Susie O'Brien

"Please Eunice, Don't Be Ignorant"

The White Reader as Trickster in Lee Maracle's Fiction[1]

In the Preface to *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories*, Lee Maracle explains how she attempts, in her writing, to integrate conventions of Native orature and traditional European story. She also constructs the role of the reader, who, in accordance with the tradition of Native storytelling, assumes responsibility for the generation of meaning. In the oral tradition, Maracle explains, "the listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their lives to actively work themselves out of it" (12). In Maracle's written text, this audience involvement is signalled in the direct address of the title to the Preface—"You Become the Trickster" (11). As A. Lavonne Brown Ruoff notes, the power of the Trickster derives from his ability to "live interstitially, to confuse, and to escape the structures of society" (Ruoff 127). By giving the reader this role, then, Maracle might be seen to be abandoning—and granting her reader permission to abandon—the traditional categories and the hierarchies of author/reader, subject/object, Native/European in favour of a less restrictive, more playful engagement with the text.

One of the signal characteristics of Trickster, however, is that he is often tricked, usually through an attempt to overreach his own capabilities, a point Maracle does not allow the white reader—and in particular the white academic reader—to forget. In the Preface to *Sojourner's Truth*, and in many of the stories that follow, Maracle undermines the freedom of the reader to "become the Trickster" by emphasizing the reality of a world so rigidly and unequally divided that the Trickster's very survival as a boundary figure is

threatened. By using "We/I" and "You" throughout the Preface, Maracle interpellates the reader into a discourse where "White" and "European" are manifestly "other." While white Canadians might want to disclaim or qualify the label of "European," Maracle's discourse here insists on this categorical definition, limiting the freedom of the white Trickster to transcend difference and denying the reader's freedom to assert a multivalent identity.[2]

Throughout the succeeding stories, Maracle alternates between accommodating and alienating narrative strategies. After seeming to engage the reader as her co-conspirator in a deconstructive project that seeks to dissolve identity in an acknowledgement of the provisionality of all categories, she repeatedly forestalls the possibility of such a rhetorical exercise by grounding the reader in a realistic narrative in which discursive play is constrained by the operation of identity politics. The stage on which the critic can now attempt to perform tricks is suddenly cluttered by a mise en scène that interferes with a pure engagement with script.

In this paper I want to explore the idea of the white reader—specifically the white academic reader—as Trickster, and to locate the contradictions of such a construction, as it is posited by Maracle's text, within current debates about post-colonial reading practice. To do so, I will look at some of the ways in which Trickster has been taken up in contemporary critical theory, particularly post-modernist theory, as well as at some critiques of such deployments as essentially appropriative gestures. Maracle's text, I will argue, does not offer the reader an easy path between these contradictory positions; indeed, by inviting the reader to become Trickster, she points to the necessary failure of all attempts to consolidate a comfortable theoretical position, even as she insists on the reader's responsibility as an "architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose" (13).

The "level" of transformation effected (assuming, with Maracle, that social transformation is a desirable—a possible—outcome of textual engagement) is, I would argue, at least partly dependent on the way the architect/reader construes the figure of "Trickster."

For Tomson Highway, Trickster is as important to Cree culture as Christ is to Western culture (qtd. in Johnston 255)

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that as the role of Christ has diminished in Western culture, non-native invocations of Trickster have become more frequent. The question of the legitimacy of such transgressions of cultural boundaries is addressed by white and native writers with varying

degrees of concern. For Robert Kroetsch, the issue is simple: "the artist him/herself:/ in the long run, given the choice of being God/ or Coyote, will, most mornings, choose to be Coyote" ("Death is a Happy Ending" 208). Asked in an interview whether he sees "a difference between using the mythology that is already a part of one's culture... and using the mythology of an alien culture, such as the Blackfoot?," Kroetsch responds that he has read extensively in both Greek and Blackfoot mythology, and that "in the latter case, there was a sense of being free from its residue of meaning that was very exhilarating" (97). The interview proceeds:

> *Wilson:* When you encountered the figure of Coyote were you struck by a sense that some of your characters.. had already been embodiments of the Coyote figure even before you had come into contact with Blackfoot mythology?
>
> *Kroetsch:* Yes, I went and looked in my copy of Radin, but I couldn't discover when I first read him on the trickster. In any case, I was certainly aware that I had tuned in on the figure of the trickster before I knew that it was a trickster in Radin's sense. The trickster's a mythic figure that really speaks to me. Partly this is because a trickster breaks down systems. There is no logic to his behavior, or only an anti-logic (99).

For Kroetsch, then, to "become Coyote" is an issue of artistic choice; moreover, Trickster's very nature seems to sanction that freedom to ignore or transcend cultural boundaries. For many Native writers, however, these boundaries cannot be so easily dismissed. As Native American writer Chrystos eloquently points out in the poem "Vision: Bundle":

> They have our bundles split open in museums
> our dresses & shirts at auctions
> our languages on tape
> our stories in locked rare book libraries
> our dances on film
> The only part of us they can't steal
> is what we know (21)

Lest the white reader associate "they" with nineteenth century anthropologists, Chrystos insists elsewhere that "No matter how sensitive you are/ if you are white/ you are" ("Those Tears" 131). Her writing further suggests that the "white" activities of anthropology and literary criticism are ultimately not that different; if "they" can't *steal* what she knows, they can translate their own interpretations of it into cultural capital; that they have missed the essence of what they sought is small consolation when their misrepresentations help to consolidate their power, and confirm her marginalization.

As Lenore Keeshig-Tobias argues, the appropriation of knowledge can be as aggressive—and as potentially devastating—as the theft of material artifacts. She asks "Why do Canadians assume the right to know whatever they want to know but not question their right to knowledge nor the impact their words will have?" ("The Magic of Others" 175). Unlike Chrystos, Keeshig-Tobias suggests that knowledge can be stolen, or at least effaced, by colonization. As testimony to European rapaciousness, she notes in the poem "Descant" that "storytellers say/ the Trickster disappeared/ with the newcomers' advent" (37). This belief is reflected in the Committee to Re-Establish the Trickster, which was formed in 1986 by Native writers in recognition of "the need for self-determination, the need to reclaim the Native voice in literature, to restore Native sensibility, and the need to consolidate and gain recognition for Native contributions to writing, in aboriginal language as well as in the dominant languages" (Keeshig-Tobias 173).

The urgency of these goals—in particular, the need to reclaim the Native voice in literature—is acknowledged by Native American writer and critic Gerald Vizenor who has published numerous critical and fictional works with the express goal of promoting tribal literatures. Unlike Keeshig-Tobias, however, Vizenor is not concerned with the possibility of the theft or loss of the Trickster, who cannot, he argues, be reduced to a "code," or even to a determinate figure. Vizenor demonstrates the impossibility of such reduction through his stories, which represent the performance of Trickster as they undermine academic attempts to define him/her. An extract from a story in which an anthropologist (Shicer) is interviewing an old Native woman nicknamed "the sergeant" for information on the Trickster exemplifies this approach:

> Shicer was never at ease on the reservation; his academic tactics to harness the Trickster in the best tribal narratives, and to discover the code of comic behavior, hindered imagination and disheartened casual conversations. The anthropologist would celebrate theories over imagination; in this sense, academic evidence was a euphemism for linguistic colonization of tribal memories and trickster narratives.

The story unexpectedly shifts into a recitation of such a piece of "academic evidence":

> Paul Radin reviews the tribal trickster as the "presence of a figure"and as a "theme of themes" in various cultures. He declares that the trickster is a "creator and destroyer" and that he "knows neither good nor evil yet he is responsible for

> both. He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come (*Trickster of Liberty* xiv).

These words are not attributed to the anthropologist, suggesting, perhaps, that Vizenor as omniscient narrator/critic is stepping in here to provide the reader with helpful background information. The roles of both the anthropologist and the knowledgeable critic are undermined in the next lines, however as the "sergeant" (thus far nearly silent) shifts the commentary back to the level of story, addressing the anthropologist directly: "'The values, not the trickster, come into being,' said the sergeant. 'The trickster is a comic *holotrope* in a narrative, not a real person, but then neither are anthropologists'" (xiv).[3]

Though someone has definitely been tricked, here, Trickster finally eludes identification; he is, Vizenor argues, merely "a comic sign with no histories, no political or economic signification, and no being, or presence in the narrative" ("Trickster Discourse" 285). In this sense, Vizenor suggests, Trickster is essentially a postmodernist figure (281). Suggesting that the meaning of tribal literatures has been distorted by "neocolonial consumerism" he argues that

> Native American Indian literatures are unstudied landscapes, wild and comic rather than tragic and representational, storied with narrative wisps and tribal discourse. Social science theories constrain tribal landscapes to institutional values, representationalism, and the politics of academic determination... Postmodernism liberates imagination and widens the audience for tribal literatures; this new criticism rouses a comic world view, narrative discourse, and language games on the past (279).

Leaving aside the question of whether postmodernist discourse can actually serve a liberating function,[4] Vizenor's argument raises some interesting questions. While Chrystos and Keeshig-Tobias might be accused of subscribing to an essentialist notion of native authenticity that replicates the colonialist binaries of native/European and self/other, Vizenor celebrates the generative power of textual miscegenation, of which Trickster is the priapic emblem. Trickster, Vizenor points out, shatters an illusion of the monologistic integrity of all anthropological notions of identity by exposing the fictionality of their boundaries; thus both Trickster and the anthropologist can finally be revealed as imaginary. While the discursive dismantling of anthropology arguably frees up a much needed space for the play of other, competing narratives, behind the comic act of defiance lurks a

serious—even a tragic—consciousness of the effects of anthropology not just on native discourse, but also on native history. Vizenor's assertion that "postmodernism... widens the audience for tribal literatures" silently attests to the operational, if not ontological, substance of something called tribal literatures, and another, perhaps oppositional category of critical readers for whom this literature needs to be validated by locating them within the academically credible domain of postmodernist discourse. This theoretical vindication of Trickster may be seen in one way as merely the most recent manifestation of a historical tendency to define and evaluate native cultural forms according to the current biases of European epistemological systems. Vizenor's uncritical celebration of the vision of Trickster at play in the fields of postmodernism seems disturbingly oblivious to the more violent relationship that historically preceded and actually discursively engendered the current theoretical mood. If Trickster could not actually be killed off by colonization, his tricks have had to adapt to the radical alteration of the textual space in which he operates.

As Karl Kerényi notes, the indeterminate and amoral figure of Trickster could not easily be reconciled with Christianity; accordingly, his mythic importance changed and diminished with European contact. Kerényi notes:

> There were several ways of disposing of him. The first, and more arbitrary, was to reduce his original function to harmless entertainment by stressing his ridiculous traits. A second was to assimilate him to the [non-divine] culture heroes... The third way was his transformation into a devil either under Christian influence, by equating him with Satan, or by treating him as one who had once been a deity and had then forfeited his higher divine rank to a more powerful and genuine deity (186).

Once he has been deposed in this manner, Trickster's stories become "lies" in the pejorative sense; this transformation in particular may explain, in part, the attraction of the Trickster for postmodernist critics. Postmodernist valorization of indeterminacy, ambivalence and, perhaps most significantly, marginalization, permits the co-option of native culture under the guise of rehabilitation; the reader can approach the Native text as a form that is "equal," in both meaning(lessness) and (in)accessibility, to the white text. Keeshig-Tobias argues that such white reclamations of Native texts are, at best, illusory:

> While readers may feel a kinship with Native people because of this literature, they do not recognize it is their own image and reflection they see and love. As is

> sometimes said of the Trickster when he falls victim to his own folly, this creature never learns (175).

The Trickster here is invoked, in one of his more negative aspects, as a figure for the white reader. More significantly, perhaps, he functions here not as an active principle but as a metaphor, an absence, which has been elided by the overwhelming presence of the white reader. The disappearance of the Trickster to which Keeshig-Tobias refers in "Descant" may be seen as metonymic of the subsumption of native culture into European institutional discourses of religion and, more recently, literary theory. Theory, according to this argument, is merely the institutionalization of the egocentric reading practice described by Keeshig-Tobias.

As African writer Wole Soyinka observes:

> [We] have been blandly invited to submit ourselves to a second epoch of colonisation—this time by a universal-humanoid abstraction defined and conducted by individuals whose theories and prescriptions are derived from the apprehension of their world and *their* history, *their* social neuroses and *their* value systems (x).

The case against theory, made by such writers as Barbara Christian in the U.S., and—not surprisingly—by Keeshig-Tobias in Canada, has been too well-documented to address in detail here[5]; that Maracle herself has taken up a position in the anti-theory camp merits further examination, as it informs the kind of contract she offers the reader in the Preface to *Sojourner's Truth.* She sums up her objections in *Coming to Oratory*:

> Theory. If it can't be shown, it can't be understood. Theory is a proposition, proven by demonstrable argument. Argument: evidence, proof. Evidence: demonstrable testimony, demonstration... None of these words exist outside of their inter-connectedness. Each is defined by the other (3).

Theory, according to this argument, fails by virtue of its failure to connect with anything outside of language. Maracle goes on to offer an alternative approach to literary understanding, suggesting that, unlike theory,

> Oratory... is unambiguous in its meaning. Oratory: place of prayer, to persuade. This is a word we can work with. We regard words as coming from original being—a sacred spiritual being. The orator is coming from a place of prayer and as such attempts to be persuasive (3).

The principles of oratory are informed, then, by a belief in the referential—even, perhaps, the reverential—power of language. As Chrystos writes, "No metaphors/ Mountains ARE our mothers" ("Savage Eloquence" 42). At the other extreme, Keeshig-Tobias points out "Native stories deal with the expe-

rience of our (Native) humanity, experiences we have laughed, cried, sweated and shit for. Experiences we have learned from" ("Magic of Others" 176). What Chrystos's and Keeshig-Tobias's assertions have in common is their claim—at the mythic and vernacular levels respectively[6]—for a special referential purchase of language in a Native context.

Aside from the dubious suggestion, implicit mainly in Keeshig-Tobias's argument, that native writing is somehow more imbued with the substance of "real life" than white writing, the assertion of an unproblematic connection between expression and experience is successfully challenged not just by contemporary theory, but by Maracle's fiction. Her belief in "unambiguous" meaning is belied in a Preface that asserts the freedom of the audience to derive meaning "at whatever level you choose" (13) from stories in which "all conclusions are considered valid" (12). Meaning, Maracle seems to be suggesting here, is created not so much through an unequivocal language (within which this kind of Preface would arguably be unnecessary), as through a contract between writer and audience, who "[the writer] trusts will draw useful lessons from the story" (12). The meaning of such a contract cannot be guaranteed by the sacred power of its words; rather, it must be negotiated within the historical space in which the functions of reader, writer and text are produced. To the place of the Transcendental Signified, the deity in which these functions were once rendered both indivisible and invisible, in steps Trickster, working *within* the historical space of the text to facilitate not a sacred communion, but secular communication between reader and writer, word and world. If not exactly a historical agent, Trickster is an agent with a history, not merely a semiotic sign. To attempt to thus construct him, on a culturally undifferentiated plane of textual différance is to make him into a parody of the transcendent deity of referentiality; here, perhaps, some *caveats* about theory need to be heeded more carefully.

Postmodern/poststructuralist theory has resulted in a proliferation of readings that, while asserting the validity of "otherness," seek to transmute cultural specificities into universal theoretical principles. One example, described by Kumkum Sangari, may be found in the concept of "simultaneity," a characteristic of much Latin American writing, which entails the synchronous presentation of different time-frames, modes of experience (real and mythical) and literary genres. Sangari points out that while synchrony is, for the West, a product of the discredited linear time of modernity and

progress, for Latin America it is "the restless product of a long history of miscegenation, assimilation, and syncretization *as well as* of conflict, contradiction, and cultural violence" (158). Post-modernism negates the specific historical and cultural forces by which narrative forms are produced by subsuming them within a universal deterritorializing framework. As Sangari has further noted, "since postmodernism both privileges the present and valorizes indeterminacy as a cognitive mode, it preempts change by fragmenting the ground of praxis" (181).

One of the criticisms Bell directs at the Trickster in Vizenor's stories is that he does not accept responsibility for his actions. Without taking up that idea as it applies to Vizenor's work specifically, I think it is worth noting one of the central ironies that characterizes postmodernist discourse as a whole: by self-consciously exhibiting the discursive under-pinnings of all truth claims, including its own, postmodernism would appear to leave its proponents discursively naked, without a veil of objectivity to hide behind. The idea of nakedness, however, of course presupposes the possibility of a something else, a subjectivity concealed beneath the neatly accessorized postmodernist suit. By reducing the idea of the coherent historical subject to a collection of discursive effects in an institutionally sanctioned space, the postmodern theorist remains safely on the level of theoretical performance without having to enact the daring role of which he speaks.

Distinctions between theory and practice, discourse and history, safety and danger are of central importance in Maracle's writing. In talking about the essential vulnerability of the postmodernist position, Kroetsch has noted:

> You stay alive by moving around on those edges where you risk meaninglessness all the time. That's one of the risks you have to take on the edge, that it might be just totally meaningless... It is the old trick of Proteus or the trickster figure... saying "I don't know the rules and I don't really want to know the rules. I'm willing to stay out here where the rules are shifting and maybe even unknowable (*Labyrinths of Voice* 130-1).

For Maracle the choice of whether to adopt a rhetorical position of interstitiality is eclipsed by her concern mimetically to render the historical conditions by which marginality is not chosen but conferred on the native subject. This condition is represented in her novel *Bobbi Lee* in which the narrator-protagonist observes:

> no welfare from the city because I couldn't prove I wasn't a Registered Indian, and no assistance from Indian Affairs because I couldn't prove I was a Registered Indian.
>
> Maybe, if I'd pursued the thing higher up in the bureaucracy I could have gotten something. But I was really ashamed and the whole thing seemed such an ugly mess. "Fuck it!" I thought. "I'm not going begging any more. (93)

Bobbi Lee manages to turn the situation to her advantage, using it to assert her independence from both juridical categories. By thematically representing the condition of liminality, Maracle is able both to expose the arbitrariness of official discourses of race and to stage the performance of an identity that refuses to be contained by them. In her writing she also seeks, through her integration of the principles of European literature and native orature, to enact her own liberation from rigid discursive categories. By grounding her emancipatory gesture in an essentially realist narrative, she foregrounds the importance of negotiation and struggle in all such political projects.

In the story "Who's Political Here?," for example, the activity of the narrator, which consists of shopping, doing laundry, tending children, cooking dinner and having sex, is counterpointed with conversation about the activity of her husband, who has been jailed for postering. For her husband's friends, who have planted themselves, uninvited, in her living room, his situation assumes a monumental symbolic significance. While the narrator cooks them dinner, they "discuss the 'politics' of Tom's arrest":

> "He was probably arrested because the subject matter of the poster was South Africa," someone says.
>
> I resume doing dishes and mothering my daughters and only half listen to the chatter. Some of it is pure theatre. It seems absurd to me to attach a whole world analysis to a simple postering charge (36).

By this point, it seems absurd to the reader as well. Drawn into the consciousness of the narrator, we are confronted by a world in which existence is defined by activity. Fraught by emotions of irritation towards her husband, mingled frustration and love for her daughters and desire and revulsion towards her husband's friend, the narrator is constantly forced to compromise these feelings in the face of the need to act in the world. Caught up in the reality of the narrator's domestic life, the reader shares her impatience with the solemn and empty pronouncements of the men around her.

The principle of activity is reflected in a narrative style that is consistent with one aspect of postmodern "synchrony"; distinctions are seldom drawn between modes of speech, thought and action. The principal vehicle for this

confluence of modes is free (direct) discourse, as is illustrated in the description of the narrator's attempt to leave the house to go shopping:

> "You said you were going to do laundry." He is whining now. There is nothing worse than hearing a grown man whine. Grown man. Since when have you known a man to really grow up, Lee. I agree that I am going to do the laundry, today, and put both girls in the stroller (back-to-back), and haul the shopping cart and kids down the lane (29).

This narrative strategy functions here in the way Henry Louis Gates describes, with reference to African literary texts, "as an implicit critique of that ancient opposition in narrative theory between showing and telling, between mimesis and diegesis" (208). In Maracle's story, where meaning is explicitly embodied in action, the use of free discourse signals the inseparability of description and process, interpretation and being. In this way, it signals, as Gates observes, an aspiration to the dramatic (208). While such a trope may function in a postmodernist text to highlight the discursive constructedness of all ostensibly "pure" events, it becomes, in Maracle's text, a way of getting around the constraints of written discourse mentioned in the Preface. She explains:

> In these stories I've had to delete some wonderful moments in the listening process. When our orators get up to speak, they move in metaphorical ways. Anyone who has watched our speakers is familiar with the various faces of the orator, Each facial expression, change in tone of voice, cadence or diction has meaning for us... The silent language of metaphor is a story in itself. I substitute physical description for physical metaphor" (13).

Free direct discourse functions as a bridge between physical description and verbal utterance. Even when she is not employing this strategy, however, Maracle succeeds in conveying a sense of speech and activity as continuous:

> "OK."..."Don't put your fingers in the butter," and I move it out of the reach of my youngest girl. "Put the hat back on his head," to the older one. "Cream, sugar?."..."Practically speaking, fifty bucks is a bit of a wad. I don't have it." (33).

This passage seems to demonstrate the narrator's mastery—both of her environment within the story, and of the story itself; indeed, according to Maracle's principles of story, the two arenas are inseparable. Within the story, the narrator ultimately demonstrates that mastery is an illusion. While she clearly gains a victory over Frankie and the other men, refusing to validate their belief in the superiority of their discourse, she confesses to being unnerved by Patti, her husband's mistress. While she is not bothered

by the affair, she observes "she has some sort of secret inside of her that inspires men to respect her brain and not intrude on her person by reducing her to a servant. I envy her position" (37). Patti's "secret" is contempt for women, and a willingness to play by the rules of the male discourse. The narrator—Maracle—refuses to be bound by those rules and so is denied the "position" they could confer on her[7]. She cannot, however, refuse them entirely, as is disturbingly illustrated by her initial encounter with Frankie, about which she comments

> I have to put up with gross physical nuances like having his arm accidentally brush my breasts, but I don't care. Under the coercive pressure of hauling fifty pounds of babies and another seventy-five of groceries a full five blocks, the stupid little rubs don't seem so bad (30).

Both accepting Frankie's help and, later, sleeping with him require an act of compromise—something which Frankie shows himself to be incapable of understanding. He and the other men, comfortably entrenched in the unassailable simplicity of their "political" theories, are disengaged from the world around them, and are thus able to maintain the illusion that their power is both uncompromising and uncompromised. The narrator, and Maracle, on the other hand both see compromise as a means of survival, of being "political" in an active, instead of a theoretical sense.

This vision is clearly demonstrated in "Eunice," a more overtly autobiographical story about a meeting of women writers who are preparing a feminist program for community radio. The meeting is being hosted by Eunice (whom Maracle has not previously met), a white woman suffering from agoraphobia. At first, Maracle is reluctant to attend the meeting, fearing that Eunice, who had not been a part of the group during the past ten years of consciousness raising, might make tactless comments such as "Why do Indian women drink so much?" (57). Deciding that her desire to meet with other women writers is stronger than her misgivings about dealing with an unknown white woman, she silently pleads "*Please Eunice, don't be ignorant*" (57). As it turns out, Eunice is, in a sense, ignorant. After speaking to Maracle for some time, someone else's comment leads her to say "'You're Native Indian, aren't you?'" Maracle reacts

> *Oh christ,* here it comes, as I answer "yes" and numb up for the next line.
>
> "How stupid of me, now I see it. I guess you get enough of that? I mean, I knew you weren't white, but... Oh, I better shut up before I get both feet in my mouth" (62).

"The stiffness in the room," Maracle notes, "was palpable" (62). The moment passes and, when Eunice doesn't make the kind of racist generalization Maracle feared, their conversation resumes, and Maracle's anxiety subsides somewhat. Later in the conversation, another woman asks "How come women don't write about political meetings?" to which Eunice replies weakly that she "doesn't go to meetings, but that she's getting ready to" (62). Empathizing now with Eunice's embarrassment, Maracle observes "No one says it, but we all feel like Jam has said something out of turn" (62). The meeting is filled with moments like these—words uttered, words withheld, not because they serve the agenda of the meeting (which is eventually abandoned), but because they facilitate the communication which is necessary to begin the process of dismantling prejudices. The project for which all the women have gathered—a program on "the politics of international feminism" for International Women's Day—remains the central force of the meeting, even as it becomes peripheral. The significant action in the story becomes the conversation of the women, the guiding direction of which is continually compromised by the difficult task of creating an atmosphere of tolerance in which to frame their discussion. Though such an atmosphere is ultimately achieved, it is both precarious and provisional. It would, in fact, have been easier for Maracle to stay home. Reflecting on Eunice's agoraphobia, she notes "We were both somewhat comfortable in our feminine invisibility, only Eunice stayed there while I merely desired to" (57). Writing, for Maracle is a relinquishment of invisibility. It is, at the same time, a compromise, as she is forced to translate the principles of oratory into a form that is unwieldy in both literary and political terms.[8] She explains the importance of writing thus:

The value of resistance is the reclaiming of the sacred and significant self. By using story and poetry I move from the empowerment of my self to the empowerment of every person who reads the book. It is personally dangerous for me to live among dis-empowered oppressed individuals (14).

In order to become empowered by Maracle's writing, the reader, too, has to relinquish the comforts of safety that are afforded by the adoption of a theory that wards off conflict and contradiction by a ritual invocation of heterogeneity. To "be the Trickster" is not just to celebrate the dissolution of discursive boundaries, but to engage, as Maracle does, with the complexities and contradictions of history. In the oral tradition, Maracle points out, "the listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their

lives to actively work themselves out of it." As readers—as academic readers—we need to continue to look for ways of achieving such an engagement.

NOTES

1 A version of this paper was given at the Div. on Orality and the Construction of Indigenous Texts, MLA Convention, New York, 27 Dec. 1992.

2 Dorothy Seaton comments on a similar interpellative strategy in Chrystos's poetry, noting that Chrystos simultaneously draws white readers into her narrative conscious while rigidly maintaining their exclusion: "The result is that i,... am being made foreign, other, both to the field of experience and knowledge constructed in *Not Vanishing*, and ultimately, even to myself" (1).

3 For a variation on this theme, in which the anthropologist, this time, unwittingly becomes Coyote, see Thomas King's *One Good Story, That One.*

4 This issue has been debated in a post-colonial context by a number of critics, including Kumkum Sangari and several writers in *Past the Last Post*, Adam and Tiffin, eds. For commentary on Vizenor in particular, see Betty Brant who, though she endorses the emancipatory potential of Vizenor's project, also questions the connection between ludic performance and political engagement.

5 For a different perspective, see Paranjpe. Among the more cogent responses to the anti-theorists are those by Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak.

6 Working from a model proposed by French linguist Henri Gobard, Sylvia Söderlind differentiates between four different linguistic registers—mythic, vehicular, referential and vernacular—which vary in accordance with their territoriality, or rootedness in a particular cultural location. In spite of their different frames of reference, mythic or sacred language shares with the vernacular the function of demarcating a realm of belief shared by all members of a particular community. In semiotic terms, these languages carry the perception of the sign as "natural and indivisible" (11).

7 The conflation of the roles of author and narrator are suggested not only by Maracle's use of her own name within this and other stories, but also by her assertion in the Preface that they are "stories from my life, my imagination and my history" (11).

8 In noting this opposition, I am not invoking the argument that Maracle has advanced elsewhere (discussed above), that "oratory... is unambiguous in its meaning" (*Coming to Oratory* 3). In a politico-historical context, however, the translation of oral narrative into writing is attended by special difficulties.

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