, Bird, and Paint. Various sources may list the clans under different or obsolete names, such as Blind Savannah. However, no reputable source, written or oral, has ever listed a Turtle or Earth Clan for the Cherokee.[149]

Throughout the entire book, Ywahoo makes an analogy of Cherokee and salmon as if they were spirit kin. Even White historians, ignorant to the ways of Cherokees, can see that this is not accurate. All one must do to cast doubt upon this claim is to look at the geographic history of the Cherokees and the salmon. One doubts if there are any salmon in Bristol, Vermont, but it is likely safe to say that there is not a great concentration of salmon in Cherokee country, and there is probably not an excessive population of Cherokee people in Vermont either. Ywahoo's comments on Cherokees and salmon lends credence to the theory of "out of place—out of touch." She is not in Cherokee Country, thus she has no

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Dhyani Ywahoo and the Sunray Meditation Society. "Sunray Meditation Society." Available at http://www.sunray.org/index.html. 6 December 2001.

149

Dhyani Ywahoo and the Sunray Meditation Society. "Sunray Meditation Society." Available at http://www.sunray.org/index.html. 6 December 2001.

concept of true Cherokee ways.

Finally, Ywahoo claims "Each one of us is being put to the test, like eggs being held to the light to see if the chickens are growing well."[150] That is not a test; that is an inspection. The true test is Life. Life is what determines what is real and, what is, in the case of Ywahoo and her claims, commercial drivel. Life is how we are all tested, and during this test known as Life, there is no cheating that goes unpunished. All cheaters will eventually be caught or caught up in their cheating ways. Life is not an easy test, certainly not as easy as some books make it out to be. Simple chanting before a mirror does not one a Cherokee make. Upon closer inspection of this "Cliff's Notes" style book on achieving Cherokeeness, I find it to be no more than New Age cult recruitment propaganda, and the Sunray Meditation Society to be a cult.

The claim of the Sunray Meditation Society being a cult and Ywahoo being the cult's leader is based on the following criteria:

1. A cult has a pyramid structure of authority with the leader at the top.
   Ywahoo is the spiritual leader of the Sunray Meditation Society.
2. The leader is always exalted or venerated.
   Ywahoo now answers only to "The Venerable Dhyani Ywahoo.
3. The leader will have questionable credentials and claims single authority.
   There is no way to verify Ywahoo's claims of these sacred teachings that apparently only she possesses. She claims it is *her* duty to bring

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Dhyani Ywahoo. 125.

these teachings to the masses.

4. The doctrine of the cult/leader demands purity.
   Throughout the entire book and web site, Ywahoo repeatedly advocates purity.
5. Mystical manipulation: the leader seeks to promote specific patterns of behavior.
   Ywahoo repeatedly promotes specific mental and physical behavior through chanting and ritualistic offerings.
6. Loaded language: words or phrases with common meanings are changed to mean things exclusive to the leader.
   Ywahoo changes many things Cherokee by commingling them with other cultural mind sets.
7. Requirement of unconditional trust: leaders require unquestioning faith from "students" of their doctrine.
   Ywahoo's "single authority" presence promotes this trust.
8. Leaders will promote an "us vs. them" polarization of the cult and mainstream society.
   Ywahoo uses this exact language—"us vs them" throughout the book.
9. Members are expected to devote inordinate amounts of time and money to the group.
   Ywahoo repeatedly calls for nearly endless meditation and chanting, and solicits astronomical donations from followers via her website.[151]

The material in Voices of Our Ancestors, as well as the corresponding material found on the author's website, when examined against the characteristics

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This list of criteria is a collaboration of information garnered from three websites and one book.
Cult 101. "Checklist of Cult Characteristics." Available at http://www.csj.org/infoserv_cult101/checklis.htm. 13 January 2002.
reFOCUS. "Characteristics of a Destructive Cult." Available at http://www.refocus.org/charcult.html. 13 January 2002.
"Characteristics of Cult Leaders." Available at http://www.phact.org/e/dennis3.html. 13 January 2002.
Michael Shermer. *Why People Believe Weird Things: Pseudoscience, Superstition, and Other Confusions of Our Time*. New York: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1997: 119 - 120.

of cults—and when read with a Cherokee mind set—can lead to only one conclusion.

## The Path to Snowbird Mountain

This book offers very little biographical information about the author. What little information that is available comes from short introductions before each story. Yet these are questionable. From these short introductions, it may be assumed that Traveller Bird, the author, is male, for he speaks of learning much of his knowledge from the male relatives on his mother's side of the family. In traditional Cherokee households, it is the custom for male children to learn Cherokee ways from the mother's male relatives—primarily, any brothers she may have.

The places Bird describes are real. Most are in the Smokey Mountains area of the traditional Cherokee homelands. As with Ywahoo, this author claims to be of the Eastern Cherokee Nation. No clan affiliation is noted. However, he does refer to the "Sky People." According to some Cherokee lore, the Sky People could be all Cherokees. Some "descendance" stories tell of how the Cherokees came from the sky to this world. There is no Sky Clan, but Bird is not necessarily

claiming such.

Bird makes no claim, as does Ywahoo, that his stories are sacred teachings to unify a divided world. His stories are primarily that—just stories. Although, allegorical lessons may be found in some, the stories contained in The Path to Snowbird Mountain contain no "sacred" wisdom. So what is Traveller Bird's motives in publishing such a collection of tales? The author, himself, gives no clear indication of motive. However, the commercialized aspects contained within these tales indicated that his motive is profit.

What is being examined in this book is not the authenticity of the tales written. They are truly traditional Cherokee lore. However, what Bird has done in many of these tales is reshape them in his own image, an image perhaps tainted by money. As noted in a previous chapter of this study, tellers will many times add their own personal touches to the stories they tell, while keeping in place their stories' traditional elements. It is also noted that stories are traditionally treated as scripture, so what Bird has done may also be seen as a sacrilege. He has recast, almost completely, these traditional tales. The Christian parable of "Devil can quote scripture ..." comes to mind. Bird's are nothing more than "recycled" materials, taken from what they once were and redone in such a way as to alter, almost completely, their Cherokeeness. Additionally, traditional Cherokee story-telling methods are ignored in many of Bird's accounts. The authenticity of these

tales is not being questioned—only Bird's motives.

The first story in The Path to Snowbird Mountain is a classic "Earth Diver" tale. Bird does utilize a formulaic beginning with his account: "A long time ago ... ." Earth Diver tales, as outlined previously in this study, tell of how the Earth came to be formed. All tales of this type use the classic story-telling device of rising tension.[152] This is achieved by having the first few divers fail in their attempts to bring up mud. All traditional renditions of Earth Diver tales, not just those that are Cherokee, utilize this formula. However, Bird does not. He cuts straight to the successful diver, which is Turtle. In many, if not most, Earth Diver tales from various segments of Native lore, Turtle is the successful diver. So this aspect of Bird's tale is common. However, other renditions do exist where a different animal is the successful one. Some Cherokee stories tell of Water Beetle as being the one. So Bird is not necessarily erroneous in his use of Turtle.

One thing, however, in Bird's account that differs from most accounts of this tale is Turtle's motive. In many of the traditional renditions the animals who attempt to dive know exactly what they are diving for: mud at the bottom of the

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There exits a five-step formula for dramatic story telling, which may be traced to Aristotle. It is called Freitag's Triangle. Step 1: introduction, 2 rising action, 3 climax, 4 denouement, 5 resolution. This technique is almost universal in its application to dramatic story telling. It is named after Gustav Freitag, who first outlined it in his 1894 book *Technique of the Drama*. For more information on this see *The Fiction Dictionary*, by Laurie Henry. Cincinnati: Story Press, 1995: 120.

water. However, this author has Turtle swimming around looking for earth on the surface. It is only after Turtle cannot find earth that he decides to look for it at the bottom of the water. Turtle finds the mud quite by accident, while in traditional accounts his actions are very deliberate.

Many of the story elements in such tales are common to various tribal lore across the nation. However, one thing exclusively Cherokee is the animal who dries the mud on the successful diver's back. As noted previously in the section on Ywahoo's account of a similar tale, in Cherokee lore the animal who dries the mud is always Buzzard—Grandfather Buzzard. Traveller Bird breaks all Cherokee tradition and uses Eagle. One may speculate that his use of Eagle is to accommodate the non-Cherokee consumer audience. Non-Cherokees, thus non-Indians, readily associate Eagle more with Native Americans than they do Buzzard. So this change may be seen as commercial.

The second story in Bird's book is called "How the Animals Obtained Fire." As with Earth Diver tales, this type of story is common to many Native Nations. Recall, also, the mention of Prometheus and the Mexican story of Opossum and fire from a previous chapter of this study.

In this story, Bird holds somewhat true to the formula of dramatic repetition. He has four birds attempting and failing to procure fire. Typically, there are three failures, with the fourth animal's attempt as the successful one.

Bird extends the failures by two, adding Turkey and Rat. In most traditional accounts of this type of tale, Turkey and Rat are not found. Though Turkey is found in several traditional Cherokee tales, Rat is not.

This particular tale is very similar to one called "Grandmother Spider Steals the Sun." In this particular tale, the objective is not to obtain fire—but light. The animals live in darkness, yet they know of the existence of light on the other side of the world. Three animals attempt to retrieve the Sun and bring light to their side of the world: Buzzard, Opossum, and the third animal often varies according to the teller. One of the more common is Mink. This story combines two explanations: how certain animals came to be the way they are, and how light came to be in this world. Buzzard once had a beautiful head plume that was burned off by the Sun. Opossum had a tail full of hair; it too was burned off by the Sun. Mink smells as he does because of burning from the Sun.

Grandmother Spider is the fourth animal, and the one that is successful in obtaining the Sun. She utilizes her weaving and pottery-making skills to create a clay pot and basket in which she places the Sun and brings it back to the side of the world where she lives. Traveller Bird uses the same method, except he utilizes Firefly in place of Grandmother Spider—the traditional element. Again, this may be seen as purely a commercial move on his part.

The next story is called "Thunder Appoints Eagle Ruler of Earth." This

story is interesting in its application of traits and animals. The basis of the story is the formation of the animals into their common forms. It also explains the assignment of the particular traits. Though there are some traditional Cherokee stories similar to the Traveller Bird story, his account more closely resembles an Iroquoian tale known as "Why the Owl Has Big Eyes."[153] In both accounts, the one from Bird and the Iroquoian story, there is a creator figure who is forming the animals by taking requests from them while they are in their unformed conditions. The creator figure, Eagle, in the Traveller Bird story—Rewano in the Iroquoian—of course, uses his wisdom to approve or deny the forms based upon his expectations of the animals. This particular story is not necessarily "not" Cherokee; it is, perhaps, more Iroquoian in its origins.

The fourth story, "The Origin of Corn and Beans," returns to more Cherokee roots, but as with the first two stories of this book, this is merely a recast and much condensed tale previously published in the work of James Mooney. Bird, though, has changed his account to reflect the origin of corn and beans, whereas in the Mooney work it is the origin of corn and game (animals that are hunted).[154]

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Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz, eds. *American Indian Myths and Legends*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1984: 398 - 399.

154

James Mooney. *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*.

Though the basic elements of the stories are the same, Bird so drastically alters certain details in his account as to almost make it a separate story. He leaves out all aspects of *Kanati* (The Hunter), which is half of the story. Dealing only with *Selu* (Corn), he enhances the aspect of beans by giving *Selu* the last name of *Tuya*, the Cherokee word for beans.

In the Mooney account, *Selu* goes to an elevated storehouse, raised on poles so as to keep animals out of the goods, when in fact there were no goods in the storehouse.[155] *Selu* produces corn by rubbing her belly, and beans by rubbing her armpit. Bird simply changes the places *Selu* rubs: her left side for corn, her right side for beans.

As for the remaining *Selu* portion of the Mooney account, Bird repeats it, almost word-for-word, in his rendition. He also follows these same tactics in at least three other of his stories. "The Squirrel and the Crayfish Race," the sixth story in The Path to Snowbird Mountain, is an exact repeat of "The Crayfish and

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Nashville: Charles Elder – Bookseller/Publisher, 1972: 242 - 249.

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An interesting, perhaps almost comical, aside to this story is the Cherokee word Bird uses for "storehouse." He calls it "unwatali." This is actually two words used in Cherokee slang for "large penis." "Un" is a shortened version of "utanah," which is large. "Watali" is the Cherokee word for penis. This is a serious Cherokee language usage error on Bird's part, further casting doubt on his credibility.

the Fox Race," as found in Friends of Thunder, by the Kilpatricks.[156] The only change is Bird's substitution of Squirrel for Fox.

The very next story in Bird's book is an account of why the opossum's tail is bare. As with the story immediately preceding, it is an exact duplicate of a Kilpatrick account.[157] Nothing is changed here. If Bird's work were for a First Year composition class, academic fraud charges could surely be filed.

Yet another story that is almost a total repeat of one previously recorded in the work of the Kilparticks is "The Rabbit and the Honey-Gum Slide." In Friends of Thunder, the story is called "Rabbit and the Image." Both stories tell of how Rabbit steals water from a community well, though he did not help in the digging of it. The animals from whom Rabbit steals the water decide to trap him by creating an image covered in a sticky substance. Rabbit is indeed captured by the sticky image.

Though Traveller Bird is basically repeating stories previously published, he is not the only one to do so with this particular account of Rabbit. Joel Chandler Harris, best known for his "Uncle Remus" tales, rendered an account of

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Jack F. and Anna G. Kilpatrick. *Friends of Thunder: Folktales of the Oklahoma Cherokees*. Southern Methodist University Press, 1964. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995: 19 - 20.

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Kilpatricks. 16.

this exact story under the banner of "Br'er Rabbit and the Tar Baby." Though it is doubtful the story was published before Chandler did so, it certainly was an oral standard among the Cherokees, who, quite likely, told it to the Blacks who lived and worked among them, and who, in turn, told it to Harris—who eventually published it.

The story that Bird calls "The Dog and the Hunter" is interesting on two fronts. It is very similar to a story recorded by James Mooney in Myths of the Cherokee, called "The Hunter and the Tlanuwa."[158] In the Mooney account, the *tlanuwa* is a giant bird; whereas, in the Bird rendition it is a dog. Many of the stories' other details are the same—with the exception of one very interesting point. In both stories, a game animal is killed as food: the Mooney version has a deer being killed—a traditional animal in Cherokee lore. However, in Bird's version the game animal killed is a buffalo. There were, in fact, woodland buffalo hundreds of years ago in Cherokee country. However, the buffalo is not an animal traditionally associated with Cherokees. This is the second time in his book that Bird drastically alters a traditional story by changing the animals involved. Recall the changing of Buzzard for Eagle in the first story of the book. Here, he substitutes a buffalo for a deer. Again, as with the eagle, speculation is that the

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James Mooney. *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees.* Nashville: Charles Elder – Bookseller/Publisher, 1972: 316.

switch was made for commercial purposes. The buffalo is forever linked to the image of Native Americans, and is almost synonymous with Native people. This is the popular image painted by non-Native anthropologists and historians and the popular image recognized by most of America's consumers.

However, this is not an image of the Cherokee. As with Ywahoo and her salmon-to-Cherokee analogy, Bird, too, makes a false and misleading animal connection. The buffalo is not a traditional Cherokee animal. The buffalo is associated with Plains Indians, with whom the Cherokees were not traditionally affiliated. Again, the geographical history of the iconic buffalo and the Cherokees need only be checked to confirm this.

The essential Cherokeeness of the stories contained in The Path to Snowbird Mountain is not in question. These tales are well-documented and authenticated as Cherokee by other folklorists. One may only speculate as to Traveller Bird's motives for repeating previously documented lore and altering it—drastically, in some cases. Although it was noted earlier in this study that folklore "belongs" to no one, the rewording of field work of others in this genre is deceptive. Rewording it for profit is a sacrilege to Cherokees. Also deceptive is the leading of the reader to believe that recast, reworded, reformulated stories, such as these, are traditional Cherokee. They are Cherokee, but they have been commercialized for a non-Native audience, and thus their Cherokeeness is tainted.

## Emperor of the Tsalagi

There is a man who promotes himself as Emperor of the Cherokees. I have personally met this man who calls himself The Oukah,[159] His Royal and Imperial Majesty, Emperor of the Tsalagi. In addition to these noted titles, he also dubs himself "Ruler of the Kingdom of Paradise," "King of the Upper Cherokee," "King of the Middle Cherokee," "King of the Lower Cherokee," "Keeper of the Ancient Traditions," and "Supreme God of the Sun."

In the cases of Ywahoo and Traveller Bird, the two previously examined authors, their motives are fairly clear. Ywahoo's are obvious. Bird's, though a bit less conspicuous, are easily deciphered. However, The Oukah's motives are quite

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Throughout this segment, I will refer to him as The Oukah. Not that I am acknowledging his claim to be the Imperial Ruler of the Cherokees, but that I truly do not know what else to call him. I do not know his name, other than he calls himself Donald, The Oukah. So I am assuming that Donald is his first name. He notes in a biographical publication that his parents' surname was Robinson, but in all of my communications with him, he has never referred to himself as Donald Robinson, but only as The Oukah, the Emperor, or King.

unclear. In the two pamphlets examined for this study no motive for their publication is clear—no motive, that is, other than self-aggrandizement. The Oukah purports nothing that resembles traditional Cherokee wisdom; in fact, he barely speaks of the Cherokees at all. He mainly reports on himself. He does give cursory attention to the plight of selected minority peoples other than Cherokees or even Indians, but only in a manner that in the end serves to bolster his claim of royalty.

I first became aware of this man during 1994, at a time when some internal difficulties were brewing at the Cherokee Nation in Tahlequah. In a copy of The Cherokee Observer, the "unofficial" newspaper of the Cherokee,[160] dated December 1993, The Oukah wrote, in a letter to the editor, to introduce and explain himself. He invited letters from his subjects to be sent to him at his palace, what he calls the "Court of the Golden Eagle," which is in Dallas, Texas.

Having met him, I found him to be very polite and charismatic, and certainly a dynamic speaker. We spent a couple of hours sitting and discussing matters concerning the internal strife that was tearing the Cherokee Nation apart at the seams. He was a quite intelligent man, articulate and precise with his words.

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*The Cherokee Advocate* was at that time the official newspaper of the Oklahoma Cherokee Nation. It was the one published monthly by the Nation itself, but has since become a separate entity. *The Cherokee Observer* is an independent newspaper that is not officially affiliated with the Cherokee Nation.

During our meeting, he produced facsimiles of envelopes addressed to him. The envelopes were from all over the world and not from just any ordinary person. These envelopes had been sent from such places as the White House in Washington, DC, the British Embassy in Washington, the United States Senate, the British House of Lords and House of Commons, and Spanish National Courts. The letters supposedly inside these envelopes when they were mailed were alleged to have been written by such people as Ronald Reagan, George Bush, Margaret Thatcher, Senator David Nickles, and Countess Caravadossi of Spain. Every member of this impressive collection of pen pals, in some manner, The Oukah maintains, acknowledged this man's title as Emperor of the Cherokee. Though his self-aggrandized title may be acknowledged by recognized heads-of-state, he is not only unacknowledged by Cherokees, but for the most part he is unknown to them.

Perhaps there is a historical basis to his claim of King of the Cherokee. When one recalls the history of the Cherokee tribe and the intermingling of Whites within it, one can easily find several instances in which chiefs were appointed in "drumhead" fashion by greedy land-grabbing English politicians to sign fraudulent treaties by ceding lands to various foreign and domestic governments. The Oukah is, perhaps, a descendant of one such false Cherokee chief. Though he does not claim this, speculation exists as to precisely from where his claim to be King originates.

In contrast to the authors previously examined, The Oukah is quite eager to share much information about himself. As part of a carefully selected collection of pamphlets, he provided me with a highly-detailed biographical data sheet of himself, one that reads more like a résumé; in fact, it is formatted much like a résumé. According to this data sheet, he was born at 9:45 in the morning on November 28, Thanksgiving Day, of 1929 in Muskogee, Oklahoma. A note within this data comments thus: "I think it is only fitting that the entire country celebrate the day of my birth." His "jobs" are listed as being Prince of the Tsalagi from the day of his birth until February 3, 1968, at which time he became the King. How, precisely, he became King is not detailed in his information, but one may speculate it was through inheritance. Additionally, he has apparently held jobs similar to those of "peasants" (his exact words), some of which are newspaper reporter and "local businessman." Although, he goes into no detail about what sort of business.

He also includes some genealogy, apparently so that his ancestry may be traced in an effort to validate his claims. He states that his parents are Ross Lee and Ruby Goss Robinson, and that he is descended from Ghigoue, the first born "beloved woman" through Jane Ross, oldest sister of John Ross. John Ross was indeed a properly elected Chief of the Cherokees. It would appear that it is through this "connection" to the Ross name that The Oukah hopes to legitimize

himself.

The Oukah gave me an autographed copy of a chapbook he wrote, entitled Ruling Your Inner Kingdom.[161] Another publication of his is titled Let's Talk Some Sense.[162] As with Ywahoo's book, there are some things within these publications that are indeed Cherokee. In fact, most of the materials in these books can be considered "authentic" Cherokee wisdom and teachings. However, in the preface of Ruling Your Inner Kingdom, The Oukah acknowledges that he is familiar with the works of Jack and Anna Kilpatrick. One must then wonder at the "authenticity" of *his* acquisition of the knowledge. Did he acquire it through traditional means, as he would lead the reader to believe, or did he merely read of it in someone else's works?

In a previous segment of this study, it was noted that religion is an individual thing. The Oukah acknowledges this in a chapter of Ruling Your Inner Kingdom entitled "The Scheme of Things: "The only life we can work with is our own. The only mind that can create for us is our own." (8) In this particular passage he is writing of faith and religion. His words are true. However, as with

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Donald, the Oukah - Emperor of the Tsalagi. *Ruling Your Inner Kingdom*. Dallas: The Triskelion Co. 1972.

162

Donald, the Oukah - Emperor of the Tsalagi. *Let's Talk Some Sense*. Dallas: The Triskelion Co. 1990.

the Ywahoo publication, this is not exclusively Cherokee, not even exclusively Native American. This concept is shared by many religions the world over.

A bit further in this same work, The Oukah makes somewhat the same comparison as did this study on the paradigms of Native religions and Christianity when it comes to the origin of humans. He notes that humans are fundamentally good, and not born of evil, as the Christian dogma has it. Again, this is not exclusively Cherokee, nor Native. It should not be inferred that this study was making such a claim previously. The Oukah states, "...let us realize that there is but one Power in the universe, and that is God. This power is within us, and within everything. ...God's power is good, not evil." (9) "It is by our own individual faith that we understand our place within God's world." (13) This is similar in nature to what this study promoted previously. Likewise, it is somewhat similar to a canon found within the Christian faith. "There is only one way." That much is true: there is only "one way" to Heaven, Valhalla, Paradise, Mecca, the Happy Hunting Ground, or whatever the various religions of the world may call it. However, there are as many "one ways" as there are individuals seeking paths.

Further in the work Kingdom, The Oukah appears to stray somewhat from his common sense approach to matters and takes on something of a meditational persona, similar to the one found in the Ywahoo work of the previous segment. He writes of chanting; true, Cherokees do have "chants," but nothing like what is

found in this work—at least none that I am aware of. He notes that when we start the day we should begin with prayers. Yes. Traditional Cherokee religious practices teach that. One of the most important ways this is done is by the Going to the Water ceremony as previously noted. Yet, The Oukah, who claims to be the consummate Cherokee, never mentions in any of his works on "traditional" Cherokee teachings the foundation of traditional Cherokee faith—the Going to the Water ceremony. At least Ywahoo, though she has it grossly wrong, does mention it. In past communications with The Oukah, when I mentioned Going to the Water, he had little idea of what I meant. He said he had "heard of it," but that he did not understand it. The morning prayer he suggests is very similar to a Ywahoo meditation noted in the previous segment.

Ironically, The Oukah notes toward the end of this first chapter in Kingdom that what he is actually calling morning prayer is chanting that he learned in a "48 hours course" on alpha, beta, and theta wave subconscious mind control.[163] His actually calling it mind control removes any initial misgivings I held about referring to it as such. It is indeed mind control that he is preaching. As this chapter closes, he even gives brief examples of creative wordplay used by

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Donald, the Oukah - Emperor of the Tsalagi. *Ruling Your Inner Kingdom.* Dallas: The Triskelion Co. 1972: 10 - 13.

proprietors of this craft: mind control.[164]

The second chapter of Kingdom is called "Work on Problems," The Oukah opens with a royal endorsement of modern conveniences. People are busy in modern America. This includes, of course, Cherokees. If one is too busy to pray, a pre-recorded prayer may suffice, so says The Oukah. Simply tape record a prayer, a small portable tape-recording device is all that is needed, and record your prayer. Connect the tape recorder to a timing device and just push "PLAY." At the designated time, the machine will come on and play your personal prayer. Though it is true that Cherokees are skilled in the art of adaptation, these "electro-prayers" are by no means Cherokee. There cannot be any substitute for actual, honest prayer. True Cherokees know this.

As a method of working on problems, as the title of this chapter suggests, The Oukah offers such prayers as the following: "The Words to Cleanse," "The Words for Material Possessions," "The Words for Prosperity," "The Words for Protection," and "The Words for Health." He offers several other prayers which are likely adaptations of formulas from James Mooney's Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees. This again raises the question of how The Oukah came into possession of some of his allegedly royal and sacred knowledge.

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Donald, the Oukah - Emperor of the Tsalagi. *Ruling Your Inner Kingdom*. Dallas: The Triskelion Co. 1972: 12 - 13.

Though many of the formulas or prayers (regardless of how he obtained them) The Oukah suggests are truly Cherokee in nature, such as for health or protection, many are nowhere near traditional Cherokee in their means, methods, nor desired results. For example, the prayer for "material things." There is, to my knowledge, no such traditional Cherokee prayer. In a truly traditional Cherokee frame of mind, wealth is not necessarily measured by the material things one possesses; rather, it is measured by what one gives away. To pray for material possessions is blasphemy for true Cherokees. The Oukah justifies this prayer by claiming material possessions set the physical being at ease, which in turn eases the spirit and brings it closer to God. "I have also found that if we are not prosperous, if there is any lack or limitation in our lives, ... if we do not have our supply, then we are not in true harmony with the Father."[165]

Another attempt at justification of this outrageous claim reads thus: "Abundance is a virtue; poverty is a sin. No one can do his greatest good in this world without the means to accomplish it."[166] With this statement he is advocating materialism and monetary wealth. Making references to biblical stories, he notes

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Donald, the Oukah - Emperor of the Tsalagi. *Ruling Your Inner Kingdom.* Dallas: The Triskelion Co. 1972: 16.

166

Donald, the Oukah - Emperor of the Tsalagi. *Ruling Your Inner Kingdom.* Dallas: The Triskelion Co. 1972: 17.

that the people who were major characters therein wore the finest clothing and held the most material objects. The Oukah claims that Cherokees, and assumably all people, should be wealthy with money and material in order to do the greatest good for the greatest number. He continues by noting that we should make a list of things we desire, not need, but desire—much as a small child might do around the beginning of December—and we are to pray for these things to come into our lives. The Oukah reasons that we may in turn do good things for others once our own desires are satisfied. However, there is a slight flaw in his train of thought. If everyone were to obtain everything they always desired, there would be no more reason to do good, for all desires would be fulfilled.

While it is true that those who have great fortunes are certainly capable of going great good, it is rarely the case that they do. However, I do agree, in part, with The Oukah's thoughts on this matter. Poverty is a crime—a crime perpetuated upon others by those who have abundance, for abundance breeds greed, and greed is not a traditional Cherokee value.

The following is an example of what is, perhaps, plagiarism on The Oukah's part. In his prayer for protection,[167] The Oukah uses a formula very similar to one found in Mooney's Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees. The Oukah

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Donald, the Oukah - Emperor of the Tsalagi. *Ruling Your Inner Kingdom.* Dallas: The Triskelion Co. 1972: 18 - 19.

uses color symbolism for war and protection, as does the Swimmer formula called "What Those Who Have Been To War Did To Help Themselves," found in Mooney's accounts.[168] Rather than actual war, however, the Oukah suggests this prayer for protection against evil thoughts. "Return the evil to the source—double strength and double force!"(18) This part of his prayer is indeed Cherokee. It is believed in traditional Cherokee thought that bad deeds will be returned to those who initiate them. However, as with many paradigms considered throughout this study, this, too, is not exclusively Cherokee, and not even exclusively Native American. This is a variation of the cliche "What goes around, comes around."

The second of The Oukah's publications examined is entitled Let's Talk Some Sense." The opening of the pamphlet asks the eternal question, "What is an American?" From the fledgling days of this great nation, this very question has been asked and most probably has never been definitively answered. In contemporary times, especially in light of September 11, 2001, this question has taken on a whole new meaning. Yet, The Oukah's thoughts on this are that when the citizens of this nation call themselves "Americans," it is an insult to the citizens of nations in Central and South America. "'American' is not a nationality, nor a citizenship. Neither is it a blood line. Actually, there is no legal way to

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Mooney, James. Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees. Nashville: Charles Elder – Bookseller/Publisher, 1972: 388 - 391.

refer to a citizen of the United States of America."[169]

Though this opening section is only one page long, it is filled with excellent advice: "Choose your words very carefully." Should The Oukah heed his own advice he would see that he, himself, is in need of a better dictionary—perhaps a Cherokee one. Recalling the prayers from Ruling Your Inner Kingdom, it is easy to see that what he is doing is as much an insult to Cherokees as what he claims United States citizens are doing to those who live in Central and South America. Calling himself the "King" of all Cherokees and telling Cherokees how to pray for material possessions is an insult of royal proportions.

Unable (or unwilling) to answer his own rhetorical question, The Oukah abruptly moves to the word "Indian." Flying the much-clichéd flag of doubt as to Columbus' discovery of the New World, The Oukah declares that the term "Indian" should not be used to describe a person of indigenous American heritage. He goes on to say that people who are descendants of Native American tribal lineage wish to be called what they are: Cherokee for Cherokee, Choctaw for Choctaw, Creek for Creek, etcetera. Then he becomes much more specific and renders the Cherokee word for the Cherokee people: "Ani-Tsalagi." He translates

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Donald, the Oukah - Emperor of the Tsalagi. *Let's Talk Some Sense.* Dallas: The Triskelion Co. 1990: 3.

this as "The People."[170] The Oukah should have chosen his words more carefully for this translation, for though he is partially correct in his translation, he has left out a vital word: Principal.

What The Oukah has done here is a common mistake among those who are not well-versed in Native American cultures. Many, if not most, Native American nations' names for themselves translate to some form of "The People." However, there are subtle variations among each. For example, some may call themselves "The First People," while others may self-identify as "The Real People." The Cherokees have always called themselves "The Principal People," which even this name is a variant of a Choctaw word. It is indeed quite ironic that the self-professed ultimate Cherokee writes this extended Dennis Miller style rant of calling his people by their true name, yet he, himself, does not.

The Oukah is a very good rhetorician, most likely a self-taught one, much as he is self-appointed as an emperor. However, his skills in the art of rhetoric ill-serve him as ruler of a great people when he does not even know their true name. So, he turns his rhetoric toward the media and Black people in the closing pages of this pamphlet. Saying nothing that has not already been said a thousand times about media personalities, he notes much the same information about Blacks as he

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Donald, the Oukah - Emperor of the Tsalagi. *Let's Talk Some Sense*. Dallas: The Triskelion Co. 1990: 4 - 5.

does Native Americans. He questions the changes in names given to and used by Black people in the United States over the past several decades. "Negro," Colored," "African-American": all are questioned as to their use before The Oukah bows out by claiming, "If they are satisfied with it, I can live with it."[171] "It" being the contemporary politically accepted label of African-American. One might wonder why The Oukah even questions the names placed upon other races of people when he cannot even correctly identify his own.

In the final analysis, none of the information contained in any of The Oukah's pamphlets examined within this study sheds any new light on what it means to be Cherokee. In fact, it tends to cast some shadows of doubt. Many of the things he claims Cherokees should be or want are about as non-Cherokee as one may get. As previously noted, he is (or was at the time of my meeting him) a very charismatic, charming, and well-spoken man. However, so was Jim Jones.[172]

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Donald, the Oukah - Emperor of the Tsalagi. *Let's Talk Some Sense*. Dallas: The Triskelion Co. 1990: 11.

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Reference is made here to the self-appointed Reverend Jim Jones of the "People's Temple." This is the man who led hundreds to their deaths in the Jonestown, Guyana mass suicides/murders.

## Warning

*We have men among us, like the whites,*
*who pretend to know the right path,*
*but will not consent to show it without pay!*
*I have no faith in their paths,*
*but believe that every man must make his own path!*
*Black Hawk, Sauk*

All of the materials examined in this section were selected primarily for their questionable content. Some are outright blatant lies. Some are recastings, not necessarily lies, but certainly not truth. What the authors would have the consuming public believe is that their words are unquestionably Cherokee, for they portray them as such. Consequently, the public sees all Cherokees in this same light. This is a blueprint for many of the misunderstandings between Natives and Whites. Further widening this division are those who maintain that since it is written so it must be. Most books about Native Americans hold very few of the answers of what it means to be Native American. The Doris Lessing quote from The Golden Notebook (cited previously in this study) bears continued

consideration.

What Lessing claims of the "real history of Africa" may likewise be said of the real history of the Cherokees, as well as other Native American peoples. Many of the books concerning Cherokees have been written by non-Cherokees, generally for commercial purposes. Such works often portray the Cherokee people from the wrong paradigm, for the wrong reasons. This study is not an attempt to discourage people from reading about Cherokees, but rather to encourage people to read these books as a judge and jury might read evidence in a trial—with a critical mind.

However, there exists a viable alternative to reading about Cherokees. Go visit them. Sit down with some Cherokees and listen to their stories. Spend some time with Native American people and experience the similarities rather than reading about the differences. If value is what the Western tradition of literacy seeks, the value of one afternoon spent with a Native American elder, and listening to oral tales is an immeasurable experience when compared to a hundred books about it.

# Chapter Four

*There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,*
*than are dreampt of in your philosophy.*
William Shakespeare, from
*The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*
Act One, scene five

## The Authors

In the previous chapter, what I have been referring to as "commercial" literature was examined. In the case of the texts examined therein, all authors claim to be Cherokee, and though I am not questioning their claims to heritage, their motives are being questioned. I do so keeping in mind the Black Hawk quote noted previously in this study concerning Indians who will not show "the way" without being paid.

Now it is time to examine some works by authentic, as opposed to commercial, Cherokee authors. These authors are well-known within Cherokee

communities and are seen as living historians of Cherokee ways. The authors in this segment are either personally known to me or were suggested by other recognized Cherokee authors and scholars.

Before beginning the examination of materials from the selected authors, it is prudent to note that though only a few Cherokee storytellers and authors are utilized within this study, many more exist who are noted and respected, but who cannot be thoroughly examined here due to space limitations. "First and chief in the list ... "[173] is James Mooney and his pioneering work with Cherokee shaman A´yûñ´ini, or Swimmer, in Myths of the Cherokee, originally published in 1900 by the Bureau of American Ethnology. Though Mooney himself was not Cherokee, the stories of Swimmer, which Mooney brought to the attention of the world, are immeasurable in their value of Cherokeeness.

Other, more contemporary, storytellers and authors include Lloyd Arneach, cited previously in this study, whose book, The Animals' Ballgame: A Cherokee Story from the Eastern Band of the Cherokee Nation, was published in 1992 by Scholastic Library Publishers. Additionally, there is Watt Spade and Willard Walker who released Cherokee Stories (Wesleyan University Press, 1966), Glenn Twist with his Boston Mountain Tales, (Greenfield Press, 1997), and Gayle Ross

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Mooney, James. Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees. Nashville: Charles Elder – Bookseller/Publisher, 1972: 236.

with several books: How the Turtle's Back Was Cracked: A Traditional Cherokee Tale (Dial Books, 1995), How Rabbit Tricked Otter and Other Cherokee Animal Stories (HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), and a collaboration with Joseph Bruchac titled The Story of the Milky Way (Dial Books, 1995). There is also Robert Bushyhead with his recently released Yonder Mountain: A Cherokee Legend (Marshall Cavendish Corporation, 2002), and Wesley Studie, now better known as actor Wes Studi, and his Adventures of Billy Bean stories (Cross-Cultural Education Center, 1982).

Additionally, for all of these authors who have found their way into print, there exists even more community recognized storytellers—those are local storytellers well known and respected within their specific Cherokee communities—who are yet unpublished.

It is relevant, here, to recall the commercial representations of Cherokee Little People wherein they were portrayed as evil and as harbingers of death. By contrast, it is not so at all in their portrayals by these Cherokee authors. It is here that I believe the most vivid differences may be seen between the two paradigms. It is here where I believe the "great rift" between Western literature and Native American lore is most evident. Though this study is not intended to perpetuate any divisions, it does not mask the fact that divisions exist, and though this one study may never bring about any closure to this rift, it may, as previously noted,

serve at least to begin the process of recognition by those on either side of the divide. As the first author examined for this segment notes, "[u]nclear and limited perceptions create a difference."[174]

Lynn King Lossiah, along with her husband Ernie Lossiah, are Eastern Band Cherokees who live near Cherokee, North Carolina. Together they authored and illustrated The Secrets and Mysteries of the Cherokee Little People: Yunwi Tsunsdi. These Cherokee authors depict the Little People in a manner completely opposite from the Western portrayal found in commercial literature. For example, one of the first stories in the book tells of how the *Yunwi Tsunsdi* helped an entire village. "Once the *Yunwi Tsunsdi* had been very kind to the people of a certain settlement, helping them at night with their work and taking good care of any lost children ...." (19)

The story goes on to tell that something, though it is not specified what, was done to offend the Little People. however, rather than taking revenge, as Western literature might portray, the *Yunwi Tsunsdi* simply leave the area and are never seen near that settlement again.

Lossiah's book also gives some historical information on the Cherokee Little People. She notes that many of the first Christian missionaries to Cherokee

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Lynn King Lossiah. *The Secrets and Mysteries of the Cherokee Little People: Yunwi Tsunsdi*. Cherokee, NC: Cherokee Publications, 1998. 79.

country were very narrow-minded people who labeled the Cherokee as superstitious pagans. "The Little People were marked as mere fable and falsehood. In the mind of the Cherokees, a logical person must either deny all miracles and mysteries of natures of none of them." (28) This story continues by explaining how the Cherokees did not—and still to this day often do not—discuss the Little People and other Cherokee secrets. "They [Cherokees] are not interested in debating the issue." (28) It is not that Cherokees, nor other Native American tribes, are secretive societies, but rather that Cherokees do not wish to debate Cherokee matters with non-Cherokees who do not and will not accept beliefs other than their own.

Lossiah recounts some of the most frequently told Cherokee Little People stories, many of which are also found in other publications. The difference in what Lossiah has done and, say for example, what Traveler Bird has done is that Lossiah holds true to the traditional Cherokee storytelling formulas. Although she only summarizes the stories, the traditional elements are present. She does not recast the stories into something different, but rather tells the reader that these selected stories are very common and have been told over and over again by many different tellers; she is merely noting their commonality.

Traveller Bird, on the other hand, introduces the stories in his collection as his own, and recasts traditional Cherokee tales into a more commercial format by

removing several of the storytelling elements. For example, the repetition with variation traditionally found in many Cherokee, and other Native American, tales is absent in Traveller Bird's stories. Repetition with variation is a key element in Cherokee, as well as other Native American, tribal lore, wherein an important concept is repeated, but with a slight change each time. A traditional number of times for an element to be repeated is four, though it may vary from one teller to another. This repetition, critical to Native American orality, is seen as a redundancy in Western literature, thus Bird has removed it. Additionally, recalling the analysis of his collection in the previous chapter, he has recast many of the stories by using animal figures not traditionally associated with Cherokee lore. This is much the same as Ywahoo does by associating Cherokees and salmon.

Lossiah, in a segment titled "Never Challenge the Little People," issues a warning. The difference in her warning and the one issued by Western authors is stark. As a Cherokee, Lossiah understands that the Little People are much the same as other people and that they wish to be treated as such; whereas, the Western paradigm often notes the Little People are "always harbingers of death." Writing of the Little People, Lossiah notes, "Their belief is one of balance." (59) The concept of balance is important to the Cherokees, as well as to many Native American tribes. Thus the importance of the circle in many tribal cultures is affirmed. Balance includes treating others as one would wish to be treated, a

belief allegedly also held by many Western religions.

Of particular interest when noting the difference between Cherokees' understandings and the Western world's understandings of Little People is the relationships between the *Yunwi Tsunsdi* and children. Recalling some of the commercial publications previously noted, A Field Guide to North American Monsters and A Field Guide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels, and Other Subversive Spirits for example, it is claimed that the Cherokee Little People often kidnap children or deliberately lead them astray. In complete contrast to this, Lossiah notes, "The Little People and children enjoy each other. One does not threaten the other. It is said that Little People talk to the children about animals and nature. The Little People want the minds of children to grow well and to develop important concepts of truth." (83) Teaching the children the concept of truth is one value also claimed by Western societies. Yet, it is Western literature that violates this important concept by spreading disinformation and misunderstandings about the true nature of Cherokee Little People and other various types of Cherokee and Native American lore.

Lossiah further challenges the claim of the *Yunwi Tsunsdi* being harmful to children in a story that details how the Little People helped to protect a Cherokee boy from his own foolishness. The story describes how the boy acts dangerously by swinging from a vine out over a river, even though he has been repeatedly

warned that the vine might break and cause him serious bodily injury in a fall. Arrogantly, he continues to swing from this vine—that is, until one day he returns to the vine to find it cut down. One might point out that the boy's parents may have been those who cut the vine. However, the boy himself quickly dismisses that as a possibility. "That's impossible!" he claimed. "No one can climb that far up." The boy points to the place high in the tree where the vines have been cut. An old man who lives nearby tells the boy that the Little People cut the vine to save him from himself. (98)

One thing of note in the forthcoming interviews which also appears in Lossiah's book is the mention of the Little People throwing rocks or gravel at Cherokees. One might think that the throwing of rocks is nothing but intentionally harmful, and thus mean or even evil. However, as noted in the interviews, as well as Lossiah's book this is not at all the case. The throwing of the rocks is intended to scare away Cherokees in order to prevent potentially even greater harm. Additionally, Lossiah notes that sometimes the *Tsunsdi* may assume an animal or some other non-human form. This, too, may be seen as an effort to scare away Cherokees from a place that may be dangerous, or to warn when a person may be getting too close to a secret place of theirs. (102, 110, 129) These warnings are potentially the source of disinformation and misinterpretation by Western authors who claim that the Little People are always evil or harbingers of death.

Sometimes, the *Tsunsdi's* warnings may be ignored and death may result. However, this does not make them evil.

Living Stories of the Cherokee, collected and edited by Barbara R. Duncan, is another book to be examined within this study.[175] In her work, Duncan accompanied Cherokee storytellers to storytelling events, primarily at schools, and recorded their sessions, which she then transcribed. About her collection methods, Duncan notes that she took an unobtrusive position at the events and simply observed the natural interaction between the tellers and their audiences. Duncan further notes that in her transcription of the tales, she used a method known as "oral poetics," which means writing out the speakers' words in a manner that resembles free verse poetry. She notes that this method more closely represents the inflections, pauses, breaks, and mannerisms utilized by the speakers during the tellings.

In the "Introduction" of the book, Duncan writes, "Cherokee culture is alive in the hearts of the Cherokee people. It is stronger, richer, bigger, and more enduring than any book that can ever be written about it." (1) Duncan's claim serves to reenforce an earlier claim made in this study, that in which the experience of interaction with a Cherokee storyteller is more enriching than

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Barbara R. Duncan. *Living Stories of the Cherokee.* Chapel Hill: North Carolina UP, 1998.

reading about it. Why, then, did Duncan produce a book about it? For the same reason this study was written—so Cherokees could represent Cherokees in a Cherokee fashion.

Duncan's claim is also a disclaimer. She tells the reader that although these stories were collected and transcribed and are represented in a manner so as to reflect as closely as possible their true rendition, her book, as is any book, is no substitute for the real thing. By extension, the claim that commercial books written by non-Cherokee and false Cherokee authors are not only no substitute, but are also gross misrepresentations, is valid. Duncan expands on this further. "When stories are rewritten to be more literate and 'readable,' they lose the beauty and style of the oral versions and their tellers, whose voices are drowned out by the conventions of standard English and the changes of an editor." (2 - 3)

Concluding this line of thought, Duncan further notes that "[I]n the past several hundred years, authors and anthropologists have at times sought out 'Indian secrets' in order to titillate audiences and make money." (15) She further notes that these "secrets" and folklore may often be turned into a "Walt Disney" film, "... which in turn generates mass-produced clothing, books, songs, and toys." (12) When money talks, the Western mind listens, and sadly that is often the only thing it hears.

Six storytellers are collected in Duncan's work. However, only four of the

six will be examined in this study. This is not an arbitrary exclusion of two, but rather a careful selection of the tellers based on the relevance of their tales to the subject matter of this study. The first storyteller in the book is Kathi Smith Littlejohn, who is of the Eastern Band of the Cherokee, as are all of the storytellers in Duncan's book. Littlejohn was born in Cherokee, North Carolina, where she grew up in a storytelling household. (29 - 31)

The story examined here is one of the Little People. Littlejohn begins by noting that there are many stories and legends about the Cherokee Little People. She notes that they can be very helpful, but are also known to play a few tricks. (68) This opening is something of a formulaic beginning for her story. Formulaic beginnings and endings are popular storytelling devices in Cherokee culture. The same holds true for many Native American storytelling cultures.

Littlejohn's story is about a boy who never wants to grow up, thus he is known as "Forever Boy." (68 - 70) While others around him plan what they will be when they grow up, Forever Boy holds fast to his notion of never growing up. Finally, his father tells him that he will have to grow up and become a man. This makes Forever Boy sad, almost to the point of despair. So sad that he goes to the river and cries. It was while at the river that several animals, Forever Boy's friends, come to him and try to console him. They ask him to return to the river the next day to say goodbye. However, as every Cherokee knows, there is no such

thing as goodbye.

When Forever Boy returns the next day, the animals reveal to him their true forms: Little People. They tell him that he does not have to grow up, that he can come and live with them and remain Forever Boy. The Little People said they will send a vision to his family to let them know he is with them and alright. Forever Boy decides to live with the Little People and remain young always. The story ends by noting that the tricks often played on us by the Little People are not meant to be evil, but to remind us of the Forever Boy inside us all, and to remain young in our hearts.

This story might be interpreted by Western authors or readers as one of the alleged child abductions often attributed to the Little People. However, as is clear in Littlejohn's rendition, there is no abduction. It is a clear and conscious choice by Forever Boy to remain with the Little People. It is not the titillating, suspense riddled dramatic account often portrayed in similar renditions written by non-Cherokees. Littlejohn's story shows how the Little People helped Forever Boy, whom they considered to be their friend. It also illustrates how the tricks played by the Little People are not designed to be hurtful, but helpful—by reminding us to balance our daily work with a little fun.

Davey Arch is the next storyteller. He, too, was born in Cherokee, North Carolina. He still lives in the area. An accomplished carver, as well as a

storyteller, Arch carves Cherokee masks and other figures to accompany many of his stories. Many of Arch's stories contained in Duncan's book are of animals, and in particular, snakes. The story profiled here is one of the *Uktena*, the legendary serpent-like creature.

The opening of Arch's story is not quiet as formulaic as Littlejohn's, or of many other Cherokee tellers. He opens in a more casual manner, as if he is discussing Cherokee story materials, rather than actually telling a story. He tells of a crystal found on the Tellico Plains, a crystal like the *Uktena* is believed to possess. This crystal was said to have been found wrapped in deer skin, and put away as if it were no to be used any more.

Although Arch does not go much further into detail about this particular crystal, Cherokee legend holds that *Uktenas* did indeed possess crystals that held their powers, and for a Cherokee to come into possession of such a crystal would empower that person with the serpent's magic. Other stories hold that the only way to kill an *Uktena* is to shoot it in the seventh spot back from its head. This was said to be the crystal wherein its powers were held. Depending on which type of *Uktena* story is being told, these creatures are sometimes metaphors for Western civilization or legendary beasts symbolic of the Cherokee Underworld. In either case, such crystals are a source of power.

The next story to be examined is a personal account told by Edna

Chekelelee, a Wolf Clan Eastern Band Cherokee who lived in Graham County, North Carolina until her passing in 1995. This story differs somewhat from the previous two, in that as it is not of any mythical or legendary creature; rather, it is about a time Chekelelee's authenticity as a Cherokee was questioned. Chekelelee notes that she was in Kansas City to perform at a church as part of a singing group. Upon their arrival at the church, Chekelelee and her group were asked, "When are the *real* Indian people coming?" Chekelelee responded by saying, "Well, I'm Indian. I just got here."

The questioning continued in this manner until Chekelelee asked just what they were expecting Indians to be. A young man answered, "I want an Indian with big beautiful feathers on."

Chekelelee retorted, "Oh, you're not looking for an Indian, you're looking for something else. I said I was full-blood Cherokee Indian. I didn't say I was a chicken."

This incident serves as testimony to the consuming public's misunderstood image of Native American people, and thus their literature and lore. Commercial publications, especially ones such as Ywahoo's, feed the consuming minds of an ignorant Western paradigm by perpetuating the stereotypes conjured up by those desiring titillation.

This leads directly to a story by the final teller in Duncan's work: Freeman

Owle. He tells a story called "Going to Water." In this story, Owle tells of a particular young Cherokee male who performs the ritual of Going to the Water every morning. Recall that Ywahoo emphatically states that the ritual is performed only once a year. For her, it would appear an everyday ritual is not titillating—not romantic enough—and is of little to no value, and thus little interest to a paying Western paradigm. Ywahoo creates an overly mystical image of a Chaucerian-like pilgrimage to feed the desire for romanticizing of the Native Americans. Freeman Owle tells the truth:

> He [a young Cherokee male] would go down to the waters of the Tennessee ... early in the morning every morning, wade out waist deep, take the waters of the river and throw it up over his head. And say, 'Wash away any thoughts or feelings that may hinder me from being closer to my God. (207)

This is a very simple, very basic prayer. Some may not even call it a prayer since it is so simple. However, what more is needed? It is an honest prayer, not romanticized, not dramatic, with nothing seemingly mystical about it. Yet it is simply a common Cherokee prayer. Disappointing as it may be to a Western paradigm—it is authentic.

Owle concludes his section, and the book, with a bit on storytelling. He claims that storytelling is a two-way interaction. (215) He continues by noting the

other mediums popular today: television, radio, and books. These are all one-way, he says. "They [the audience] have no input, they have no identity, they have no place, and they have no one there with them." (215 - 216)

## The Interviews

This segment contains interviews conducted in support of this study. Some of the interviewees I know personally and know them to be storytellers. Others, Nancy Pritchett and Elsie Vann, were known by my mother, who is a social worker for the Oklahoma Cherokee Nation. When I asked my mother, Georgia Kent, for help in locating elders or storytellers, she did not hesitate in contacting Nancy and Elsie, whom she had known for years and knew to be living repositories of Cherokee lore.

All of the interviews contain stories that were told to me under "unnatural" conditions. By this I mean these stories were told when most often only myself and the tellers were present, and they were video taped while I took notes on a laptop computer.

The natural setting of a storytelling event is a gathering, something akin to a reunion or a holiday feast wherein many people are gathered and take turns telling and listening to numerous tales. Ideally, (to avoid accusations of hypocrisy) I could travel back in time and attend such an event as an unnoticed observer and

recorder, and in a manner of speaking that is what I have done. As a Cherokee who grew up around this type of environment I know of and understand the "natural" setting of such storytelling events. However, since I could not travel back in time, the more academic means of historians and anthropologists were used.[176] The unnaturalness of the settings of these interviews perhaps intimidated the subjects somewhat, especially initially, but they all warmed up to the situation once the excitement of telling stories commenced.

Unless otherwise noted, the interviews in this chapter were conducted in the homes of the story tellers. During some of the interviews other people were present: my mother, Georgia Kent, who helped in translating many of the stories; my wife, Tori; and my nephew, Sam. These interviews, although I certainly feel they are necessary for many reasons, are not the comfortable family event I so fondly describe in the Introduction. Therefore, I felt it beneficial to have people other than just myself present as it might tend to put the story tellers more at ease

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To clarify this statement, I direct the reader's attention back to the statements concerning academicians (historians and anthropologists) found on pages 94 - 95. With this study, I am not taking issue with the means nor methods used by such. Their means and methods are not under attack here, as I understand them to be truly a fine means of preservation. Issues arise when said professionals—who are often non-Natives—misunderstand, misinterpret, and erroneously assign false allegories and other misinformation to Native lore, then render these errors as axioms—absolute, unquestionable truths. Often these errors are reported by way of a highly publicized book that brings notoriety to the author and establishes that person as an expert in Native lore. The underlying argument found in this division is not one of oral vs. written, but of cultural Indians vs. commercial experts. This is what Vine Deloria calls the Heyerdahl Effect. See pages 34 - 35 of this study.

to have an audience rather than just an interviewer.

Oftentimes, at storytellings the elders speak while the younger generation attentively listens to their knowledge. More contemporary storytelling events, such as those held among Native American student groups at universities, may be compared to small, informal discussion sessions. The manner in which such meetings commonly function consists of several people, each with varying degrees of storytelling experience, gathering informally to share their tales and gain experience in the craft. These, too, are unnatural when compared to traditional storytelling events, but they are certainly becoming more popular, especially on university campuses and with a younger generation of Cherokees and other Natives.

In most of the stories that follow, one should note the formulaic beginnings and endings. Many Cherokees, when they are about to tell a story, will begin with some formula. Some of the more common ones include references to things that happened "...a long time ago ...." Another popular opening is something of a disclaimer, noting that the teller may not remember much about the accounts about to be rendered. These formulaic beginnings may be compared to the "Once upon a time" introduction of many popular fairytales. It signals to the audience that a story is about to begin. The same can be said for formulaic endings. Many Cherokee tellers will end with something to the effect of "And now my story is

done," or "And that's all I remember about that." This, in the fairy tale realm, is the equivalent of "And they all lived happily ever after." These formulaic beginnings and endings vary from teller to teller, and often the same person will change his or her introductions and endings, or even simply leave them out.

In an effort to capture the essence of the storytellers' voice inflections, body movements, and hand gestures, I use in the transcribed text of the interviews certain spellings and unique punctuation and iconic marks, similar to what Dennis Tedlock has done with his works in the Zuni storytelling tradition, The Spoken Word and the Art of Interpretation and Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians.[177] A reading guide precedes the first interview.

Unlike Ywahoo, the Oukah and Traveller Bird, the tellers who participated in the following interviews all live in northeastern Oklahoma. All are members of the Cherokee communities in and around Stilwell and Tahlequah. Their connections with their own Cherokeeness and that of the region are understandable by the relationships they keep with the Cherokee community. They have a sense of place within their communities, within their own identity, and within the identity of the Cherokees.

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Tedlock, Dennis. *The Spoken Word and the Art of Interpretation.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press: 1983.
- - - . *Finding the Center: Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians.* New York: The Dial Press, 1972.

# Reading Guide

When reading the text of the forthcoming interviews, refer to this guide for an explanation of the unorthodox spellings, punctuation usages, and symbols.

| | |
|---|---|
| "When I was a liiiitle girl." | When a word contains letters multiplied beyond their traditional spelling compliment, this indicates that the speaker draws out that word for emphasis. This typically occurs with vowels sounds. |
| "THEY CALLED IT A **BOOGER!**" | When the dialogue is in all capital letters, the speaker utilizes either a louder, more dramatic voice, or is excitedly reenacting the story. If a word or phrase is bolded within an all capitalized sentence, the speaker emphasizes that word even more strongly. |
| "*It was real quiet.*" | When the dialogue is hushed for emphasis, italics are used. |
| "It was at night<br>A *liiiittle* after dark<br>The men heard something<br>Running behind them | Occasionally, the tellers recount their stories in an almost poetic format. The dialogue of such passages is broken into poetic-like phrases to indicate such. |

| | |
|---|---|
| "It was BIG• | A bolded period raised half a space above the traditional placement indicates an abrupt stop with a slight dramatic pause before the next word is spoken. |
| ▲ | A triangle pointing up indicates that the speaker raises his or her hand(s) in a gesture to add emphasis or dramatic illustration to the dialogue. |
| ▼ | A triangle pointing down indicates that the speaker lowers his or her hand(s) in a gesture to add emphasis or dramatic illustration to the dialogue. |
| 𝄞 . . . 𝄞 | Passages that were told in a chanting or singing/near singing manner are surrounded by the treble clef symbol. |
| < | Indicates ascending inflection in the speaker's voice. |
| > | Indicates descending inflection in the speaker's voice. |

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The following interview was conducted on February 6, 2000 with Georgia Kent, my mother. She is a fluent speaker of the Cherokee language and a social worker for the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma. As part of her duties, she often

serves as an interpreter for Cherokee elders who possess a limited command of English. The interview was conducted at the Best Western Hotel in Springdale, Arkansas. The interview was conducted in English. With Georgia being my mother and having all the connections to Cherokee elders and communities she does, she seemed a natural choice. The stories she told are of personal interest as they are based in my own family.

The first story she tells is an account of a *skili*. As previously mentioned, *skilis* are traditionally witches, but there seems to be a growing trend, especially among contemporary Cherokees, of referring to *skilis* as "boogers." As noted, perhaps it is because of the shape-shifting capabilities of the traditional *skilis*. Oftentimes, as with this story, the figure will appear to be headless. Of all the stories collected for this study, none of the tellers could, or would, explain why the spectral figures were thus featured.

Georgia Kent: "This is a story about—one our grandpa used to tell when we was little kids. At night we would sit around and listen to the old people who would come around and tell stories, and we would sit there and listen. One of the more famous stories they told was about maaaany, many years ago my grandfather and his family had been to a church—the name of the church was Long Springs. And laaaate one night they were going home, and they had to go through an area on their way home to a community called Flat Rocks. But the road they had to walk,

in Cherokee they called it ▲ *nui tsuwasiohosv*, ▼which would be like a rock slide. And a long time before then, there was like a little cave—a little hole, beside the road• Some guys who had been helping to build the road had been killed and stuffed ▲ into that hole—that little cave. Later on, when they were building a new road, *they found the remains of the skeletons*.

"He [Grandfather] used to tell us that late one night they were on their way home from church. They were riding in an oooold-timey wagon pulled by two horses, and as they went on they begin to hear SOUNDS coming from behind them. At first he said it sounded like a dog, and that's what they thought it was. *They tuuuurned around to look, but couldn't see anything*. They went on a ways farther and kept hearing it. Finally they turned and saw it• And as it got closer, it wasn't a dog, but a large hog or a pig. AND THE HOG **DIDN'T** HAVE A HEAD• He said the hog tried to jump up in the back of their wagon. He said him and his brother grabbed some boards that was in the back of the wagon and tried to **BEAT** ▲ the hog to keep it from getting up in the wagon; all the time the others [people in the wagon] tried to get the horses to go FASTER. THE HORSES GOT SCARED AND TOOK OFF TROTTING FASTER—RUNNING. He used to tell us that they finally got away from what ever it was chasing them. To them—they called it a 'booger', ▲ *skili* in Cherokee.

"This story was also told by his brother-in-law, whose name was Mose

Feeling. *He pretty much told it the same way.* I don't know if Mose was with them that night or not. And there for a loooong time people were afraid to drive through that area because they believed that *skilis* lived there. People would say that they would see figures throughout the night—maybe a cat or a deer run across the road or just something. You would see soooomething there. And sometimes we would be walking through there during the day and then all of a sudden the rocks would start falling; there would be a small rock slide. ▲▼ I don't know if that's why they called it *nui tsuwasiohosv*—like I said that means rocks sliding. Even today people say they hear things there or see things at night. They believe that there is something there.

"ANOTHER TIME—*this is a different story.* When I was a liiiittle girl we had been to church at the old Oakdale school building where I went to school. And one night we had been to church there and right next to the school there was an old house, just an old frame house. And there was a family who lived there; his name [the father] was Ovie King. We were all outside playing in the school grounds and we heard some gunshots. And Mr. King had shot himself. The teachers took us all back into the schoolhouse. Somehow they sent for the sheriff and an ambulance. Someone had to run for a waaaays because there wasn't a phone at the school. I don't know where they had to go.

"After that, one night we—my Aunt Opal, Cousin Marie, and me—had

been to church and we were walking home. The moon was shiiiining real bright and we saw these figures coming down the road. *It was right about where Mr. King used to live.* I remember my Aunt Opal and Cousin Marie saying they wondered who those people were that were walking toward us. I think we were kind of scared because we knew what had happened there at the King house. We saw these figures as they were coming toward us and didn't know what to do. There were two of them• As they got closer—*real close to us*, we realized that it was a couple of leaves that were blowing down the road. I don't know—I remember being scared about that. We saw two people walking toward us, and I don't know if they came out of that house or what•

"That's another place that the older Indian people believe that there's something there. There's an old cemetery just right there close, too, and some of the older people believe there are *skilis* there, too. I don't know if it's because of the shooting or what• That little house [King] is gone now and that old schoolhouse is occupied by a family now. But that's something else—another story about local people believing in something."

Leslie Hannah: "Do you know of any other stories you've heard of people talking about down around the Pumpkin Hollow area or Flat Rock—any animal spirit stories or anything like that?"

GK: "Well, all of the older people believed in the Little People. And my

Grandpa (George) and Grandma (Nancy Buckhorn) used to tell us about stories about the Little People. They used to say that they believed in leaving out food for them at night. They would aaaalways tell us to be careful out in the woods and around the house because if we upset the Little People they could cause us to get lost. Nancy used to tell us that when she was a little girl, she said she had gone to do some work, some farm work to help another family. It was getting dark when she started walking home—AND ALL OF A SUDDEN SHE HEARD A WOLF HOWLING• And she got scared and started running. She said she climbed up a tree when she heard it getting reeeal close. She said about that time the wolf came and started **JUMPING ▲**up at her where she sat on that limb. She said finally—*and she knew it was the Little People that came to help her*. That wolf, she said, started yelping and acting funny—like it was confused. Pretty soon, she said, it ran away. She said she looked around and couldn't see aaaanything but some small—what she said looked like porcupine quills sticking in the ground and even one or two in her legs. She said it was the Little People who came and helped her by driving off that wolf. That's why she always told us to not go tooooo far off into the woods and be careful where we stepped and to always share whatever we may have with the Little People."

LH: "Whereabouts was that that this happened?"

GK: "This would be around the old Long Springs Church, down close by Eldon,

up the hill a little ways. She used to tell us about a cave in that area. There's not many people who know about that cave. My mom and aunts and uncles used to talk about going down to that cave to play. And as a matter of fact, my mom, Laura, has told me about taking food down to that cave to leave for the Little People.

"Back then, the old people used to gather 'round at night and told stories. And I remember when I was a little girl sitting around and listening to tales that they talked about. There was a legend about Cedar Holler—*what we call Cedar Holler*—where maaaany, many years ago about this—they [the older people] described her as being a beautiful lady. And it was up the river around what they call Goat's Bluff. *This lady fell off of Goat's Bluff.* The people believe that if you went up there late at night, or early in the morning or evening—whatever— that you could hear this lady calling for help. I believe that lady's last name was Gatewood. And my mom used to tell me that this lady was sitting there combing her ▲ hair, and they always thought that someone came and pushed her off, but they really don't know what happened. But, uh, now I've heard tell that you can still hear this lady calling for help. Some people say lately they've heard her singing. So thinking maybe that she—or someone had really found out what had really happened to her.

"There's a lot of little stories like that that they used to tell us. It was things

that had happened way back when they were kids."

LH: "Have you ever heard of any Raven Mocker tales, the old witch that would come for someone during death, come and take their life force. Do you know any of those?"

GK: "Well, when my grandma was real, real sick—and I don't know if this is the same thing that you're talking about—my uncle had told me this—my Uncle Garner Buckhorn, he's deceased now—but they were sitting up with my grandma when she was very ill and he said that he was sitting in the living room and he looked toward my grandma's room where she was. ALL OF A SUDDEN HE HEARD THIS NOISE, AND WHEN HE LOOKED OVER THAT WAY HE SAW THIS BIRD . He says it was like a hawk or an owl—but not exactly like either one—flying in there, and it ▲ flew out through the key hole, or it just disappeared as it hit the door. He always thought that it was my grandma's spirit, or maybe a—*I hate to say a booger when it's a family member*, but he always said that's what it was. My uncle always said that my grandma was a booger—or a *skili* in Cherokee is what you would say.

"I know they knew Indian medicine, because when I was a little girl people would come way in the night wanting medicine for ear aches or tooth aches, and either my grandma or grandpa would get up and fix some tobacco and doctor the people. Then another thing they used to do was if there was a death in the

community they would burn cedar and take the ash and sprinkle it around the house. They would let the smoke fill the house to get rid of bad spirits."

LH: "You mentioned the owl—can you tell about the significance of the owl in Cherokee folklore?"

GK: "A loooot of the old people believed that the owl was a sign of either—well, it was strong spirits or ...• They had a belief about them. At night, if they heard an owl, they believed that it was sure death or you would hear about someone in the community or a family member passing away. They have different types of beliefs about the owl. Also, they believed in if they smelled wood burning or smoke at night, they believed it was a bad sign. And then another thing they really had a strong feeling about was hearing crows at night—if you heard crows in the night that was sure death."

LH: "Of who—a family member?"

GK: "Of a family member."

LH: "Any other little stories...."

GK: "That's all I can think of right now. Maybe when I've had some time to think and remember I can recall more. I know there's more I've heard. I just can't remember them right now."

COMMENTARY:

Even though Georgia, in this interview, was speaking to very close family

members, she held true to formulaic beginnings and endings traditionally associated with Cherokee storytelling. Although not always strictly adhered to, the tradition of formulaic beginnings and endings is certainly a basic element of Cherokee storytelling. Cherokees, as well as all Native American peoples, are not the only ones to use such storytelling elements. The oral tradition, no matter what the culture involved, has a strong history of such elements.

Another element strong in the oral tradition, especially Native American, is repetition. Though it is not overtly evident in the stories garnered from these interviews, perhaps due to the unnatural setting of these events, repetition plays a very important role in traditional Cherokee stories. "[T]he repetition of words and phrases ... create a heightened rhythmic language whose cadences are unlike those of ordinary conversational speech."[178] Whereas in the Western written tradition repetition is seen as redundant, it is not so in the oral tradition of the Cherokee. Instead, it is seen as essential. The repetition serves to build tension—a key element of the storytelling craft. As Dr. Joseph Faulds, professor of Native American literature at Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, states, "It is repetition with variation. The teller is not merely repeating for the sake of repetition. The repetition is not static, but changes slightly each time, just

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Craig Womack. *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999: 88.

enough to drive the story to its climactic end."[179] Dr. Faulds compares the repetition to a spiraling circle drawn on a sheet of paper. The repetition is where the circle crosses itself, but then drives the story again forward to complete the next loop. Such elements are certainly present in more traditional settings.

Along with many common storytelling devices, Cherokee stories often involve common things, such as caves, so this aspect of Georgia's tales is not out of the ordinary. Before removal from their homelands to Indian Territory, many, but not all, Cherokees lived in or near caves. Additionally, many Cherokee creation myths are tales of emergence wherein the Cherokee people emerge or ascend from a lower world into this, the present world. In many such stories caves play a prominent role, something of a portal between the two worlds. Commonly, Little People are said to live in caves. One need only recall the Lloyd Arneach account from a previous segment. Many stories of lost travelers who came into contact with the Little People note that those who were lost are often taken to the cave homes of the *Tsunsti*.

Additionally, the hog is a prominent animal figure in Cherokee life. They are one of the more popular domesticated animals in Cherokee farm life—even today. Georgia was unsure as to why it was a hog specter, as opposed to any other

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Dr. Joseph Faulds. Personal Interview. 5 November 2001.

animal, but perhaps it was due to association. The Buckhorns, my mother's relatives noted in the story, raised hogs.

As noted in Chapter One of this study, *skilis* are thought to remain fairly localized—that is, they do not wander very far from the place where they are seen. Notice in her first story, Georgia said that *skilis* were thought to live at the place of the sighting—"live" as in reside, contrary to the *Kolans* who are apparently roaming entities. Again, this permanent residence is perhaps a warning to stay away from a place where evil has happened. Recall the analysis of such stories from Chapter One and compare it to the account rendered by Georgia. Note that though Georgia described the *skili* as frightening, and that it was trying to get up into the back of the wagon. However, she did not mention that the specter was trying to do the family harm. If harm were the goal, it stands to reason that the *skili* would have certainly found a way into the wagon, perhaps to have even continued to pursue the wagon until harm was accomplished. Rather, the "attack" was broken off as soon as the family left the area.

The place she mentioned in that story is today a paved and well-traveled county road. There is still an occasional rock slide in that area, and holes in the side of the hill can be seen from the road.

In the story about the incident at the King residence, Georgia actually mentioned that the presence of *skilis* is perhaps because of the violent deaths of the

Kings. This lends credence to the figures serving a warning, something to scare away passersby, and not being malevolent creatures out to destroy. She noted that there were two distinct figures that approached them, but that soon they appeared to be only leaves. Skeptics might be quick to point out that it was the shadows of leaves all along and there were never any otherworldly creatures. These same people might argue that Native Americans are childlike and superstitious. Indeed, the shadows theory is a possibility, as Georgia notes that the moon was shining brightly that night. However, it is just as plausible that two figures were approaching them in an effort to scare them away from a place where evil had happened; therefore, it is plausible that *skilis* are guardian spirits.

In Georgia's account of the Little People, she illustrated the helpful nature of the Cherokee fairies. She began her story with an element common to many *Tsunsti* stories. Often, Cherokees will tell of leaving food or milk for the Little People. The leaving of food for the *Tsunsti* is, perhaps, the most common element of a traditional Cherokee lifestyle. This is sharing of food with the *Tsunsti* is a matter of respect, a respect that is returned in kind by the most often helpful little ones.

In Georgia's story, contrary to accounts in popular commercial books that sensationalize them as evil, the *Tsunsti* actively come to the rescue of a Cherokee in need. Many accounts tell of the *Tsunsti* helping people who wander upon them

in the woods, perhaps a coincidental meeting wherein the human received opportune aid, but in this tale the Little People, although not summoned, came to Nancy Buckhorn's rescue. The porcupine quills noted in this story were used, perhaps, as either spears or arrows to drive the wolf away. Other Cherokee tales tell of quills being used as such. These helpful actions are not those of impish demons. Also note the mention of a cave as Georgia made the transition from one story to another.

In her final story, Georgia mentioned the crow calling at night. This is reference to the Raven Mocker, or *Kolan,* as most Cherokees in northeastern Oklahoma call them. The term Raven Mocker comes from the sound the creature makes, something akin to the call of a raven or crow. This is said to be the sound these creatures make while traveling. Recalling information from a previous segment of this study, remember that Raven Mockers, or *Kolans,* are not the bringers of death, but more the signalers. In all accounts of *Kolans* I have read or heard, it is never mentioned that the creatures actually do any killing. When Georgia noted that it is a sign of sure death to hear a *Kolan* it could be interpreted that she means "bringer," but the most accurate interpretation is that of signaler.[180]

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What can perhaps be called a Pygmalion Effect related to the Cherokee *Kolan*, I personally know of a story involving a an elderly Cherokee man with the last name of Soap who lived in the Cherry Tree Community of Adair County, just a few miles south of Stilwell. According to witnesses who lived nearby, Mr. Soap one evening heard the sound

**The reputation of the *Kolan* is not due to its horrific nature, but to mankind's natural fear of death.**

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The following interview was conducted on 12 March 2000 in the home of Nancy Pritchett, in the Salem Community of Adair County in northeastern Oklahoma. Nancy's home was a modest Indian home[181] perched atop Walkingstick Mountain. Salem Community is approximately fifteen miles east of Stilwell, closer to Evansville, Arkansas, a small farming community which sits on the states' borderline.

Present for the interview were Nancy Pritchett, myself and my wife, Tori

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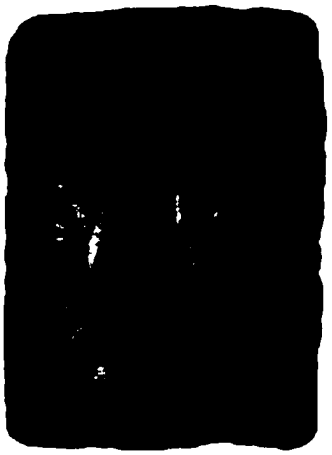
of a *Kolan* approaching. It soon arrived and came to rest on the eve of his house. Understanding this to be a notice of impeding death, Mr Soap fulfilled the prophecy by committing suicide with a .22 long rifle. His neighbors reported that they had all heard the *Kolan* on several previous occasions and were concerned about its presence. They had discussed this amongst themselves, all troubled by a potentially long and serious illness, or debilitating injury. Rather than face these consequences, so said the neighbors, Mr. Soap killed himself.

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An Indian home, as I discuss it within this study, is a house built by the Cherokee Nation for registered members of the tribe. These houses are built with materials and funds provided by the Bureau of Indian Affairs. The tribe provides the workers.

Hannah, and my mother, Georgia Kent, who aided with the interview as an interpreter. Nancy Pritchett spoke very little English.

Nancy was a soft-spoken woman of small stature, about five feet and two or three inches tall, weighing around one hundred pounds. Her silvery hair was bound up in the back in a bun and held in place by hair pins. Before the interview began, my mother and Nancy had a brief conversation about matters of the Cherokee Nation. My mother works for the Cherokee Nation as a social worker, providing social services for the elders; it is in this capacity that she knows Nancy Pritchett.



Nancy Pritchett
Photo by
*Leslie D. Hannah*

While my mother and Nancy conversed in Cherokee, I set up my video and audio equipment. My wife, Tori, helped me prepare. As we were doing so, Nancy saw the array of equipment: a video camera, a small tape recorder, and a laptop computer. She became visibly curious and even a bit nervous; she asked my mother, in Cherokee, "What's he going to do to me?" My mother explained what the equipment was and the purpose of each piece. Nancy settled a bit and the interview began.

Rather than following a strictly scripted set of questions, I asked Nancy if she knew any stories that she would like to tell. She began as many of the tellers I

have interviewed began: "I don't know (or remember) much ...," but then she went into one of the most amazing narratives I have ever heard, with vivid details and remarkable descriptions.

The interview began when I asked Nancy about some of the stories she had heard throughout her lifetime. Throughout the interview, Nancy spoke mostly in Cherokee; she did, however, narrate some parts of her stories in English. The following dialogue Nancy spoke in Cherokee. It has been translated by myself, with the aid of my mother.

Nancy Pritchett: "Many things I have heard come from my parents or friends."

Leslie Hannah: "Can you tell us some?"

NP: "I have forgotten many things."

LH: "That's alright; tell what you remember."

NP "I don't remember much about him, but there was this man called Andrew Starr• It was many years ago that Andrew and his brothers were walking by the Salem cemetery."

LH: "What time of day was it?"

NP: "It was < at night•
Just a little while < after nightfall•
He [Andrew] was an oooold man then•
There are some < oooold, old graves there•
> The men heard something behind them—footprints [footsteps]•
> They knew someone
> was coming up behind them,

< so they took off running•
< They ran for a ways and stopped•
Behind some trees• ▲
They looked back to where they had just been•
> There was nobody there•
> The figure had disappeared•" ▼

LH: "Did they actually see someone?"

NP "Yes. They said they saw a figure come out of the cemetery."

LH: "What kind of figure?"

NP: "Somebody. It followed them for a ways. Then they ran."

LH: "They saw it? How close was it?"

NP: "Just right there•" ▲

Nancy points a short distance from where she sits. She never specifies an exact distance, but with her gestures she indicates a very close proximity—perhaps as close as five or six feet.

LH: "What happened?"

NP: "Andrew said that the figure disappeared."

LH: "Disappeared?"

NP: "When they stopped and looked back, they saw the figure just disappear. It blended into the night."

LH: "Huh!"

NP: "There was another time, not too long ago, we had sewn a quilt for a lady

and were to meet her at the Salem church...."

LH: "That's right there by the cemetery, right?"

NP: "Yes. Right next to it. Me and my sister Rachel took that quilt to give to that woman. We drove our car down there. We sat and waited for a long time, but noooo one never showed up. It must been eight or nine 'clock, and noooo one never came."

LH: "What did you do?"

NP: "We were going to leave, but the car wouldn't start. We tried to push the car to get it started, but the brakes were locked up. We couldn't move that car, ▲so we decided to walk. It was dark• Rachel reminded me about what Andrew saw that time."

LH: "Were you scared?"

NP: "Not really—not until we heard something coming from behind us. We turned to look and saw a dog coming out of the cemetery."

LH: "A dog?"

NP: "Yes."

LH: "Big dog—little dog?"

When answering this question, Nancy broke out of her Cherokee and spoke in English for the next few minutes.

NP: "It was 'bout this big," ▲ she said and leaned forward on the couch to

indicate with her hand a height of about two-and-a-half feet. She became visibly excited when recounting this story, but she continued, "WE TURNED 'ROUND ▲ AND WENT BACK TOT HE CAR AND GOT IN. WE LOCKED THE DOORS• WE LOOKED 'ROUND BUT COULD NOT SEE THE DOG ANYMORE•"

LH: "What happened to it?"

NP: "IT WAS COMING RUNNING FAST AS IT COULD TOWARD US. We was outside walking where the car was. It just passed by us like it was playing with us and went way down there and stopped• THEN IT TURNED 'ROUND AND CAME BACK. ME AND RACHEL WAS RUNNING 'CAUSE WE WAS SEEING THAT DOG COME RUNNIN' BACK TOWARDS US. WE JUMPED IN THE CAR•. AND THAT DOG WAS COMING RIGHT BEHIND US—LITTLE WAYS. It didn't jump over the gate either or no wire either. IT JUST CAME RIGHT THROUGH THERE."

LH: "It came right through the car?"

NP: "Huh?"

At this point my wife Tori clarifies something that I misunderstood. "She says it ran through the gate."

LH: "It came through the gate?"

Nancy clarified this to my mother in Cherokee, who translated. (Georgia

Kent) "She says it ran through the gate like a ghost might. Didn't jump it, but ran right through it."

Nancy continued briefly in English, "That was at Salem Church, just a few miles from here."

She returned to speaking Cherokee. "Several people have said something chased them down there by Salem church and cemetery."

LH: "Is it the dog every time—or something different?"

NP: "No—sometimes something different. The preacher down there tells that him and his wife were leaving the church one night. They heard something behind them as they were going to their car."

LH: "What was it?"

NP: "They say it sounded like a cow."

LH: "A cow?"

NP: "Huh?"

LH: "A cow?"

NP: "Uh-huh. But there was nothing there."

LH: "Did they ever see anything?"

NP: "Not a cow. They said they saw a person."

LH: "Did they know this person?"

NP: "No."

LH: "What time of day do these things happen? Is it at different times of the day?"

NP: "In the night."

LH: "Always in the night?"

NP: "Just at night time."

LH: "What was it causing these sightings? Was it a *Kolan*?"

NP: "Some people say that it is. There was this man a loooong time ago—a missionary that was said to have done some baaaad things around here."

LH: "What did he do?—do you know?"

NP: "No—no one would say, just that it was bad. They said that some people conjured him for him for what he did. He died not too long after that."

LH: "How did he die?"

NP: "Got reeeeal bad sick. They buried him down there in the Salem Cemetery." ▲

LH: "Do you think that's the *Kolan*?"

NP: "Don't know. Maybe."

There is a slight pause as Nancy seemingly concentrates on something.

NP: "One more thing—it was a white dog."

LH: "A white dog?"

NP: "That night me and Rachel ran from it; it was a white dog that chased us."

Nancy folded her arms across her chest and paused for a moment. She then resumed with a *Kolan* story.

NP: "Several years ago we had gone to church at Rock Fence.[182] After church we were walking home. While we were walking I turned around and saw a ball of fire. I thought it was chasing us. It was about this high up off the ground." ▲

Nancy held her hand about a foot or so above the floor.

LH: "Who was with you?"

NP: "There was three or four of us that night. Me, my husband—his mother. We were walking home from Rock Fence. My husband said, 'LET'S HIDE,' but I told him it would find us."

LH: "How did you first notice it?"

NP: "We were walking along and we heard something—a noise; it sound like a cup falling or tin falling. I turned around and saw the ball of fire chasing us—behind us. We watched it for a while and it just disappeared."

LH: "Was it a *Kolan*?"

NP: "That's what my mother-in-law said it was."

LH: "And it just chased you a little ways?—you didn't see it again that night?"

NP: "No," Nancy says as she shakes her head.

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Rock Fence Community is in southern Adair County, Oklahoma near Highway 59, just a few miles north of the Sequoyah County border.

LH: "In many of the stories I've heard, especially stories told by elders, I've heard dogs mentioned many times. What connection do these stories of dogs have with the Cherokees?"

NP: "People can change themselves into a dog or another kind of animal."

LH: "Are these *Kolan*?"

NP: "No—not always; sometimes just people who know how to do that. The dog is a favorite animal of these people."

Nancy pauses for a moment, then points toward the front door; she resumes speaking.

NP: ▲"This road right out here," she points to indicate the dirt road that runs directly in front of her house, "this road is an old wagon road, hundred years old. People have said they seen dogs all up and down this road."

LH: "Big dogs, little dogs; what kind of dogs were they?"

NP: "All kinds and sizes. And when the people would get near the dogs they would change into a person and run off. Sometimes it happened the other way."

LH: "How do you mean—'the other way?'"

NP: "Sometimes they would see a person standing beside the road and when they got near it would change into a dog and run off."

LH: "Always a dog?"

NP: "Most times. Sometimes a deer or some other animal."

LH: "Have you ever seen a dog like this?"

NP: "ONE TIME, when I was a liiiittle girl, we was at home and our own dogs—our dogs that we had—began barking. We looked outside and saw our dogs barking at this other dog that had appeared."

LH: "How many dogs did you have?"

NP: "Five or six. Our dogs were standing out in the yard. There was another dog that was a ways more away from the house."

LH: "Was it a mean dog? Were the dogs fighting?"

NP: "No, they weren't fighting, just barking at this other dog. He wasn't mean, but he was barking a funny kind of bark, more like crying?"

LH: "You mean like somebody crying?"

NP: "Yes. It sounded like someone who was hurt or needed help. This dog was about so tall."

▲ Nancy holds her hand about two feet off the floor to indicate height.

LH: "Was the dog wounded, hurt?"

NP: "No—I couldn't see. I don't think so, but it had a towel around its head."

▲ Nancy indicates with her hand that the towel was wrapped around the dog's head much like a turban might be.

NP: "This towel was all wrapped up like this, and parts were hanging down like its ears."

LH: "You mean the ends of the towels?"

NP: "Yes. The ends were hanging down."

LH: "What happened next?"

NP: "Our dogs ran up to it and barked more. I saw one dog run right in to it. They couldn't bite it or fight it. They just bounced right off it."

LH: "Who all else saw it? Who was at home?"

NP: "It was just us kids. Me, my brothers and sisters."

LH: "What do you think it was?"

NP: "We figured it was a person who changed into a dog and did not finish."

LH: "You mean one of these people to change into animals—the ones the other people would see at the side of the road?"

NP: "Yes. We figured he messed up or forgot how and got stuck." Nancy gives a slight laugh here and finishes with the thought, "*Wonder if he ever made it*?"

LH: "Did you ever see it again?"

NP: "No. It just walked off into the woods; our dogs were barking the whole time. It never came back. It went down that way." ▲

Nancy points to indicate to the west of the house; this is in the general direction of the Salem Church and Cemetery that she was telling about earlier.

LH: "Was it in the daytime that you saw this thing?"

Nancy steps out of her Cherokee here and answers this part in English.

NP: "It was 'bout 'leven 'clock."

LH: "About noon time?"

NP: "Yes—midday. We didn't know what it was. We didn't have no gun in the house. Didn't know what to do. Ever' time my Daddy and Momma goes off they hide them guns; they was 'fraid that someone would come along and take them guns. Steal. They had 'bout four. Daddy was 'fraid some one would take them."

Here, Nancy returns to speaking in Cherokee.

NP: "We was all scared and hid some in the house. We fastened the doors. When it started to take off me and my brother went outside and watched it leave."

LH: "How close did you get to it?"

NP: "Close. 'Bout from here to that tree." ▲

She points outside to a pecan tree that occupies her front yard; the distance is no more than thirty feet.

NP: "That's 'bout all I know of that."

LH: "Do you know anything about the *Tsunsti*—the Little People?"

Nancy thinks about this for a moment and recounts a story she heard from her husband.

NP: "My < husband told me this.
When he was a young man,
him and three others went hunting one time.
He said they walked for a < loooong time,
< deeeeep into the woods

and one of the hunters got tired.
> They all decided to rest for a few minutes.
When they were ready to leave,
that one young man was still sitting there,
on an oooold tree stump.
The others went on.
< Pretty soon he had not caught up to them,
and they decided they had better go back to find him.
When they got back to the place where he had been sitting,
< he was gone•
< For five days that man was missing.
People were looking for him all that time.
No one could find him.
> Then after five days
the man was found sitting on the stump
where he had first stopped."

LH: "How did they find him?"

NP: "HE WAS JUST SITTING THERE LIKE HE HAD BEEN THERE ALL ALONG. He said that the Little People took him. They kept him for five days, then brought him back. They told him not to say anything about it for three days. If he talked about it before the three days they would come and get him again. He would not say anything for a long time. He was afraid to talk about it."

LH: "How long was it before he talked about it?"

NP: "Long time they said—maybe three or four weeks."

LH: "Did any harm come to him while he was gone? How did they treat him?"

NP: "They took good care of him. They fed him huckleberries and blackberries. He was in the same condition he was when he disappeared. They treated him well. They shared their meat with him. He was in good shape."

LH: "This man they took, when he got back did he have to be doctored?"

NP: "No—because he did what the Little People said. They warned him not to speak of them for three days. He did not speak at all for several days. He refused any doctoring. After some time, he was able to speak again. Then is when he told of what happened. If he had spoken of them [*Tsunsti*] before the three days something would have happened to him."

LH: "What? Did he say?"

NP: "He said they would come back and get him again and this time not let him go."

LH: "When the Little People had this man, where did they take him? Did he say?"

NP: "He said they came up from inside that stump that he was sitting on, and when they took him they all went back down inside that stump and took him to a cave where they lived. When they went inside there were rattlesnakes all inside. They were coiled up. That is what the *Tsunsti* used for their chairs. They sat on them coiled-up snakes."

▲ Nancy makes a gesture with her hand, winding it around to indicate something coiled.

NP: "After that time, that man was afraid to go into the woods. He was afraid that he would get lost and the Little People would get him again and he would

never be reunited with his family again. That's about all I know of him."

LH: "Do you know any stories about the *Tsunsti* helping people?"

NP: "I really haven't heard much about stories like that. When I was a little girl my Daddy and Momma would not talk of these things when us kids were around. The older people would not let the children sit around and listen to that. If we came in when they were talking like that they would stop and make us go off and play. Some things are like sacred things, and we could not hear them so young."

Nancy starts into another narrative about a time that she had a personal "encounter" with the *Tsunsti*. I set off encounter not to dismiss nor lessen what she says of them, only to indicate that Nancy, by her own account, did not actually see the *Tsunsti*, but simply heard them.

NP: "Some years ago, my son had gone to the neighbors to play with those children. He had been there all day, and as it was getting dark and time for him to come home I walked part way to meet them. They brought him part way. As we were walking home I heard something behind us."

LH: "What was it?"

NP: "It sounded like somebody dropped a log chain." Nancy answers partly in Cherokee and partly in English. She said the words 'log chain' in English.

LH: "A log chain?"

NP: "Uh-huh. When we got back home my dad said that it was probably the

Little People. He told me that if they would have caught up to us they probably would have took us with them."

LH: "Did you see them?"

NP: "No. Just heard them. It was dark."

LH: "Could you tell maybe how many there were? A bunch of them, a few? Did you hear any footsteps or anything like that?"

Again, Nancy answers partly in English and partly in Cherokee, 'log chain' as before is in English.

NP: "I didn't heard any footsteps, just that log chain falling. My dad told me that if we would have stayed around long to listen we probably would have got lost and the *Tsunsti* take us."

LH: "Was that log chain sound like a lure?—bringing you to them [*Tsunsti*], bringing you closer?"

NP: "Huh-uh," she says and shakes her head no. "I don't think so. I was told some years ago that the Little People were probably trying to scare us off. People said that there was money hid there in the woods."

LH: "Money? Do you mean like paper money or coins?"

NP: "Coins, gold coins, I think. People say that this money was put there by robbers from the war."

At first it was a bit confusing as to which war she may have been talking

about. All Nancy said was war, but as we talked more it became evident that she was speaking of the American Civil War. I asked her if she meant the War Between the States—North and South—and she nodded affirmatively.

NP: "Later, a man named Jim Cap took a machine down there and found money."

Nancy seemed unsure of what to call this machine, but she gave an accurate description and enacted the motions of someone who would be using a metal detector. She motioned that the machine was held with the hands and swept back and forth, somewhat like one might do with a broom. It is from this visual description that I surmised she meant a metal detector.

NP: "He [Jim Cap] did find some money down there."

LH: "Where?"

NP: "Just down this road a ways; ▲ near where I heard that log chain that time." Nancy again points to the road that runs near her house.

LH: "How much money? Do you know?"

NP: "I don't know. But he moved away not long after that, and I think did not come back."[183]

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I did not go to great lengths to verify this story, but I did some minor investigation into this man named Jim Cap. I was able to find other people who knew of a James Allan Capps who lived in Adair County during the 1930's and 40's. According to the information I was able to gather he moved to Nevada some time during the later part of

LH: "I believe that's the first story like that I've heard."

NP: "Uh-huh. Anything else?"

LH: "I don't really know what to ask after that one. Do you know of any other *Tsunsti* or *Kolan* stories?"

NP: "I've heard so many things, but they are just things that I have heard. The only things I really know are those I have told—the things I have seen or know the people who saw. There are things that Cherokee know. *Ani-Kolan*, if someone dies they will come from miles away. They'll pass through in the night time and they make a sound like nothing else."

LH: "What kind of sound?"

NP: "There is no way to describe it. There is nothing else that sounds like *Kolan*. If you ever heard one before you will never forget that sound. If you heard one before you can tell where one is close by or passing over that sound."

LH: "Can you think of anything else?"

NP: "I guess that's all I know. THEM KOLAN, IF YOU HEAR ONE COMING, THE SOUND IS SO SCARY THAT PEOPLE CAN JUST PASS OUT, JUST FALL TO THE GROUND."

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the 1940's. If it is this man, this lends great credence to this story. I could not determine the current status of this James Capps. There are still some Capps, allegedly relatives of his, living in the Adair County area. As best as I can gather, this is probably the Jim Cap of whom Nancy spoke.

There is a bit of silence as things wind down, but before too long Nancy speaks in English a bit more about the *Kolan.*

NP: "It [the sound a *Kolan* makes] can scare you to death."

Nancy returns to speaking in Cherokee.

NP: "There are still some around. They live in different places and will travel for miles to get to a new grave. They try to beat each other to get to the cemetery, especially if it is a new grave of a young person."

LH: "Interesting."

NP: "Uh-huh."

LH: "Well, Nancy—is that it?"

NP: "I guess. That's about all I know."

LH: "Wado then."

NP: "Howa."

COMMENTARY:

In Nancy's account of Andrew Starr, she related a similar tale of figures disappearing as did Georgia in the previous interview. Georgia said that the bird-like creature in the relative's death disappeared when it hit the door. These accounts of disappearing figures are another commonality in many such Cherokee tales. Often creatures or figures will simply vanish. However, this is not limited to only Cherokee tales. Recall the Cherokee Little People/Norwegian Huldrefolk

comparison from a previous segment. There it is noted that these creatures are said to hide behind a veil of mist, and it is only at certain times that they can be seen. Tales of mythical creatures from various cultures often share similar abilities to vanish behind a veil of mist or to disappear into nothingness. Therefore, this aspect of these Cherokee stories is, perhaps, a storytelling device common to tales of mythical creatures rather than an exclusively Cherokee element.

When Nancy began speaking of the occurrences in and around the Salem Cemetery she seemed somewhat cautious of not saying that a *Kolan* was responsible. Perhaps it was because she was unsure, or maybe she was a bit apprehensive about the topic:

> Of all the Cherokee wizards or witches the most dreaded is the Raven Mocker, the one that robs the dying man of life. They are of either sex and there is no sure way to know one, though they usually look withered and old, because they have added so many lives to their own. (Mooney 401)

Following the interview, I went to the Salem Cemetery to look around. It is a small graveyard, not much more than an acre in size and sits approximately two hundred feet due west of the Salem Church. There are many grave markers that



Salem Cemetery
Photo by
*Leslie D. Hannah*

predate Oklahoma statehood; additionally, there are several headstones with dates as recent as the current year. One marker in particular stands out from the rest, not because of its ornateness, but because it is isolated somewhat from the others, off in a corner by itself, and because of its plainness. Rather than a manufactured headstone, this grave has an ordinary concrete slab with hand-chiseled letters. Though Nancy did not provide any information to confirm this, one might conclude that this was the grave of the missionary of whom she spoke.

Having established, perhaps not definitively but at least speculatively, the guardian function of the *Kolan*, it could be conjectured that this is the function in this situation. Nancy mentioned that the missionary had reportedly done some "bad" things to the people, and that he had been conjured. This particular grave is isolated, to some degree, from the rest. In traditional Cherokee societies, isolation is considered a fate worse than death. Many other Native American societies hold similar beliefs. The fact that the grave with the plain stone marker was several dozen feet away from the next closest grave, and that first hand reports of *Kolan* sightings near this cemetery exist leads one to believe that evil is interred within.

If this is the grave of the missionary of whom Nancy spoke, his evil must have been so great that even in death he is isolated.

Nancy mentioned that the animal figure she saw at the cemetery was a dog. Dogs of various breeds are common in stories among the Cherokee. Many stories are told wherein ordinary Cherokees, not ones with any special powers, have dogs "fixed" or conjured by Indian doctors to act as watch dogs against *Kolans* or *Skilis*. Additional stories tell that even *Kolans* have watch dogs of their own to guard against others like themselves. The competition between these creatures for fresh graves is said to be fierce, thus necessitating that *Kolans* have guard dogs. Additionally, such tales also note how *Kolans* often shape-shift into dogs themselves in an effort to travel inconspicuously. Such a tactic is not necessarily to conceal themselves from humans, but from other *Kolans*. After all, a dog walking through the woods is not as conspicuous as a ball of fire flying through the air. Cherokee parents may warn their children against approaching stray dogs for this very reason. Children are a special favorite of the *Kolans* since they have such a strong or full life force.

Nancy's closing comments about the *Kolan* serve as confirmation about the scavenging nature of these creatures. She also noted the competitive, and perhaps mistrustful nature of the *Kolan*, which lends credence to the belief that *Kolans* themselves will have guard dogs, perhaps to guard against each other.

The Little People story narrated by Nancy serves to show again how the Cherokee fairies have been terribly misrepresented in popular commercial literature. In this story, the *Tsunsti* took in a lost hunter, fed and cared for him for an extended period. It could be said that the man was not actually lost, merely resting on the stump. However, he was alone in the woods, no longer accompanied by his hunting friends; therefore, in a manner of speaking he was lost. Also, this was obviously no ordinary tree stump, but one where the *Tsunsti* lived. Traditional Cherokee belief holds that the *Tsunsti* are lovers of peace and do not wish to be disturbed. The hunter's action of resting on the stump obviously disturbed the *Tsunsti*, and perhaps they took him in an effort to teach him a "lesson." This was not an act of malevolence, since they treated him with respect and graciousness, fed him, and returned him in the same condition in which he was found. However, the warning they issued was apparently stern. Had it not been heeded, the hunter would certainly have required "doctoring" to prevent harm coming to him. Notice that the hunter did not speak, according to Nancy, of the incident for several weeks, even though the *Tsunsti* said to remain silent for only three days. Obviously, their message was well-understood.

In some previous tales noted in an earlier segment it was illustrated how the Little People are often found around caves. Likewise, many stories exist wherein *Tsunsti* are said to be found around tree stumps, especially stumps that are hollow.

Stumps are comparable to caves in this sense because of their connection to the earth.

In this same story of the Little People, Nancy mentioned the use of snakes, interestingly enough, as furniture. Snakes of many types are prominent in Cherokee folklore. Adders are often mentioned, as well as copperheads. Rattlesnakes are another prominent animal figure in Cherokee lore, in particular, the Yellow Velvet-tailed Rattlesnake. Some stories detail the medicinal purposes of the venom of this snake, while other tales mention that these snakes are to the *Tsunsti* as dogs are to humans. James Mooney documented several accounts of snakes in Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees. Some of these stories hold that the snakes noted were once men, presumably Cherokee.[184]

An interesting parallel to the Irish Leprechauns is found in the story of Jim Cap. In this account, Nancy mentioned that Mr. Cap had found money in the area where she had heard what she originally described as chains rattling. Folklore of the Irish Leprechauns holds that they have hidden money, most commonly gold coins. In Nancy's account of Jim Cap, she said that Cap supposedly found gold coins. In much of the lore associated with the Cherokee *Tsunsti*, it is noted that

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James Mooney. "The Daughter of the Sun." 252 - 254. "The Snake Tribe." 294 - 297. *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees.* Nashville: Charles Elder – Bookseller/Publisher, 1972.

they are fine artisans and craftspeople. However, the hoarding of money is not a trait traditionally ascribed to the *Tsunsti*. Is Nancy's story a contamination of Cherokee lore by Irish lore?—perhaps, but very doubtful. Nancy admitted that she had rarely traveled far from home, and knew no Irish people.

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The following interview was conducted with Elsie Vann at her home in south Adair County. Elsie, at the time of this interview, was about 65 years of age, five feet and five inches tall, weighing around one-hundred-and-sixty pounds, with short, greying hair. Present at the interview were myself, my wife, Tori; my mother, Georgia Kent; and my nephew, Sam Hannah.



Georgia Kent (left) and Elsie Vann
Photo by
*Leslie D. Hannah*

My mother and Elsie began talking as I sat up the equipment. The tape began rolling as they were already a bit into a conversation about stories. Elsie spoke primarily in Cherokee. Again, as with Nancy Pritchett, the translation of this interview was

aided by my mother.

Before the recording devices were ready, Elsie had already begun with her formulaic introduction. Hers was of the "I have forgotten many things" style, but as with Nancy and even my mother, Georgia, she recounted many amazing details. Elsie Vann: "When I was a liiiittle girl, we used to go to the New Baptist Church just oooover there a ways." ▲

Elsie points back toward the north, toward Stilwell. From her house, which sits directly adjacent to Highway 59, the New Baptist Church would be about a three-to-four mile walk.

EV: "A loooong time ago we used to walk; we had to walk eeeeverywhere we went. In the night when we were walking from church we would go past this spot where we would see a person standing there, OR SOMETIMES A HEADLESS DOG FIGURE. THIS HAPPENED SEVERAL TIMES. A TIME OR TWO THAT DOG CHASED US."

Leslie Hannah: "What would you do when the dog chased you?"

Elsie laughs a bit, seemingly recalling times when she had laughed about it before.

EV: "We would take off ruuuunning—because it scared us. This thing [referring to the figure] would sometimes throw gravel at us. ▲ But it's funny—THERE WAS NO GRAVEL TO THROW. It was not a gravel road—a

dirt road• IT WAS A DIRT ROAD. I don't know where it got the gravel. It took us some time to learn, but we finally quit walking that way because we were so scared. It's funny now because it took us so long to think of taking another way."

LH: "How often did this happen?"

EV: "EVERY TIME WE WENT BY THAT PLACE."

LH: "I mean, how often did you go by that place?"

EV: "Oh—maybe once or twice a week. When we were going to church. One time we went by that place and there was a wolf standing there. This was a female wolf, and she had pups standing there with her. We got scared and was going to pick up some rocks to throw at the wolf to scare it away, but when we picked up rocks and started to throw the wolf was gone. There was nothing there."

LH: "Where did it go? Did it run away?"

EV: "No. I don't know. We didn't see it run away. It was just there, and then it just wasn't."

LH: "Did you ever see it again?"

EV: "No. But I think it was a 'booger'."

LH: "A *skili*?"

EV: "Uh-huh—yeah. Somebody who changes from one figure to another. I think it was someone practicing changing shapes. He was trying to scare us."

LH: "Sounds like he did."

EV: "Uh-huh. HE DID!"

LH: "Was it at the same place—the same place where you would see that headless dog?"

EV: "Uh-huh. The old timers used to say that there had been a killing there a long time ago. We think that is one reason why people see things around there, but even before the killing people would say that they saw things there. It's just right down there road here." ▲

Elsie points outside to the highway, Oklahoma State Highway 59, just about fifty feet from her house. Her house is about three miles north of the Adair/Sequoyah County line.

EV: "A loooong time ago, my dad was going up here to play poker with some men. He said he saw a woman standing there in about that same place. Sometimes you can still see her standing there. It's right up here ▲ near the grocery store, just down the dirt road little ways.[185] My dad said he stopped and asked that lady what she was doing there. He said she just disappeared like that•—in the blink of an eye. ▲ (Elsie snaps her fingers as she speaks.) He looked around for her, but she was gone. He turned to continue, and he saw her

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The grocery store that Elsie referred to is the South Greasy Mart, a small "Mom-and-Pop style" country market that sits just of Highway 59 approximately six miles north of the county line. The dirt road is known to locals as Greasy Road and leads into the rural community known as South Greasy.

again. She was standing next to some posts that were some ways away from where she was before."

LH: "Did your dad recognize the lady? Had he ever seen her before?"

EV: "No. He had never seen her before. He didn't know her. A long time ago, when my daughter was just a little girl, we were going somewhere to visit someone. We heard someone hollering at us. 'HEY—HEY!' they shouted. We turned around to look, but there was no one there. We didn't see anything. So we started back toward the house; we could heard footprints [footsteps] someone behind us. When we got close to the house, we could hear sticks breaking, like when someone is chasing you. I told my sons to go look, but they never could see anybody."

LH: "You never did see anyone?"

EV: "No."

LH: "Could you tell if it was a man or a woman?"

EV: "I think it was a man, but I never did see anyone."

LH: "What makes you think it was a man?"

EV: "When he said 'Hey—Hey' it sounded like a man's voice."

LH: "Did he say anything else?"

EV: "No. Just 'Hey!' He said that twice."

LH: "How far did it chase you?"

EV: "Loooong ways• Through the woods. We could hear the sticks crackling and cracking behind us."

There is a slight pause.

EV: "Just about a week ago, my son went hunting. He was off in the woods just down here. ▲ He heard voices, bunch of voices—people talking, but he couldn't understand what they were saying. It was a strange language."

LH: "The woods down around here?" As I ask her this, I point toward the north, the same direction as where Elsie had indicated the apparitions of the woman and the headless dog had been seen. She nods affirmatively.

EV: "I think it was the Little People."

LH: "Your son—could he tell how many there was?—how many voices?"

EV: "No. He said it sounded like a bunch—maybe twenty or more. He couldn't understand what they were saying."

LH: "Did he not understand the language?"

EV: "Some. He said it sounded like Cherokee, but none like he had ever heard."

LH: "When was this again?—just about a week ago?"

EV: "Uh-huh—just about a week ago."

LH: "Have you ever seen anything yourself—the Little People, I mean?"

EV: < "A loooong, long time ago,
there was this family.
> They had a set of twins.

The family was kind of < MEAN•
to one of the twins.
One of the twins was out playing one day.
Two little boys, about so tall ▲ (Elsie indicates with her hand a height of
Came up to her and said about three-and-a-half feet or so)
< 'Let's go play.'
So the girl followed the two little boys.
They led her to a cave.
When they got to the cave
there was a whole bunch of other little people there.
They had food sitting on the table.
The little boys showed her around
and then asked her to sit down.
But the chairs that they were using were snakes•
< —coiled up rattlesnakes.
The little girl told the boys
< that she was really afraid,
> but they told her not to be.
They told her to sit and eat.
They had all kinds of good food on the table:
meats, berries, corn. It was a feast.
There was all kinds of people there:
< old people, men and woman, children.
> After they all ate, they had a dance.
< EVERYONE was dancing;
the little girl, too.
< She had a good time.
After the feast and the dancing,
> the Little People did bring her home."

(There is a slight pause as Elsie seemingly concentrates on something.)

EV: "I made a mistake• The twins were boys—not girls. The one that went to the cave did not live to be very old. He came home and told what all had happened."

LH: "Did something happen to him?"

EV: "Uh-huh. He died of illness. YOU'RE NOT SUPPOSED TO TALK ABOUT THE LITTLE PEOPLE. He told of his involvement with them. He came back and told everyone. It's supposed to be a secret. Some things you don't tell. That's what the people believe—you're not supposed to talk about certain things."

EV: "When I was a little girl,
I had gone to get some water.
I saw this little person,
a lady about so tall ▲ (again, Elsie indicates a height of around
She had long, red hair. three-and-a-half feet).
She was getting water too,
< but she had a liiiittle ol' bitty bucket with her.
< I was looooking at her, kind of wondering like.
That lady saw me, and > she just kind of disappeared."

LH: "Did she disappear really fast or just kind of fade away?"

EV: "It was kind of foggy that morning. The little lady just kind of faded into the fog. When I got home, I told my dad what I had seen. He scolded me. He said I should not have told it. I had to be doctored for this to keep something from happening to me."

LH: "What was done?"

EV: "I had to go to the creek•—THE WATER. TO BE DOCTORED. IF I HAD NOT, SOMETHING WOULD HAVE HAPPENED TO ME. THE LITTLE PEOPLE CAN EITHER BE GOOD TO YOU, OR THEY CAN BE EVIL•—*no,*

*that's not right—scosti.*"[186]

LH: "Do you know of any times that the *Tsunsti* helped someone?"

EV: "Oh yeah."

Elsie pauses to think for a moment.

EV: "One time there was an old man. His name in Cherokee was Unole; that would be Windy. He used to ride a horse—no a mule. He was riding home one night. He was drunk; I think he was probably drunk that night. Anyway, he fell off his mule and it knocked him out. He hit his head. He laid there a long time. I guess he didn't know how long, but when he came to, he heard somebody singing."

Here, Elsie began to use a more melodic voice, almost as if she was singing the story to illustrate the manner in which Windy was being cared for. She also gestured, using both hands, what, perhaps, the Little People did for Windy. She rocked back and forth slightly as she recounted this story.

EV: 𝄞"He came toooo.
> and he was surrounded byyyy
the Little Peeeople.
And there was an elderly one
< who was doctoring him.
This oooolder one

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Here, Elsie seemingly searched for the right word. She at first said evil, but then corrected herself, saying that evil was not really the best word. She finally settled on the word *scosti*, which is "mean."

< was rubbing on Windy's head
> and blowing across his face.
I guess that was his waaaay
of doctoring hiiiim.
< They had picked him [Windy] up,
helped him to his feeeet,
then took him to siiiit
< on a reeeeal pretty rock.
They sat him there
> until he was able to go home.𝄞

That's one time I know that they really helped somebody."

LH: "Did they guide him home, or just help get him right again and let him go?"

EV: "No—they got him right, doctored him, then took him home. They helped guide him to his house. He was lost. Windy was a pretty good-sized man. ▲ (Elsie gestures to indicate a large belly.) He said he didn't know how they picked him up and set him on that rock. But they did. And they took him home."

LH: "To his house or theirs?"

EV: "To his. They took him to his house. They rode 'ponies', but their ponies were not horses; they were 'coons. They rode raccoons like we ride horses. Cherokees call 'coons *kutle*. Windy said they even had a little wagon pulled by 'coons."

Elsie laughs at this.

LH: "That story you told a little bit ago, about the woman standing beside the

road. Do you think that was a Raven Mocker that people were seeing?"[187]

EV: "It's been about four, maybe five years ago, I had company: Lilly Ross, Albert Ross, their sister. We were sitting outside; there was three or four others here. It was toward the evening time, and we were sitting just out here ▲ (indicates her front yard). We saw a light come from out the woods over there. There was a sound too. It made a sound, and as it got closer the sound got louder and there was more fire, more light. It got brighter. It went kind of up the road here, up the hill just past the house and out into the field over there. If you know what season [month] these *Kolan* come by, more than likely it will come by again during the same month next year. They will go underground."

Elsie pauses for a moment, then resumes speaking, but changes the subject.

EV: "Some people will do mean medicine—bad medicine. I don't. I help people. I doctor them and help them to get better."

LH: "Has anyone ever come to you when someone else has done bad medicine on them and they came to you for help to get right?"

EV: "No—I don't do that. Just when people get hurt or are sick. I've doctored

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Elsie had a great deal of difficulty understanding this question. She was apparently not familiar with the term Raven Mocker as such; she was only familiar with the Cherokee term *Ani Kolan*. After it was described to her, she gathered that I was talking about the *Kolan*; she recognized it from the description and began to nod affirmatively. She called it *Kolan* from then on.

people who got stabbed or had a head injury. I used to read cups.[188] But then I got baptized, and I let all of that go. I don't do that any more. I used to have people come from all around—many different places: Oklahoma City, Tulsa, Hot Springs. They all knew about me. Someone told me that I was doing the Devil's work—Satan's work—and that I was bound for Hell. George Glass, a preacher. He told me that. I used to use fire to help people, and he told me that it wasn't good, so I quit doing that. I never did do mean work, at least I didn't think it was bad. I thought I was helping people. And they came from so far off. A long time ago, many of the old men did a lot of mean work, but I never did learn that. All I learned was how to help people get better. That's it.

"There's still some older people who still know these things [mean medicine], but they won't tell it. They won't talk about it. It's sacred to them. They don't talk of it."

LH: "Anything else you would like to tell?"

EV: "Can't remember much else right now. I have forgotten many things. So, I guess that's all then."

LH: "Wa-do."

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Cherokees who practice medicine are sometimes known to "read" coffee grounds as a means of forecasting the future or determining a course of action for a given situation. This is perhaps what Elsie means as "reading" cups.

COMMENTARY:

In the first story, Elsie's laughter and comments about it taking them so long to begin traveling another way indicates that there was perhaps a fascination with this place, this creature. Obviously, Elsie and her companions did not feel danger from the creature, otherwise they would have taken a different route after the first occasion.

Elsie referred to the figure as someone perhaps practicing shape-shifting. It is possible that Elsie and her companions happened upon a *Skili* practicing different shapes. Three of the four women interviewed for this study had a tale of a headless *Skili* to share. Perhaps the transformations were not completed at the time these people saw the creature. This theory may serve to explain the sometimes headless condition of these creatures. None of the interviewees offered a time frame for how long such a transformation might take. However, it is obvious from all of these tales that the transformation is not an instantaneous process. It could take from several minutes to a few hours.

It was this headless dog figure that Elsie noted that would sometimes throw gravel at them, and she wondered from where the gravel came, since it was a dirt road. A few moments later in the interview, when Elsie mentioned the wolf with the pups, she noted that she and her companions would try to throw rocks at it, but the animal disappeared. This, perhaps, helps to explain the gravel that would

sometimes be thrown back at them. If indeed this were someone practicing shape-shifting, it stands to reason that these various entities were the same person, and possibly brought its own gravel.

As with other similar stories, Elsie notes that a murder was associated with this story. She mentioned that there had been talk of a killing. She also noted that her father had seen the apparition of a lady very near the same place. A few possibilities exist here. The apparition could be the lady Elsie's father saw, who was the victim of the murder, or it could be a *skili* guardian, or it could be, as Elsie speculated, someone who lives nearby out practicing shape-shifting. Whatever the answer, there is a long history of the apparition seen in that area.

A bit later in the interview, I asked Elsie, in an effort to clarify what this apparition might be, if she thought it was a Raven Mocker. She obviously was not familiar with this term, so I described it to her and called it by the Cherokee name *Kolan*. Elsie apparently misunderstood my question and began another, unrelated story, one of a *Kolan*. So the question of the apparition remained unanswered.

Elsie's account of the *Kolan* offers but little additional information to those stories already noted. In this brief story, Elsie suggests that *Kolan* sightings are an annual event. Perhaps *Kolans* make regular rounds, much like Cherokee hunters or trappers would have their favorite places. The aspect of seasonal or annual

sightings differs somewhat from many other Raven Mocker tales. Recall the Carl Farinelli story from a previous section. Dr. Farinelli stated that his sightings occurred over a period of successive evenings. The annual sightings might lead one to draw the conclusion that the *Kolan* is returning on the anniversary of the death. However, considering the vampiric nature of the Cherokee *Kolan,* it is more likely that these are regular feeding rounds, much like the hunter returning to favored grounds.

When addressing vampires, the folklore of various cultures notes that a vampire will keep a "stable" of victims from which he or she regularly feeds. Most commonly, when considering vampires, people will think of Nosferatu-like humanoids popularized by the commercial fiction of Bram Stoker and Anne Rice. However, there are many more types of vampiric creatures. There will be more on this in the next segment.

Elsie spoke of a very recent event, when her son went hunting just the previous week. The woods where she said he went hunting were just across the highway from her house. It is in this vicinity that Rock Fence is located, the place mentioned by Nancy Pritchett in her *skili* story. This account, however, concerns *Tsunsti.* Although her son did not see anyone, it is reportedly that he did hear what sounded to be a dialect of Cherokee. Recalling the information in a previous segment, wherein the piano used in the Buckhorn household had what appeared to

be an archaic form of the Cherokee syllabary etched into it, it is a possibility that an archaic form of Cherokee still exists and is spoken in certain circles.

With a little prompting, Elsie cut to another Little People story. This account illustrated both their helpful, caring characteristics and their more vengeful or mean nature. Having taken pity on the twin that was being treated badly by his family, the *Tsunsti* invite the child into their home. First, there is a feast, obviously in his honor, and then there is dancing, most likely a Circle or Friendship dance of some sort.

This story told by Elsie is perhaps one of the most compelling stories against the malevolent nature of the *Tsunsti*. This account takes the helpful image a step further, vividly illustrating the *Tsunsti's* possession of very human-like emotions, in this case—pity. Clearly, the Little People have pity on this child for the way he is treated. They have a feast for the young boy, play with him, and otherwise treat him as an equal. This is not merely a case of helping a lost traveler, but of actively taking pity on one who is obviously mistreated.

Though the *Tsunsti* took pity on the young man, he violated a sacred trust by later speaking of his relationship with them. Recall the story of the lost hunter told by Nancy Pritchett in the previous segment. The hunter did not speak of his encounter with the *Tsunsti* until enough time had passed for it to be safe for him to do so. He ultimately lived a long and healthy life. However, the young man spoke

inappropriately of his encounter and thus paid the ultimate price. Elsie said that the young man became quite ill and eventually died. One might ask, why did not his family have him doctored to prevent his death, as indeed Cherokee medicine is certainly capable of such prevention. Recall, however, the relationship between the young man and his family. Possibly, his family allowed him to die to rid themselves of him. After all, he was mistreated.

Here again, as with many Cherokee stories, especially ones involving the *Tsunsti*, caves are involved. Skeptics may argue that it is not possible for caves to be involved in so many stories that are obviously so diverse in their geography. As previously noted, caves are prominent features in the landscape and lore of the traditional Cherokee homelands in the east. The same is also true of the new, removal-given lands of eastern Oklahoma, the Cherokee Nation of Indian Territory days. These skeptics might be quick to point out that the Cherokee Nation area of Oklahoma is not as saturated with caves as are the eastern homelands. Indeed, these skeptics would be correct if speaking of large caves. However, recall the caves mentioned in the Lloyd Arneach account in a previous chapter, as well as the indicated size of the Little People in this chapter. Eastern Oklahoma is saturated with small caves and cave-like openings. There are many springs throughout the area that create such openings. Any of these small caves might easily accommodate *Tsunsti*. Additionally, tree stumps figure into the equation, as

in the tale Nancy Pritchett told during her interview.

In a humorous tale, Elsie recalled another case of the *Tsunsti* taking pity on someone in need. Windy. Apparently, Windy was the local drunk of that area, and was often in need of help in getting up and walking. This time, however, he needed a bit more help than usual. Enter the *Tsunsti*. They medically cared for Windy and helped him home.

Obviously, Windy told of his experience with the Little People, so why did not harm come to him? One may conclude that either he waited the appropriate amount of time, or the *Tsunsti* thought him harmless, considering his name—Windy—and that he was a drunk. Solemn trust between humans and *Tsunsti* is at the heart of the relationship between the two groups. Obviously, the trust in this case could not be violated since no one would trust Windy in the first place.

Elsie's laughter during the telling of this story serves as yet another marker that the *Tsunsti* also possess another of humanity's most precious emotions—humor. Clearly, the Little People in this account felt no threat to their secrecy from this man, Windy. If a warning were issued to him, it was not noted in Elsie's account. Rather, their actions with Windy in his inebriated condition suggest not only compassion, but perhaps instead pity, upon this man, and also the enjoyment of "messing" with him somewhat and enjoying a good laugh at his expense.

The personal encounter Elsie had with the little woman while gathering

water illustrates another aspect of such encounters. Recall that Elsie admitted she immediately spoke of the encounter, that she told her father that she had seen the woman vanish into the fog. Her father was instantly concerned and immediately took her to the water to doctor her. This is the Christian equivalent of taking a sick child to the altar for prayer and laying on of hands.

Additionally, note a comparison in this story to the Norwegian Huldrefolk mentioned in a previous segment. In the myth of the Huldrefolk it was noted that they sometimes hide behind a veil of mist or fog. Elsie told of a fog that this little lady seemingly disappeared into.

In the closing moments of this interview, Elsie mentioned "bad" medicine and how she never used it. "Bad" medicine is those incantations and formulas designed to bring about harm or demise to others. Some such incantations were documented by James Mooney in Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees. One such incantation is called "To Destroy a Life."[189] The title clearly explains the purpose of the formula—it is to kill. Many such incantations will invoke the color black, or somehow mention night, as in "the nightland." Additionally, these formulas may sometimes call upon the direction of West. These symbolic things—black, night, West—have relevance to death in more than just Cherokee lore. Many

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James Mooney. *Myths of the Cherokee and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees.* Nashville: Charles Elder – Bookseller/Publisher, 1972: 391 - 395.

cultures hold black to be the color of death, including many European cultures. Nighttime is also symbolic of death, as illustrated by the "Riddle of the Sphinx" in Oedipus, the King, wherein the twilight of man's life signifies the approach of death. The Western region is also symbolic of death for this same reason as it is where the sun sets, signifying the coming night—thus death. Additionally, the West holds more significance of death to many Indian nations, Cherokees included, as it was to the West that they were removed from their homelands and suffered so much death along the way.

The incantation documented in Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees combines all three of the elements noted above: black, night (darkness), and West. The color black is invoked seven times, an important number in Cherokee lore, in the form of rock, cloth, slab, coffin, clay, and houses, with the final invocation being toward the person's soul. The "Darkening Land," understood to be the West, and darkness are also mentioned. In this particular formula, the poisonous effects of selected plants are used to bring about the demise of the victim. Poisons are popular for this type of formula. Recalling the mention of the rattlesnake from a previous segment, it is a commonly held belief among the Cherokee that if one dreams of being bitten by a snake, it will have the same effect as if that person were actually bitten, and that person must be doctored as if the bite were real. That being noted, one of the more popular formulas to bring about harm—if not

death—to someone involves causing that person to dream of being bitten by a rattlesnake.[190]

Cherokee lore certainly holds that such things as killing a person by way of "bad" medicine are possible, but it also holds that bad medicine always comes back, multiplied, to those who initiate it. This is perhaps the most taboo of things in Cherokee lore, which suggests Elsie's reluctance even to mention it beyond cursory attention.

Two additional interviews were conducted for this study: one with Archie Stayathome and the other with Jennie-May Smith. The information garnered from those interviews is much the same as that which has been noted thus far. Therefore, for the sake of avoiding redundancies, that information is summarized here.

Archie Stayathome is the father of my sister-in-law, my brother's wife. He was 67 years old at the time of the interview. He spoke to me primarily about Indian medicine and why Cherokees should not spit nor leave hair or fingernail clippings lying around. These things, he said, may be taken and used by people who do bad medicine. One thing, perhaps, that modern science and ancient Cherokee medicine hold in common is that these things, spit, hair, nail clippings,

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[190]Archie Stayathome. Personal interview. 7 February 2000.

hold the composition of one's person. Science calls it DNA. Archie said he knew of some formulas, but he would not discuss them.

Jennie-May Smith was the most comical of the interviewees. I note that not to discredit anything she said, but merely to point out that she was laughing nearly the entire time. She claimed to know hundreds of *Tsunsti* stories, and to have seen the little ones many times. Yet, she would not discuss any of these occasions or accounts with me for fear that the Little People would come and "get" her. Jennie did, however, say that she always leaves them food and is always very careful where she walks for fear of stepping on one. When asked about the nature of the *Tsunsti*, she commented that they were not necessarily mean, just ornery sometimes. Her tone did, however, drastically change when I asked her about *Kolans*. She refused even to speak of them.

The *Tsunsti* stories in this chapter, both those from the Cherokee authors and those obtained during the interviews, when taken in their totality, offer a complete reversal of commercial publications' portrayal of Cherokee Little People—and for that matter most Native American folkloric creatures—as evil, demonic creatures determined to see human kind destroyed. Additionally, sitting with Cherokee elders/historians and listening to their stories, is the only way to get a true accounting of what it is to be Cherokee. The humor found in such stories is also a reflection of the Cherokee people themselves. Humor is a mainstay of the

full gamut of Cherokee—and Native American—emotions. Likewise, the knowledge one may gather from an afternoon of Cherokee tales told in a Cherokee setting is definitive proof that not all things must be written down to be valuable.

## Comparatively Speaking

The purpose of this segment is to show that though there are many similarities, the lore of the Cherokee (and most other Native American nations) is marginalized while the Western lore is canonized. Why is this so? To reiterate the main argument of this study one might conclude that the difference lies primarily within the different cultures' view of literacy. That the stories of these various cultures have so many commonalities is obvious. The one major difference is that one culture's literature is primarily written and the other is primarily oral. One may safely say that this same attitude is shared by most of mainstream America, and since most Native American lore remains primarily oral, it is devalued by the dominant culture and relegated to a realm of "otherness." If information cannot be "looked up" it is too often assumed that it holds no value, so dictates the Western paradigm.

However, this paradigm can also be the proverbial double-edged sword. Contemporary Americans, especially university and college students, tend to "look

up" information on the Internet. Books are no longer as popular a medium as they once were. Not the least concerned with verifying authenticity, students will quote and cite (sometimes) the "information" they find as the gospel truth. As noted in Chapter Three of this study, many times First Year Composition students will use the Bible as the definitive authority when advancing a claim. The Internet now rivals—if not owns—this authority.

The following is from a First Year Composition student essay actually submitted for consideration: "Some guy on the Internet says that good teachers get good results and bad teachers get bad results, regardless of what language is used. Some other guy said that is bullshit. It all depends on the language."[191] "Looked up" information such as this is more comparable to the drunken blitherings of a high school dropout. Literacy experts should be the first to understand that not everything written is authentic, authoritative, or authorized. However, it would seem that the value the Western tradition places on the written word supercedes orality, as evidenced by the following comparisons.

Throughout the interviews, primarily Cherokee mythical creatures and stories associated with said creatures were revealed. Each person interviewed for

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Anonymous student. "America = Liberty?" An essay submitted to Leslie D. Hannah in partial fulfillment for the requirements of English 102.006 at the University of Nevada, Reno. 23 October 2001.

this study offered amazing information, recalled it with incredible detail, and offered it as solemn truth. Yet, many professionals in the field of literature will summarily dismiss these tales as the nonsensical ramblings of superstitious people. Recall the William M. Clements commentary from Chapter One. Therefore, written stories similar to those detailed in the interviews are offered here for the sake of comparison and contrast. Mainly, these stories will be from what might considered a canon of Western civilization.

When thinking of the Cherokee Little People, there are many comparable creatures that come to mind. The broad category for comparison is fairies. Included within this category are kelpies, mermaids, nixies, gnomes, dwarves, and elves.[192] Of course, no one fears elves because of their association with Santa Claus. Many things are written about elves and Santa Claus, despite the fact that both are fictional. Elves reward goodness and punish badness; they are cute, and they are helpful.

Little People are, perhaps, the most popular of mythical beings the world over. Though there are many, the most immediate comparison from a Western literary canon that comes to mind is Puck, the mischievous fairy from William Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream. In many accounts written by non-

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"Fairies." *The Year 2000 Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia* ®. © 1999 Grolier, Inc. Danbury, CT.

Native authors about the Cherokee Little People, they are portrayed as evil creatures and harbingers of death. Recall the description found in A Fieldguide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels, and Other Subversive Spirits, wherein the authors note that it is always bad luck and a "portent of death" even to see the *Tsunsti*.[193] Now, compare the description of the Kilpatricks in Friends of Thunder, wherein the authors, who are Cherokee, report that there is no belief among the Cherokee that encounters with the *Tsunsti* are harmful, so long as one respects the wishes of the Little People.[194]

How is it that these two descriptions of the same creature are so different? Certainly it is not because Western culture does not know of fairies. This paradigm has made Shakespeare's Puck, one of the most beloved characters in the canon of English literature. Even his alias portrays him as virtuous: Robin Goodfellow—a good fellow, despite the fact that the name Puck is derived from "'pouke,' [which] originally was the term used to describe a type of devil or evil spirit."[195] The following is a description of the character Puck:

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Carol K. Mack and Dinah Mack. *A Field Guide to Demons, Fairies, Fallen Angels, and Other Subversive Spirits*. New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1998: 77.

194

Jack F. and Anna G. Kilpatrick. *Friends of Thunder: Folktales of the Oklahoma Cherokees*. Southern Methodist University Press, 1964. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995: 79.

195

Oscar James Campbell, ed. *The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare*. New York: MJF

> Not that he [Puck] is truly malevolent. Although his tricks make people uncomfortable, they don't seem to do any permanent damage. He casts an ironic eye on humanity. Thinking people fools, he loves to make fools of them. But laughter, not tears, is his aim. He delights in mischief-making, like a boy bent on fun. He's the childlike antidote to Oberon's seriousness; that's why he's jester as well as jokester. With his quickness, ventriloquism, and shape-changing ability, he clearly has magic fairy powers of his own. Meddling in the affairs of lovers and administering Cupid's love juice, he's reminiscent of Pan. And like him he seems to have some animal nature. He even tells us that he likes to take the form of animals and that he communicates with them.[196]

In this description, Puck's actions are described as being "not truly malevolent," causing no more than slight discomfort to humans, yet the exact same behavior is found in the Cherokee *Tsunsti* (as well as many other tribes' fairies) and these beings are said to be pure evil, determined to destroy humans. The

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Books/HarperCollins: 1966: 665.

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George Loutro. "William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*." *The Complete William Shakespeare Collection.* CD-Rom. Ottawa, Ontario, Canada: Corel Corp./ Fulcrum Technologies, 1995 - 96.

shape shifting ability attributed to Puck is seen as just another one of his tricks, yet this same ability of characters in Native lore is said by many in the Western culture to be a sign of deviltry. Additionally, the animalistic tendencies attributed to the Shakespearian character are funny; whereas, in the *Tsunsti* it is the disquality of savagery. Additionally, the previous description heralds Puck's love of jokes and laughter. Many *Tsunsti* stories also indicated that they are true lovers of hilarity, yet their sense of humor is portrayed as malicious.

In every production of Shakespeare's comedy, Puck is indeed the most trouble-making character on stage, yet he is perhaps the most loved in the play. Why is this so?—the acceptance of one being and the dismissal of what is in effect a duplicate. The only difference appears to be that the account of one is written and the other is spoken.

Hobbits, the fictional humanoid creatures from J. R. R. Tolkien's fantasy writings, are another set of little people that have gained popularity recently, due to the release of the movie Lord of the Rings. They have gained popularity despite their abilities and appearances: Hobbits, as portrayed in the movie, have pointed ears—a trait of the Devil as accepted by Western tradition. They have disfigurements. Frodo Baggins, the lead Hobbit, possesses the ability to vanish at will.

Another natural comparison to the Cherokee Little People is the Irish

Leprechaun. These little ones are said to be master craftspeople, primarily cobblers. Other traits of leprechauns include being two feet tall or less, have a love of gold and usually horde gold coins, and live around rocky, craggy areas, possibly caves.[197] This group of fairies seemingly has the most in common with the Cherokee *Tsunsti*. Recall the Lloyd Arneach account wherein he described the crafts found in small caves, little more than two feet in height. The Nancy Pritchett story of Jim Cap and the gold coins he supposedly found also indicates a relationship. So, with all these commonalities, the question bears repeating: why is one loved and the other hated?

During the interviews, the vampiric Cherokee *Kolan* was noted. Whereas the vampire of popular Western literature feeds on the blood of living, healthy victims, the Cherokee vampire feeds on the remaining life force of dead and dying people. The Nosferatu-like creature of Western literature is then a murderer, whereas the Cherokee *Kolan* is more a scavenger. Yet, the murderous vampire of Western literature is romanticized, while the opportunistic scavenger is demonized.

The popular work of Bram Stoker, Dracula, served to propel the vampire to almost rock star status. Additionally, contemporary authors, such as Anne Rice,

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"You might be a Leprechaun ..." Available at www.hicom.net/~irwind/leprecom.html. 10 January 2002.

continue to paint a romantic picture of these non-discriminating killers of men, women, and children. The popularity gained in the Western tradition's written works of these creatures is only multiplied when such works are made into Hollywood films. With handsome male actors such as Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, and Gary Oldman, and beautiful, well-endowed female actresses like Pamela Anderson, Kristy Swanson, and Salma Hayek portraying these creatures, the allure of the blood-sucking vampires continues to grow. Additionally, the lifestyles of such creatures, as portrayed in the movies, rival that of Hugh Hefner. Vampires are romanticized perhaps more than any other monstrous creation of Western literature. Innumerable books have been written about this creature.

Conversely, the Cherokee *Kolan* is little documented outside of Cherokee circles and even then primarily only in oral lore. Perhaps the most vivid description of a *Kolan* remains the one found in the work of James Mooney. Alan Kilpatrick, author of The Night has a Naked Soul, refers to Mooney's description thus:

> The only viable description of the Cherokee Raven Mocker comes from Mooney's 1900 account. Adjudged to be "of either sex" and "withered and old" as a consequence of "adding so many lives to their own," this fearsome birdlike creatures flies through the air in a fiery shape, with arms outstretched like wings, and sparks trailing

behind.... (9)

Kilpatrick further quotes Mooney in noting that *Kolans* will often torment a dying person in order to hasten death. (9-10) In the information gathered for this study, no accounts of torment were revealed. That is not to say that *Kolans* do not torment the dying. However, the fact remains that the person is dying and not being murdered. When activity such as this is documented in animals it is called "nature's way." Scavengers, such as buzzards, do often hasten the death of a wounded or ill animal, yet they are not the cause of death. Perhaps it is this association to scavengers, which in turn results in the vilification of the *Kolans*.

Alan Kilpatrick notes another vampiric creature, the "Night Walker," which bears noting here. The Night Walker, close relative of the *Kolan* (sometimes used interchangeably) is seemingly a bit more popular with readers of the Western tradition. Contemporary horror author Stephen King wrote a novel titled Sleep Walkers, which was turned into a movie. As with the romanticizing of the Nosferatu-like vampire, King's creatures are portrayed as sexy and good-looking. The main Sleep Walker character rapidly becomes the most sought-after young man at his school. This novel is one of King's most successful horror books, and the characters are in effect *Kolans*. Though it is a fictional story it made popular creatures feared for centuries—simply by being written.

The *Skili*, as noted previously, is traditionally a witch. However, the shape

shifting creatures of Cherokee lore might be most readily compared to werewolves. Belief in lycanthropy, the ability to change from one form to another—usually that of a dog or wolf, is well-documented, and is almost universal in lore. Norwegian lore, as well as that of Sweden, Germany, and even ancient Greece contains accounts of the "man-wolf." The term "lycanthropy" comes from the ceremony of an ancient Greek cult who worshiped on Mount Lykaion. A yearly ceremony was held wherein one worshiper would be changed into a wolf and made to roam the countryside for nine years. If he could refrain from eating human flesh during that period he would change back to a man. However, if he consumed human flesh he remained a wolf.[198]

According to much of the lore associated with werewolves, shooting them with a silver bullet is the only sure way to kill one. However, it is also believed that the only true way to ensure the creature stays dead is to cut off its head and either burn or bury it, thus condemning the body (same tales say the spirit) to search forever for its head. This bit of lore offers an explanation to the headless condition sometimes associated with sightings of these creatures.

As with the two aforementioned creatures, the werewolf has been romanticized in the Western tradition. Perhaps second only to the vampire, the

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Robert Burton. *The Anatomy of Melancholy, vol. 1.* London: J. M. Dent; New York E. P. Dutton, 1932: 133 - 134.

werewolf benefits from a multitude of books being written about it. In many such writings the werewolf is even portrayed as a comical and certainly lovable character. Additionally, movies glorify the werewolf as both heroic and comedic. Perhaps the most obvious is the Michael J. Fox movie, Teenwolf.

In addition to the fictionalized accounts in books and movies, there is scientific research which sought to prove the existence of such creatures. The most contemporary example is a mythical creature of the Amazon delta region, the Mapinguari. It is said to be a large, headless, man-like wolf creature that emerges from the forest around the time of a person's death. So vivid and detailed are the accounts of this creature that in 1999 an expedition was launched to try and find it. Evidence, such as footprints and dung, was found to support the existence of the Mapinguari, yet the actual creature itself was not found.[199] Though the lycanthropic Mapinguari remains a mystery, the written scientific data does provide it some legitimacy.

Some interesting information was uncovered during the research on the *Tsunstis* and *Skilis*. There are well-documented physical and mental diseases associated with these creatures. Western science has known of lycanthropy for centuries. Robert Burton, in The Anatomy of Melancholy referred to it as "wolf

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"Beast of the Amazon." *The Unexplained.* The Learning Channel. 6 January 2002.

madness." It is said to be a mental illness.

Similarly, Leprechaunism is a physical ailment, a well-documented, although rare, form of dwarfism. More readily known within the medical community as Donohue Syndrome, "Leprechaunism is an extremely rare disorder characterized by abnormal resistance to insulin that results in a variety of distinguishing characteristics, including growth delays and abnormalities affecting the endocrine system (i.e., the system of glands that secrete hormones into the blood system)."[200] Thus, Little People are scientifically proven to exist. In fact, Little People is the label preferred by people who have this and other forms of dwarfism.[201]

It is the *image* of these Little People that is embraced by Western society for such things as children's cereal and university mascots.[202] This folkloric image of the Leprechaun is loved the world over as a symbol of fortune and good luck. However, in stark contrast to this, the image of Cherokee Little People is one of

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"Leprechaunism" National Organization for Rare Disorders. New Fairfield, CT. Available at www.rarediseases.org. 1 March 2002.

201

Centralized Dwarfism Resources. Available at dwarfism.org 1 March 2002.

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I say here the *image* of Little People, for in reality people who suffer from dwarfism are oftentimes ridiculed. Reference is made here to the breakfast cereal Lucky Charms® and the University of Notre Dame.

vilification.

Similarly, as previously noted, the images of the Western lycanthropic and vampiric creatures are also glorified. Thus the question again arises, why, with so many similarities between these creatures of Western tradition and Cherokee tradition, are such folkloric creatures glorified (one may safely say loved) in one sense, yet vilified and hated in another? The only visible difference is the sense of literacy and the interpretation of it. One is written—one is spoken. The argument of this study is not that one is better or more valuable than the other, but both are equal.

In conclusion, I feel it is pertinent to note and briefly explain Pirsig's Paradox. This term comes from Robert Pirsig's 1974 intellectual adventure novel entitled Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance. In this story, a man and his eleven-year-old son, along with a group of friends, are on a cross-country motorcycle ride, and at night they have deep philosophical discussions on various topics. One night, the conversation turns to ghosts, wherein the father declares his non-belief in such things, because, he says, "They are unscientific." To summarize, science has not proven they exist; therefore, they do not exist.

However, then it is mentioned that Indians believe in ghosts because "...they [Indians] have a different way of looking at things. Science isn't part of the Indian tradition." Immediately the father reverses himself and now declares

his belief in ghosts, for, he says, he did not know in what way he was supposed to be seeing the ghosts—a modern, scientific way, or a more primitive, non-scientific way. "The scientific point of view has wiped out every other view to a point where they all seem primitive," he says. The father then explains his reversal by using what is, he declares, an Indian point of view. It is rather lengthy, so it is summarized here.

The father begins an elongated narrative on gravity and its existence well before Sir Isaac Newton "discovered" it. (This passage may also been seen as allusionary to Columbus and his "discovery" America.) The father continues by stating that it would seem "nutty" to think that before the 17th Century there was no gravity, but along comes Sir Isaac Newton and his apple incident and suddenly there is the Law of Gravity. Gravity—the Law of Gravity. Gravity has always been here, but the Law of Gravity has existed only in people's heads since Sir Isaac Newton wrote it down, or in other words validated it. (This is much the same as the Thor Heyerdahl Project as noted in a previous chapter of this study.)

This is what is known as Pirsig's Paradox.[203] If something exists only in a person's mind, to that person it is real—whether it is written about or spoken about. Additionally, things must not be written about to exist. The creatures of

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Robert M. Pirsig. *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance.* 1974. William Morrow. New York: Bantam Books, 1975: 28-32.

Cherokee folklore exist in the minds of Cherokees; therefore, they are real to Cherokees, who understand the realist nature of these creatures. It is, perhaps, this equation "writing = validation" that leads non-Cherokees down the path of disbelief in such Native creatures, but have them readily accepting misinformation from a written—albeit wrong—source.

## Conclusion

This study has been an argument on two fronts. First, storytelling is a common thread among all of humanity. Regardless of the boundaries of race, nationality, gender, religious or political affiliation, storytelling is a core element in the composition of humanity. Second, though storytelling is common to all of humankind, there are differences in each cultures' means and methods that make certain types of stories as unique to a culture as our signatures are to us as individuals. There are those among us who will attempt forgery in promoting certain types of stories and the telling aspects of these as authentic, namely in the circle of Native American folklore.

The first argument, that of stories and their telling being the common link between all humanity, should be a nonargument. It is, perhaps, one of the most obvious claims ever made. Yet, this argument *must* be made because of the devaluation of the spoken word by those who are masters of the written word. Some literacy theorists often devalue oral cultures so severely as to make them

practically worthless within the canonical circles of written Western Tradition. How soon such experts forget that the world's oral cultures are the primordial "ooze" from which their precious written culture emerged. These experts would do good to look up in some of the written historical documents of the great Western Tradition some cold, hard facts of Native American theory. Craig Womack's thoughts bear repeating here:

> To take this one step further, the primary purpose of this study is not to argue for canonical inclusion or opening up native literature to a broader audience .... I say that tribal literatures are not some branch waiting to be grafted onto the main trunk. Tribal literatures are the *tree*, the oldest literatures in the Americas, the most American of American literatures. We *are* the canon.[204]

However, it is obvious that the value of oral cultures in the literate Western culture is devalued. Some might say even worthless. Yet, this study is a caution to such literacy experts that their world of written tradition is reverting back to one of orality. "The more things change, the more they stay the same," one could say. What I shall deem *hyper-literacy* is reverting the tradition of the written word in the Western Culture back to a more grassroots level of orality. Hyper-literacy is

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Craig Womack, *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999: 7.

"writing" digitally, and this "writing" is rapidly becoming speaking: computers that "listen" and convert the spoken word to digital text on a screen. The heyday of the Western Tradition's tangible book is in decline. Orality is once again on the rise.

The second argument of this study has not been so much of an argument as it has been an investigation—almost a criminal investigation concerning some of the materials examined. This also plays, somewhat, into this study's first argument: that being, if it is written in a book it must be so. Such a value is indeed placed upon the written word. Thus, it is in such a mind set where the fraudulent representation of Native lore festers.

Putting words on a page and calling them "Cherokee" does not make them so, especially when these words are allegedly sacred. Such gross misrepresentations of "authentic Cherokee teachings" is unacceptable to real Cherokees. Yet, the Western Tradition sees value in these frauds, simply because they are "written down" and may be "looked up." Such a misguided sense of values leads ignorant literacy experts down the wrong path of truly understanding authentic Cherokee and Native American teachings.

I am reminded here of an old poem that my grandmother always recited. It is appropriate to this study's second argument. It is good advice for all literacy experts, and those who peddle themselves as keepers of sacred Cherokee wisdom.

A wise old bird sat in an oak,
The more he saw, the less he spoke,
The less he spoke, the more he heard,
Why can't we all be like that wise old bird?

To the subscribers of the Western Tradition's value of written literacy, this study is a plea. Put down the books, not forever, only for a moment each day, and listen to the wisdom of the world around you. Close your eyes, but not your minds, and listen—really listen—to the words of Native American elders, to the words of the elders from other cultures, to the gentle and wise words of Mother Earth herself. She will tell you what she wants you to hear. She still tells stories, by and through the lives of her people. These lives are "books" like no others you will ever encounter. You just have to learn how to "read" them is all.

Donvdagohvi.

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