

**RITUALS AND LEGENDS OF THE GREAT *OJIBWA* –
A MYTHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE NOVELS OF
GERALD VIZENOR**

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**Thesis Submitted for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in English Literature**

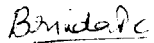
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DECLARATION

I, T.C. Brindhakumari, hereby declare that the thesis entitled “Rituals and Legends of the Great *Ojibwa* - A Mythical Analysis of the Novels of Gerald Vizenor,” has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree, diploma, associateship, fellowship or other similar title, or recognition.

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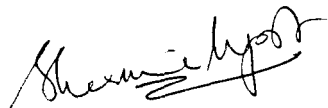

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “ Rituals and Legends of the Great *Ojibwa*- A Mythical Analysis of the Novels of Gerald Vizenor” submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy is a record of bonafide research carried out by the candidate under my supervision and that no part of the thesis has been submitted for any degree before.

Place : Calicut
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ABBREVIATIONS OF TITLES IN THE THESIS

Bearheart	:	Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart
Griever	:	Griever : An American Monkey King in China
Trickster	:	The Trickster of Liberty
Heirs	:	The Heirs of Columbus

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

"It may take only one drop of Black blood to make a person a Negro, but it takes a lot of Indian blood to make a 'real' Indian (Blu 25). This statement discloses the tension and contradiction inherent in the complex identity of the Indian/native American in the world consciousness. The indeterminacy in the definition of an 'Indian' is due to the image of an Indian as an 'invention' which bears little resemblance to actual living native American people. As a result of this uncertainty the native Americans inevitably confront the question of identity. The dilemma experienced by native American writers stemming from the conflict between the myth of an invented Indian and a reality related to peripherality, cultural denigration, displacement and suppression has led them to seek meaning in their own traditional oral narratives. The words of the Russian critic Mikhail Bakhtin explicate the challenge confronted by the native American writers - "indeed, any concrete discourse finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualification, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist- or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgements and accents. The word, directed toward its object,

enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of the alien words" (*Dialogic Imagination* 276). Because of the 'tension-filled environment of the alien words,' identity has become the central issue for the contemporary native American novelist who must come to terms with liminality as well as both European and Indian ethnicity. This identity crisis has become a disturbing reality in the modern American context as native American children are adopted into non-Indian families and institutionally channeled toward a Euro-american culture that results in the widespread loss of cultural identity. This has led native American fiction writers to take recourse to their traditional oral literatures to assist them in the process of the reconstruction, self discovery and cultural recovery of their lost identity and thus redefine their space. But there are many challenges and obstacles that impede the native American writer in the exploration and expression of his self-defined identity.

Native American writers are primarily storytellers for whom the audience plays a vital role in the act of narration. But since they write in the language of the dominant culture, they constantly confront the dilemma of a 'privileged discourse' (Owens, *Other Destinies* 7). For the native American author, "writing within a consciousness of the contextual background of a nonliterate culture, every word written in English represents a collaboration as well as reorientation from the

paradigmatic world of oral tradition to the syntagmatic reality of a written language" (Ashcroft 82). The written language posits a problem for the native American writer to such an extent that Arnold Krupat comments, "There simply were no native American texts until the Whites decided to collaborate with Indians and make them" ("An Approach to Native American Texts" 118). Native American writers have to depend upon a system of discourse that conflicts with the traditional native American oral narratives which possess the unique coercive power of functioning as the creators of reality. The descriptive language connected with a creativity that is of a historic consciousness often fails to fulfil the performative function of the tribal stories (Owens, *Other Destinies* 9).

The emphasis in the oral tradition is upon a creativity that is of a communal nature that does not solely depend upon the creativity of the individual storyteller. On the other hand, native American novelists while relying upon story and myth relate themselves to the egocentric genre of the written prose narrative. This shift from oral communal literature to written translated work becomes problematic to native American writers. While "native American writing represents an attempt to recover identity and authenticity by invoking and incorporating the world found within the oral tradition – the reality of myth and ceremony – an authorless original literature," contemporary

native American writers like Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louise Erdrich and Gerald Vizenor 'inscribe' their 'authorial signatures to published works' (Owens, *Other Destinies* 11). As a result, native American writings become individually authored texts incorporating within them a foreign genre.

Another challenge faced by native American writers is that their novels present an Indian world view which opposes western ideologies. This confrontation is manifested in their fiction either through silence or through conflicting discourses that subvert the alien culture and the established structures associated with it.

Native American writers, while telling stories founded upon their tribal tradition, have also to contend with readers who remain in the periphery as the 'other.' Readers, in order to appreciate the writings of native Americans must possess some amount of knowledge of tribal histories, tribal traditions and the poststructuralist theories of Foucault, Lacan, Derrida, Barthes, Baudrillard and Bakhtin. The novels of native American writers must be read with the recognition that "what they teach frequently runs counter to the teaching of the western tradition, and that the ways in which they delight is different from the ways in which the western tradition has given pleasure" (Owens, *Other Destinies* 19).

Before 1968 there were only a few native American writers like John Rollin Ridge, Simon Pokagon, Mourning Dove and John Milton Oskison. Louis Owens, in *Other Destinies* states that before 1968 only nine novels by American Indian authors had been published. They are John Rollin Ridge's *Joaquin Murieta* in 1854, Simon Pokagon's *Queen of the Woods* in 1899, Mourning Dove's *Cogewea* and *The Half-Blood* in 1927, three novels by the Cherokee writer John Oskison in the 1920s and the 1930s, John Joseph Mathews's *Sundown* (1934), and D'Arcy McNickle's *The Surrounded* (1936) and *Runner in the Sun* in 1954. The 1970s saw the publication of many novels by native American writers like Janet Campbell Hale, Nasnaga (Roger Russel), Chief George Pierre, Ted Williams, Scott Momaday, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, Charles Penoi and Leslie Marmon Silko. The 1980s and 1990s have seen novels being published by newer native writers like Louise Erdich, Michael Dorris, Paula Gunn Allen, Anna Waltes, Tom King, Linda Hogan, Craig Strete and Louis Owens.

Over the years the native American writer's perspective of white culture has undergone considerable change. Early native American writing seems to have been inhibited since writers found it difficult to emerge from the constraints of prejudices. Writing in the sixties John Rollin Ridge could not openly express his feeling of hatred towards the white colonizing culture and had to disguise it in the novel under the

garb of a biography of a California bandit. Similarly Mourning Dove's novels while they convey a sense of the Indian's isolation and estrangement, also link it with the romanticized image of the 'Indian' in American literature. Louis Owens has this observation to make about the novels of Joseph Mathews and D'Arcy McNickle - "Writing of the nightmare time of new oil money and dissolution for the Osage, Mathews permeates his novel, *Sundown* with a feeling of naturalistic despair as the protagonist, Charl Windzer, slips into the deracinated no-Indian land between Osage and white worlds. In spite of subtle invocation of sacred geography and patterns out of the oral tradition, both of which hint at continuity and survival. McNickle, like Mathews, reflects the grimness of the Hemingway era of naturalism in his first novel, *The Surrounded*. Like Chal Windzer, McNickle's protagonist Archilde Leon never has a chance within a civilization bent on turning Indians into Europeans" (25). D'Arcy McNickle accepts his socio-cultural position in the two worlds and becomes the first native American historian to interpret the native American point of view *vis-a-vis* white values. Scott Momaday's Abel in *The House Made of Dawn* (1989) though dislocated and fragmented and quite incapable of locating his cultural roots, asserts the validity of a native vision by joining the communal runners from the Pueblo in order to secure the knowledge of his real identity. Scott Momaday, son of a *Kiowa* father and a *Cherokee* mother considers the Kiowas to be his tribal people.

His novels define the recovery of an Indian identity as coming through identification with the land. Another novel by Momaday *The Way To Rainy Mountain* (1969) emphasizes the power of the imagination to create. Karl Kroeber comments, "It is the agonistic nature of Momaday's novel that empowered subsequent native American writers of fiction. Given Momaday's circumstances, he could not have written a less contradictory novel than he did. But in so honestly creating a fiction whose form inevitably frustrates the aspirations that brought it into being, to celebrate a native culture's resistance to the overwhelming Euro-american culture, he displayed for following native American novelists the most fundamental problem of their endeavor" ("Technology and Tribal Narratives" 23). Momaday's novels carry the message that "We are what we imagine. Our very existence consists in our imagination of ourselves" ("The Man Made of Words" 55). With Momaday American Indian fiction becomes a kind of vision quest toward a self-recognition as a native American.

Like Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko presents in her novels the fragmented cultural experience of native Americans. The frameworks of native American and western cultural traditions allow Silko to achieve a stand point "both cultural and transcultural" (Ruppert 10). Silko's *Storyteller* (1981) is a kind of autobiography that contains stories, poems and photographs. She dedicates the book to the storytellers of

the past. The significant position of listeners in oral narration is exemplified by Silko in the following lines :

The Laguna people
always begin their stories
with "humma - hah"
that means "long ago"
and the ones who are listening
say "aaa - eh." (*Storyteller* 38)

Tayo, the protagonist of Silko's novel *Ceremony* (1977) is confused, disowned, alienated from self, family, land and tribal traditions when the novel opens. As the fictional world of *Ceremony* expands, Tayo traverses through a series of experiences and transcends fragmentation to be united with self and the land.

In James Welch's novel *Winter in the Blood* (1974), the unnamed narrator is a survivor of historical, tribal, familial and cultural trauma. Even though he does not succeed in his quest to find his *cree* girl friend, his gesture of putting his grandmother's medicine pouch in her grave and deciding to go back to find his girl friend towards the end of the novel suggests the possibility of psychic renewal and the restoration of native American traditions.

One of the main themes in native American fiction is "fragmentation." The protagonists here suffer "alienation in the Marxist sense, for the self from which they are alienated is, in fact, shown to be potentially coherent and dependent upon a continuing and coherent cultural identity" (Owens, *Other Destinies* 19). These novels generally conclude in the reorientation of the lives of the characters like the nameless protagonist of *Winter in The Blood*, Tayo of *Ceremony* and Abel of *House Made of Dawn* who shed the superimposed white values and return to tribal traditions to acquire psychic renewal.

Another recurring theme in native American fiction is the sacredness of land and the return to it. "Surely such fictional characters as Momaday's Abel in *House Made of Dawn* and Tayo of Silko's *Ceremony* come full circle back to nature to become a dawn runner at sunrise or a mystical participant in a healing ceremony high in the Chuska mountains of New Mexico, the highest spiritual point in the land" (Fleck 4).

Some general characteristics of contemporary native American novels are the use of circular narrative structures, multiple voices and ambiguous language. They are founded upon the native American conviction that language is an incarnation of reality and that words themselves have the power to create.

Native American writers revise the static world view of Indian lives and cultures, introduce a new reworking of ancient mythology and offer a holistic perspective founded upon the totality of existence that makes 'humanity equal to all elements but superior to none' and gives "humankind crucial responsibility for the care of the world we inhabit" (Owens, *Other Destinies* 28). They explain the process of becoming and testify to Bakhtin's contention that "one's own discourse is gradually and slowly wrought out of others' words that have been acknowledged and assimilated" (*Dialogic Imagination* 345).

Gerald Vizenor who is *Ojibwa* and European descent is one of the most popular native American fiction writers and is also an outstanding poet, essayist and critic. He belongs to that group of native American writers who are deeply attached to their cultures and traditions and who consciously develop effective ways to disclose their special heritage and dignity. He is an experimental writer who is part of an international, postcolonial, postmodern movement. His fiction combines elements from other contemporary narrative structures, traditions and a variety of other sources. His novels present social and cultural groups as 'fluid' and identities as the result of 'choice' and 'chance.' He favours transformation and liberation from all kinds of racial, national, social and cultural dominance. Vizenor challenges the hyper realities of the white and tribal cultures which he calls

"the structured ceremonies at the tenable borders of civilization" (*Narrative Chance* 8). Regarding his identity, Vizenor comments, "Trying to reimagine a cultural voice, a tribal consciousness, a connection in my life to the imagination and to experiences in the past, to give myself and that past some meaning surely makes me, proudly in fact, a native American Indian writer. But if I were to choose politically a category of identity as a writer, I would choose an international postcolonial literary consciousness" (Breinig 146).

Like other contemporary native American writers, Gerald Vizenor is also preoccupied with the issue of native American identity. He defines American Indian identity by deconstructing the term 'Indian.' He, in fact, abnegates the term 'Indian' and advocates the term 'postIndian.' He comments, "Indian is an invention. I don't think anyone could live up to the idea of the invention of an Indian. That is why I use the word 'postIndian.' Surely after five hundred years we can figure out that we're not Columbus's Indians. We're much more complex than that" (Vizenor, "A Chance of Survivance" 8 Aug. 1996). The simple obedient native Americans in the western gaze of Columbus get transformed into a tribal people possessing imagination and the power to create in Vizenor's fiction. Through his writings, Vizenor proves that the natural reason of the tribes antecedes the invention of the 'Indians.' To Vizenor tribal identity means "the inheritance of tribal traits and the

traditional use of an oral tribal language, recognition of peers, and documents of family connection to a reservation or tribal community" (*Manifest Manners* 59).

While writing about native American experience, Vizenor's focus is on a shared consciousness and a world view defined by a quest for identity. He explains:

I'm still educating an audience about Indian identity. The hardest part of it is that we are all invented as Indians The inventions have become disguises We're invented from traditional static standards and we are stuck in coins and words like artifacts. ("An Interview with Gerald Vizenor" 41)

He affirms native American identity, resists the metamorphoses imposed by the European intruders and holds on to "that certainty of self that is passed on through tribal traditions and oral literatures" (Owens, *Other Destinies* 21). His goal is to liberate humanity from the entropic forces that attempt to deny full realization of human possibilities. Vizenor is drawn towards myths for his didactic purpose precisely because myths possess the generative potential for renewal in response to changing social reality. In an Interview, Vizenor makes the following comment about his commitment to myths: "When I was seeking some meaning in literature for myself as a writer, I found it

easily in mythic connections" ("An Interview with Gerald Vizenor" 42). His themes are tribal experiences that were 'heard' in stories focusing on trickster signatures and narrative chance. The corpus of his writing is "an invitation to liberation, a noetic mediation and communal discourse" (*Narrative Chance* xii).

Archaic traditional features within novelistic prose have provided Vizenor with the formal means of representing his new dialogic perception of human consciousness. His intention is to articulate an identity dependent upon a rediscovered sense of place and community. While other native American writers like Scott Momaday, James Welch and Leslie Marmon Silko foreground the plight of alienated and fragmented men, lost between cultures and identities, Vizenor the most original and critically acute of all native American writers recreates the world through myths for those who have lost it.

Vizenor has effectively incorporated in his novels the cyclical, ordered, ritual-centred and paradigmatic world of North American myths. The North American myths describe a primal world peopled by "animal spirits in more or less human form and monsters and confusions of nature" (Ruoff, *American Indian Literature* 40). They explain how a transformation took place in the world when a culture hero brought about order into it by turning animal people into actual animals and other beings into landmarks. These myths have for their

setting a primordial paradise where there is fluid interchangeability in the identities of human beings and animals. The myths contain an introduction to harmonious situation, a thesis of episodes showing disruption of harmony, an antithesis relating the measures employed to overcome disruption and a conclusion which explains that harmony is restored by some power of four like four songs or four nights (Ruoff, *American Indian Literature* 43). The trickster heroes provide for disorder and the possibility of change and guide mankind into seeing the seamy underside of life often reminding them that culture is finally artificial. Vizenor's conception of the trickster is in line with native American oral tradition where the trickster is portrayed as benevolent, but amoral, lustful, irresponsible, and given to fighting evil with trickery. The trickster is a compelling figure for Vizenor because he is an embodiment of human ambivalence. Vizenor places much faith in the Creation myths, the Deluge myths and Emergence myths of *Ojibwa* tribe and the myths of the twins of *Hopi* tribe. These posit the formation of the world either through struggle and, robbery or through a fortunate fall from a sky world to a water world. Creation myths deal with how world was created and Emergence myths describe the ascent of beings to the surface of the earth through a series of underworlds. Vizenor has incorporated the earthdiver of the Creation myths in his fiction as the central metaphor for mixedbloods. Through the adoption of the Creation

myths he emphasizes the need to accept the ambivalence in life in order to maintain balance –

The experience expressed in tribal culture is not that complete elimination or annihilation of anything. It's a balance, not a terminal creed. The balance is a resolution which grows out of trickeries, of outwitting, or the modulation of experience. It may grow out of origin myths themselves (myths) that (assert that) the balance was present at the time of creation. Those origin myths are still structurally and functionally a part of belief in tribal culture, the idea that life is not created by a patriarch but (through) a balance of male and female, an androgynous balance. The restoration of balance is present at all spiritual activities. ("An Interview with Gerald Vizenor" 42)

Vizenor's use of Creation myths reveals that Creation myths are "not time bound, the creation takes place in the telling, in present tense metaphors (*Earthdiver xii*). They demonstrate how mixedbloods structure their lives in the modern context.

The narrative in the novels where Vizenor has incorporated Migration myths moves from chaos and pain at emergence towards a settlement in a homeland. The life force in these stories which he had

heard when he was a child has assisted him in accepting life as it is, despite his deprived childhood and liminal existence. His works affirm the religious attitude of tribal cultures which is one of balance rather than of annihilation. They reflect the realization that "life is not a separation but a connection between binary yet mutually complementary planes of being" ("An Interview with Gerald Vizenor" 43).

In some of his novels like *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991), Vizenor has introduced the visions of historical figures like Columbus and Pocahontas who provide the tribals with meaning and the powers of regeneration.

Central to all Vizenor's writing is the traditional trickster figure – the transformer, the shape-shifter and the great mediator of human relations. Trickster myths in oral tradition give an account of the creation or the transformation of the world. The term 'trickster' was probably used in the last decade of the nineteenth century to refer to certain figures possessing incongruous characteristics present in the prose narratives of American Indians. The trickster is represented as existing in the mythical worlds. Empowered with powers of transformation, he is generally portrayed as an animal with many human characteristics. The tales in trickster myths are centered upon the activities of a culture hero of divine birth with Sun, Wind or Stone for a father and a lesser being for a mother. He is represented in the

identities of Coyote in the South-West and Plateau, Raven in the North West and Arctic, Hare in the Great Lakes and South-east, Oldman among the *Blackfeet* of the Northern Plains, Spider among the *Sioux* of the Dakotas and Wolverine and Jay in Canada. Alan Velie notes

Whatever his form, trickster has a familiar set of characteristics: he plays tricks and is the victim of tricks: he is amoral and has strong appetites, particularly for food and sex; he is footloose, irresponsible and callous, but somehow almost always sympathetic if not lovable. ("The Trickster Novel" 122)

His positive qualities are associated with the powers of transformation that enable him to do good deeds that benefit humanity, but the benediction bestowed by the culture hero in most cases is only a means through which he supplies his own needs. The trickster episodes narrate the

securing of fire, of flint, of tobacco, of food in general and of the main cultivated plants: the regulation of the seasons and of the weather, the assignment of their proper and non-destructive functions to the forces of nature: the freeing of the world from monsters, ogres and giants; the origin of death; the gradual education of the hero's female guardian,

generally pictured as inimical at first, and the gradual freeing of the hero from her tutelage. This freeing is symbolized by his being swallowed by a sea monster, killing of it and escaping from it and finally, by his cohabiting with his guardian. (Radin 165)

The trickster is the incarnation of disorder and an enemy of boundaries representing the principle of pure unbridled energy, directed into human shape and impelled by primal human needs. His tales are stories that give freedom to personal action in the face of communal taboos. The duality of the trickster's act is manifested in the stories about him which are told as a cycle of tales. The tales show the trickster's lack of a sense of unity and his failure to coordinate his body parts. He treats his organs as if they were independent of him. He talks to them, punishes them and even eats them. In one such story the trickster's right hand quarrels with his left hand and this results in the left hand being damaged badly (Radin 5). In another story, the trickster instructs his anus to keep watch over the roasted ducks while he sleeps. When he wakes up he finds out that they have been eaten by foxes. He tries to punish the offender by sitting on fire, but cannot bear the pain of being burnt. In the same story he discovers that he has been eating his own intestines and in yet another story he sends his

penis across water in order to have intercourse with the chief's daughter. He can even coil up his phallus and put it in a box (Radin 17-19). Tricksters are primarily preoccupied with satisfying their desires. In order to attain this goal, they cheat, injure, kill animals and humans and break taboos. The trickster is also recognised to be a major stimulus of humor. Biological, psychological, behavioural and socio-cultural incongruities are central to all humor. A fundamental contradiction in trickster nature is the combination of the opposing roles and functions of a culture hero and a selfish buffoon. Mahadev L. Apte observes that even though the trickster is a creator of culture, his (the trickster's) excessive indulgence in and gratification of primordial desires are often associated with destruction of culture (230).

The trickster violates temporal and spatial boundaries and remains at the margin. At the center of his existence is "the power derived from his ability to live interstitially, to confuse and to escape the structures of society and the order of cultural things." He embodies all possibilities – "the most positive and the most negative" and is "paradox personified" (Babcock 153). He is usually to be found at cross roads, markets and open public places and is involved in situations which are creative, destructive or amusing. He is transsexual and often possesses man/woman, man/animal dualism. He questions the finality of fact and guides man to a rediscovery of essential truth. He is "a forerunner

of the savior; and like him, God, man and animal at once." He is "both subhuman and superhuman, a bestial and divine being" (Jung 154). In his tales, existing values are redefined and primal order is reaffirmed.

The trickster in Vizenor's writings displays the quality of compassion and a desire to liberate humanity from the shams and hollowness of everyday life. He is the "imaginative trickster, the one who cares to balance the world between terminal creeds and humor with unusual manners and ecstatic strategies" (*Earthdivers* XII). Vizenor has deconstructed and restructured the disruptive acts of the traditional trickster in such a way as to foreground the compassionate aspect of these acts. Vizenor comments, "The trickster's acts are compassionate. I see them as compassionate" ("Gerald Vizenor" 59).

Vizenor not only introduces the trickster into his fiction but also functions as a teller of tribal trickster tales. *Summer in the Spring* (1981) is a collection of *anishinabe* songs and tales edited and reexpressed by Gerald Vizenor. It was originally a collection of tales published in *The Progress*, a weekly newspaper published by Vizenor's great uncle Theodore Beaulieu between December 1887 and May 1888. *Summer in the Spring* remains open-ended with its message that one should permit spontaneous and unguided responses to life's experiences in order to formulate wise and creative solutions. Moreover it teaches the listeners of the possibility of human endurance and the

exertion of free will. *Summer in the Spring* with its balance of humor and struggle registers the fact that the oral narratives of the native American is a tradition that has resisted colonization. The trickster, as mythic agent and Vizenor as the storyteller of real life together offer the readers a model for reconciling and integrating oppositional forces in life.

The trickster discourse of Vizenor's fiction resembles Bakhtin's definition of Menippean satire:

The familiarizing role of laughter is here considerably more powerful, sharper and coarser. The liberty to crudely degrade, to turn inside out the lofty aspects of the world and world views, might sometimes seem shocking. But to this exclusive and comic familiarity must be added an intense spirit of inquiry and utopian fantasy. In Menippean satire the unfettered and fantastic plots and situations all serve one goal – to put to the test and to expose ideas and ideologies. Menippean satire is dialogic, full of parodies and travesties, multistyled and does not fear elements of bilingualism. (*Dialogic Imagination* 60)

But while Bakhtin is focusing primarily upon the function of deconstructive carnival energy, Vizenor's view is that "life itself is a carnival" (Breinig 146).

Vizenor treats the problems of bicultural life and literature differently from other native American writers by fusing postmodern techniques with oral tradition through the use of trickster narrative themes, symbols and structures. He has given trickster a postmodern dimension by associating the trickster's shape-shifting abilities and resistance to definition with the infinite signification of language. Vizenor observes that the postmodern 'opened in tribal imagination' (*Narrative Chance* x). According to Vizenor

there are four postmodern conditions in the critical responses to native American Indian literatures : the first is heard in aural performances: the second is seen in translations; the third pose is a trickster signature, an uncertain humor that denies translation and tribal representation and the last postmodern condition is narrative chance in the novel. (*Narrative Chance* ix)

The postmodern condition that Vizenor applies in his fiction is a liberation of tribal stories which sets language free. The trickster in Vizenor's fiction is "an encounter in narrative voice, a communal sign and creative encounter in a discourse" (*Narrative Chance* xiii). Vizenor

shares May Rollo's conviction that "creativity occurs in an act of encounter and is to be understood with this encounter as its centre" (77). In Vizenor, the trickster becomes a semiotic sign in the third person, a communal sign, a concordance of narrative voices" (*Narrative Chance* 12).

The trickster acts as a point of conscious articulation of language tradition. He is a meta-discourse that contains patterns of development and revision and internal principles of patterning and organization. His signifying language functions as a metaphor for intertextuality within the native American tradition. He carries within him aspects of native American culture recreated from memory and preserved by oral narration. He deconstructs views on language and reality through acts of defamiliarization. Vizenor's trickster characters oppose the freezing of selfhood in patterns imposed from without and favour a distancing from the accepted social reality. They subvert racism and social institutions and rupture "the epic view of the world as a closed unity." They open up "the potential to envisage human consciousness and social reality as unfinalizable" (Morris 188). These trickster figures advocate violation of the generally accepted course of events and the established norms of behaviour. They suspend all "hierarchical ranks, privileges, norms and prohibitions" (Morris 199). Often through burlesque manner they disclose the surreptitious and corrosive nature

of these structures and deflate the romantic notion of reality. They carry readers beyond the conventional fictionalized images of life toward an experience of authentic underlying harmony.

The *Ojibwa* trickster is transcribed as *Naanabozho*, *Nanibozho*, *Nanabush*, *Wenebojo* and *Manabozho*. Vizenor explains the significance of *Naanabozho* to *Ojibwa* culture in the Prologue to *The People Named The Chippewa*. "*Naanabozho*, the compassionate woodland trickster wanders in mythic time transformational space between tribal experiences and dreams" (3). He adopts the identities of all forms of nature and acts as a teacher and healer. But he is also capable of "violence, deception, and cruelties: the realities of human imperfections. The woodland trickster is an existential shaman in the comic mode, not an isolated and sentimental tragic hero in conflict with nature." He represents "a spiritual balance in a comic drama rather than the romantic elimination of human contradictions and evil" (4).

The Earthdiver myth manifests in many forms in Vizenor's fiction. The earthdiver myth has four traits – earth covered with water, the creator, the diver and the making of the earth. Vizenor has given a detailed account of this myth in his narrative *Earthdivers* (1981).

Wenebojo was standing on the top of the tree . . .
and the water was up to his mouth. Pretty soon
Wenebojo felt that he wanted to defecate. He

couldn't hold it. The shit floated up to the top of the water and floated around his mouth. Wenebojo noticed that there was an animal in the water. Then he saw several animals – beaver, muskrat, and otter, Wenebojo spoke to the otter first. "Brother," he said "could you go down and get some earth? If you do that, I will make an earth for you and me to live on" Away he went to the bottom of the water. He drowned. Then he floated to the top. Wenebojo tried to reach the otter. He got hold of him finally and looked into the otter's paws and mouth, but he didn't find any dirt. Then Wenebojo blew on the otter and the otter came to again. Wenebojo asked him, "Did you see anything?" "No" said the otter. The next person Wenebojo spoke to was the beaver. He asked him to go after some earth down below and said, "If you do I'll make an earth for us to live on" The beaver was gone a long time. Pretty soon he floated to the top of the water. He also drowned. Wenebojo got hold of the beaver and blew on him. When he came to, Wenebojo examined his paws and mouth to see if there was any dirt there, but he couldn't find

anything. He asked the beaver, "Did you see any earth at the bottom?" "Yes, I did," said the beaver, "I saw it, but I couldn't get any of it." These animals had tried and failed. The muskrat was playing around there too. Wenebojo didn't think much about the muskrat, since he was so small, but after a while he said to him, "why don't you try and go after some of that dirt too?"

The muskrat said "I'll try," and he dived down. Wenebojo waited and waited a long time for the muskrat to come up to the top, he was all crippled. Wenebojo caught the muskrat and looked him over. The muskrat had his paws closed up tight. His mouth was shut too. Wenebojo opened the muskrat's front paw and found a grain of earth in it. He took it. In his other front paw he found another little grain, and one grain of dirt in each of his hind paws. There was another grain in his mouth. When he found these five grains, Wenebojo started to blow on the muskrat, blew on him until he came back to life. Then Wenebojo took the grains of sand in the palm of his hand and held them up to the

sun to dry them out. When the sand was all dry, he threw it around onto the water. There was a little island then. They went onto the little island – Wenebojo, the beaver, the otter and the muskrat. Wenebojo got more earth on the island and threw it all around. The island got bigger. It got larger everytime. Wenebojo threw out another handful of dirt. Then animals at the bottom of the water, whoever was there, all came up to the top of the water and went to the island where Wenebojo was. They were tired of being in the water all the time, and when they heard about the earth that Wenebojo had made, they all wanted to stay. Wenebojo kept on throwing earth around (*Earthdivers* xii-xiv)

Just like *naanabozho*, the *Evil Gambler* who annihilates mankind in a game of dice is a familiar figure in native American mythology. This accounts for Vizenor's introduction of the conflict between trickster shamans and gamblers in his novels. To Vizenor the figure of the evil gambler does not stand for the white world or dominant cultures or evil in general, "the image and the description of the events surrounding the image "evil gambler" or the word 'game,' does not stand for something. That would be representational, but it is something, it is a

mystery, it is the contradiction of life and the shadows of tribal memories" (Breinig 148). Tribal cultures take contradiction as a way of life and in that world view gambler is a part of reality. Vizenor states that "this evil gambler who lurks in all of us and draws our attention through animals and stories and mysteries and contradictions and lust and greed" (Breinig 149) stands for the 'eminence of evil' in this world and the need for the restoration of balance. In *Summer in the Spring* Vizenor narrates the encounter between *naanabozho* and the *great gambler* in the game of dice.

The great gambler felt very uneasy at the stolid indifference of his guest. As the gambler started the game the figures assumed a standing position. This was repeated three times, and each time the figures stood erect in the dish. But one chance remained, up on which depended the destiny of *naanabozho* and the salvation of the *anishinaabe* people. He was not frightened, and when the great *evil gambler* prepared to make the final shake, *naanabozho* drew near and when the dish came down on the ground he made a whistle on the wind, as in surprise, and the figures fell. *Naanabozho* then seized the dish saying. It is now my turn, should I win, you must die. (125)

Vizenor's description of the encounter between Proude Cedarfair and Sir Cecil Staples in *Bearheart* is the same story in a different context.

Besides the tricksters in the oral narratives Vizenor's fictional space is inhabited by ritual clowns. The clown is the earthly counterpart of the trickster and is engaged in the ritual of violating the taboos of society. By virtue of the violation of conventions, he acquires magical powers and ability to heal the sick, grant success in hunting and in war, luck in gambling and in love, happiness and prosperity. The clowns are healers. Just like the trickster, the clown also possesses a dual personality. Laura Makarius observes, "[. . .] people turn to him for his capacity of healing, purifying, bringing happiness and luck, and at the same time recoil from him as from an unclean being to whom every kind of impurity is assimilated and whose contact is defiling and baneful" (57). Vizenor is drawn towards these ceremonial figures mainly because of their 'reverse behaviour,' their ability to transvalue all established conventions, and their power to create a new reality.

Vizenor's novels are mediations on language and society in a dialogic mode. Since they are founded upon the oral narratives, they contain within them the Bakhtinian text and context. His commitment to dialogism can be taken as a type of radical pluralism and a recognition of the necessity of an infinite semantic openness. He proves

through his novels that speech is social and that meaning is 'open' and in 'flux.' Vizenor's fiction testifies to the incompleteness and its indebtedness to the discourse of others. His characters explore the possibilities of language. He is committed to dialogue on empirical grounds. He points out what speech and social life "really" are. His commitment to dialogue is founded on moral and aesthetic grounds. He endorses Jacques Lacan's view that the subject is never sovereign in itself, but emerges in an intersubjective discourse with and in the presence of the other and that this emergence is continually interrupted by the interplay of the various texts which make up the subject's history (Lacan 42). His novels are multi-voiced and comprise of equally valid voices based on communally shared consciousness. In the words of Morris, Vizenor's fiction is a "great dialogue of interacting voices, a polyphony" (89). It is an intertextual world of multiple narratives. It testifies to the Bakhtinian concept that unified truth does not necessitate the idea of a single transcendent consciousness. Vizenor's novels prove that it is possible to imagine a truth that requires "a plurality of consciousness . . . one that is, so to speak by its very nature, full of event potential and is born at a point of contact among various consciousness" (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 81).

Vizenor's works exhibit a profound distrust of human discourse. He often adopts the discourse of the three popular figures central to

folklore tradition – the rogue, the fool and the clown. He introduces the notion of the human being as unfinalizable through the use of parody and fragmented language. He is a formidable warrior in the "word wars" who derives immense pleasure in language games. He is a brilliant and evasive trickster figure and the supreme ironist among American Indian writers of the twentieth century. He shares intellectual kinship with Roland Barthes, Black Elk, Jacques Derrida and Scott Momaday.

In Vizenor's novels the figurative and the literal, and the oral and the written are locked in a signifying relation. Remaining close to a mythic system he experiments with language and different literary forms. He sees connection between myth and other systems like poststructuralism and anthropology. His close analysis of how metaphors work in his own *Ojibwa* tradition has helped him evolve a style that develops as "double visions, peeled from visual experiences on the trail near the spacious tree line and transposed in tribal visual word cinemas" (*Earthdivers* 166).

Vizenor calls the tribals 'the word – arrow makers' after their traditional practice of making arrows. Vizenor's conviction is that the tribal exists in words and that "language is the repository of his whole knowledge and experiences. It is the world of his origin and of his posterity and there is no other . . . For the arrow maker, language represented the only chance for survival" (*Word Arrows* viii). Vizenor

points out that the tribal has created "the earth, birds and animals, shadows and smoke, time and dreams" with his "words and sacred memories" and he is made "whole in the world with words and oratorical gestures" (*Word Arrows* vii).

Vizenor's tricksters engage the world through rhetorical tropes built on principles of difference like fragmentation and juxtaposition. Their discourse is 'the world' rather than 'a representation' (*Narrative Chance* 6). As such it often conflicts with the representational discourse that fails to reflect reality. Vizenor writes in a spirit of liberation. His tricksters are 'agonistic imagination and aggressive liberation, a 'doing' in narrative points of view and outside the imposed structures" (*Narrative Chance* 13).

Vizenor's "word wars" are wars over words, discourses and inventions. He reimagines the language by 'breaking' it-

I like playing with words and I think part of it is a mixedblood tribal effort at 'deconstruction.' I want to break the language down, I want to reimagine the language. I still haven't broken very far out of grammar. I've broken out of the philosophies of grammar, English language grammar, but I haven't broken out of the standard grammatical structure.

("Follow the Trickroutes" 291)

The stories that Vizenor tells are ethnocentric. They are the translated versions of heard stories in aural performance bearing 'trickster signature,' 'an uncertain humor' and 'narrative chance' (*Narrative Chance* ix-xi). Through his stories Vizenor has verbalized his faith in the power of the imagination to act as the creator of reality. His novels exemplify the fact that in the circular movement of time "creation takes place in ceremonies and between tellers and listeners" (*Earthdivers* xviii).

Gerald Vizenor is deeply concerned with the contrariety that exists in the relationship between the tribal world and modern white society. His anxiety about the mechanical impotency and cultural suicide of the urban Indians becomes explicit in his mission as a writer to resurrect in his literary works a world brutally extinguished by the European savages. The theme of his novels is 'survivance' and the process of becoming. His visual memories are 'survivance stories' not simply 'survival stories,' for "survival suggests more of a reaction It's tied to something and describes the circumstances of a response, a survival" (Vizenor, "A Chance of Survivance" 8 Aug. 1996). Vizenor explicates the inadequacy of the term 'survival' to refer to the living condition of the mixedblood Indians in the following words, "My idea is that we understand what dominance is, a condition: we know it in many forms in time and place and circumstance, we need a word like

'dominance' that speaks and is understood in the context of our will to live" (Vizenor, "A Chance of Survivance" 8 Aug. 1996). Hence in his writings he makes use of the term 'survivance' which sounds like and is as powerful as 'dominance.' Keeping close to the mythical narrative structures, he creates his stories "with a new sense of survivance" (*Manifest Manners* 4).

The two Vizenorian terms that expound his aesthetic vision and perspective regarding western culture are 'Manifest Destiny' and 'Manifest Manners.' 'Manifest Destiny' according to Vizenor "would cause the death of millions of tribal people from massacres, diseases, and the loneliness of reservations" (*Manifest Manners* 4). 'Manifest Manners' are "the simulations of dominance; the notions and misnomers that are read as the authentic and sustained as representations of Native American Indians" (5-6). According to Vizenor, it is manifest destiny and manifest manners that cause the decimation of the tribes and the annihilation of their culture. Through his writings he counters the literature of dominance as it bears no reference to tribal remembrance. His 'new stories of tribal courage' warn readers of the dangers involved in 'manifest manners and terminal creeds' (4). They mediate and undermine 'the literature of dominance' that moves away from natural reason and the pleasures of the trickster stories. They are stories of liberation and survivance "without the dominance of closure"

(14). They contain the doubt and wonder in built in the native American myths. The spirit behind his writings is comic as they are founded upon native American Indian literatures which are "unstudied landscapes, wild and comic rather than tragic and representational, storied with narrative wisps and tribal discourse" (*Narrative Chance* 5).

Vizenor's novels are 'narrative wisps' that carry "stories that one tells, that one hears, that one acts out" (Lyotard, *Instructions Paines* 85). His fiction conveys a balance, an acceptance of the ambivalence of the human condition, a reassertion of the creations and a celebration of tribal remembrance. His works offer an unusual vision of survival in the cities. His characters resist tragedy as it is "cultural boredom . . . the closure of natural reason" (*Manifest Manners* 14) and insist upon survival through an imaginative affirmation of the self. The tribals in his novels survive by enduring the lies of the whites with silence, natural reason, the trickster hermeneutics and the solace of heard stories.

The challenges confronted by the 'mixedblood' or 'crossblood' due to their liminal existence have engaged Vizenor's attention throughout his literary career. He is "the first American Indian author to find crossbloods a cause for joyous celebration. The most ambitious and radically intellectual of American Indian writers, Vizenor has taken Indian fiction and the figure of the mixedblood in particular into the future" (Owens, *Other Destinies* 254). Vizenor's mixed blood characters

are earthdivers who dive into unknown urban places "into the racial darkness in the cities" in order to create a new consciousness of coexistence (*Earthdivers* ix). The earthdivers Vizenor introduces are "mixedbloods or *Metis*, tribal tricksters and recast cultural heroes, the mournful and whimsical heirs and survivors from the union between the daughters of the woodland shamans and white fur traders" (*Earthdivers* ix). Vizenor notes in one of the interviews that "they are not incomplete. They're not half of something, or this or that. They're whole people" (*Breinig* 158). The mixedbloods in his novels often find themselves lost and estranged from their homelands, but as the course of action proceeds, the schizophrenic tension between the regenerative wild stories and urban artifice is resolved. Empowered by dreams and visions, they derive strength to survive from the performative language of their tradition. They 'loosen the seams in the shrouds of identities' as they move between their tribal traditions and those urban pretensions that counter their cultures. Even though Vizenor's tricksters live in a world of uncertainties suppressed and controlled by the indifference of the dominant culture, they refuse to be defeated and destroyed.

The voice of the trickster in Vizenor's fiction is raised in defense of the entire marginalized community. Vizenor's vantage position as a *metis* has equipped him with insights into the complexities of the mixedblood consciousness. In an epigraph to autobiography, *Interior*

Landscape: Autobiographical Myths and Metaphors, he quotes Primo Levi: "Someone who lives at the margin of the group, or actually isolated [. . .] can leave when he wants to and can get a better view of the landscape" (1). Vizenor refers to the crossbloods as 'the agonistic survivors.' He observes, "they are a postmodern tribal blood line, an encounter with racialism, colonial duplicities, sentimental monogenism, and generic cultures. The encounters are comic [. . .], crossbloods are communal, and their stories are splendid considerations of survivance" (*Crossbloods* ii). While in the traditional earth diver creation myths, the culture hero seeks the help of the animals and birds to dive for the earth, in the modern context Vizenor's characters summon the white settlers to dive with mixedblood survivors into the evils of the bureaucratic set up in search of a few honest words upon which to build a new urban turtle island. The metaphor of the earthdiver in Vizenor's fiction, as in the traditional stories, calls for a return to the earth rather than a separation from it. The chaos in the lives of the characters is balanced through dreams and the mythic imagination.

Vizenor's novels fuse the course of an individual's life with his actual spatial course – the road. In *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978) Proude Cedarfair, the trickster shaman along with his circus caravan, engages in the act of ritual quest and journeys from Wisconsin to New Mexico when there is a cultural loss in the area where they lived

due to the depletion of energy resources. His journey begins in the third world which evil spirits have filled with contempt for the living and the fear of death. He successfully reaches the fourth world by outwitting the evil spirits by moving backward in time and using the languages of animals and birds.

All Vizenor's characters have a transformational connection with animals, especially mongrels and bears. Caliban, the mongrel, and Samana, the panther in *The Heirs of Columbus*, Proude Cedarfair, the bear, in *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* and Griever, the Monkey king in *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1987) are all examples that prove that fluid interchangeability and creative metamorphosis are often required for regeneration and renewal. Vizenor makes use of animal myths associated with animal-husband stories as in the case of Lilith Mae Farrier in *Word Arrows* and *Bearheart* who develops sexual relationship with her boxers who function as husband-surrogates. Of all the animal transformations, it is the bear transformation that appears most frequently in Vizenor's works especially because of its significant role in the sacred rite of the *Ojibwa*, 'the midwiwin ceremony.' Vizenor explains the significance of bear transformation to his work and to *Ojibwa* culture by making references to *Bear Ceremonialism in the Northern Hemisphere* in which A. Irving Hallowell states that animals 'have a language of their own,

can understand what human beings say and do, have forms of social and tribal organization, and live a life which is parallel in other respects to that of human societies" (*Earthdivers* 145). In *Darkness in Saint Louis* Bearheart Proude Cedarfair who speaks with the voice of the bear and takes on the bear form permanently after he reaches the fourth world, and Zebulon Matchi Makwa, a drunken urban shaman who offends everyone with his foul stench possess bear power. In *Earthdivers*, those with bear power are Martin Bear Charme and Father Berald One, the shaman who dreams of blue birds and bears, dresses as a priest, and wears an overshoe on one foot. In *Griever* when the protagonist reaches China, he dreams of a female bear who embraces him and leads him to a room filled with histories of shaman bear cultures from the Chinese mountains and urges him to select a birchbark manuscript whose marks are the same as those on reservation scrolls. Kangmei, the mixedblood daughter of Battle Wilson who possesses the birchbark scroll which Griever tries to obtain is also identified with the bear. Vizenor's use of the traditional Indian motif of transformation is evident in the person of Bishop Omax Parasimo in *Bearheart* who possesses three 'meta masks' of three other characters in the novel.

Vizenor keeps the therapeutic tradition of oral literature alive in his fiction. In *The Heirs of Columbus*, children wounded and deformed

due to the evils of the chemical civilization are healed by listening to the stories. Vizenor's conviction that the story is the centre of the world and that there is 'life' and 'humanity' in it has encouraged him to include many stories in his narratives. In *Dead Voices* stories are heard not in the wilderness. Paradoxically they are heard in a city, the last outpost of dreams and imagination. There in the contradiction of an urban life and its wild distraction, the old woman Bagese takes on the identities of various life forms through transformation and imagination and engages in the act of storytelling to cause psychic renewal. While in *Bearheart*, Proude transforms himself into a bear, and moves into a different world, in *Dead Voices* the bear is right there at tables in restaurants. The bears are seen in a mirror and seen only to Bagese the tribal woman. Here there is a play on multiple images, a device employed by Vizenor to deconstruct the romantic expectation of the real representation of the bear. Even though the protagonist is displaced from a traditional time, place and environment, the bear is in her through memory and imagination.

Landfill Meditation (1991) includes characters, incidents and themes which have appeared in Vizenor's other narratives and novels. An important character in these stories is "Almost Browne," who enjoys liminality by defying all classifications of space and color. He is almost brown and was almost born in an Indian reservation when his parents -

a blonde mother and a *Chippewa* father - ran out of gas on their way to the reservation hospital. Almost Browne symbolizes Vizenor's fictional world which is the 'almost world' of tricksters and where there is free play of wit and imagination.

Vizenor's stories are "visual dream flights, untamed in unusual places, with terminal beliefs and urban shamans and landfill mediators" (*Earthdivers* 167). Vizenor celebrates the *Metis* earthdiver who brings up mud from the primal ocean to shape the Earth by centering the twelve stories in *Earthdivers* on the traditional *Ojibwa* creation myth. *Earthdivers* is an attack on self-serving anthropologists, neoromantic scholars, corrupt Indian officials and dim-witted bureaucrats. These imaginative narratives are written in "double vision, peeled from visual experiences on the trail near the spacious tree line and transposed in tribal visual word cinemas" (166). As the words of Derrida quoted by Vizenor in his *Earthdivers* denote, "the book is not in the world, but the world is in the book" (165).

Word Arrows and *The Everlasting Sky* (1972) are tribal narratives. While *Word Arrows* declares the fact that "the oral tradition has prevailed in fine humor over the grim realities of colonial suppression (3), *The Everlasting Sky* gives the readers a graphic account of the conflict between *naanabozho* and the *great gambler*.

The *great gambler* took in his hands the *anishinaabe* dish game and said to *maanabozho*. "Here are the four figures, the four ages of man, which I will shake in the dish four times, and if they assume a standing position each time, then I am the winner . . . should they fall, then you are the winner."

Laughing, *maanabozho* looked at the dish and the four ages of man and told the *great gambler* beyond the realm of darkness, "Very well, we will play. But it is customary for the party who is challenged to play any game to have the last play."

The *great gambler* consented while taking up the dish for the first time and striking it on the ground. The four figures were all in a standing position. This was repeated twice more by the *great gambler* and each time the four figures representing the four ages of man fell in a standing position.

The destiny of *maanabozho* and the *anishinaabe* people depended up on the one chance remaining. Should the four ages of man fall in the standing position, *maanabozho* would lose and the spirit of

the *anishinaabe* people would be consigned to the flesh eaters in the land of darkness.

When the *great gambler* prepared to make the final shake of the game *maanabozho* drew near and when the dish came down to the ground he made a teasing whistle on the wind and all four figures of the four ages of man fell.

The *anishinaabe* people had not lost their spirit to the land of darkness. When *maanabozho* seized the dish from the *great gambler* he said, "Now it is my turn, and should I win, you will lose your life

(3-4)

The narrative, besides paving a way for a better and meaningful life, asserts with vehemence the fact that the *anishinabe* "have not lost their dreams. We will sing again and praise together the endurance of the *anishinaabe* spirit. The dominant society can start listening any time now" (xvi).

Vizenor illustrates the importance of imagination and dreams to native American culture by narrating myths about the *anishinabe* in his narratives. About his tribe '*Ojibwa*' Vizenor writes

Indian reservations on federal enclaves were created with specific geographical and historical place names, but the tribal people who were contained there had several names. For example there are '*Anishinabe*' or '*Anishinabeg*' and '*Chippewa*' or '*Chippeway*' and '*Ojibwa*' or '*Ojibway*', all living at White Earth and Leech Lake and other reservations in Minnesota and Wisconsin and on tribal reserves in Canada. These are not separate tribes or languages but the same people with several names. In the language of the tribal past the families of one of the largest woodland tribes spoke of themselves as the '*Anishinabe*', singular, and '*Anishinabeg*', plural until they were named '*Chippewa*' and '*Ojibwa*' in the English language. (*The Everlasting Sky* ix)

To Vizenor, the collective identity of the '*anishinabeg*' implies the sharing of language with other families and the sharing of dreams and visions expressed in their myths and stories. He points out in the chapter "shadows at La Pointe" in *The Everlasting Sky* that the earth began and *naanabozho* was born, according to *Ojibwa* tradition, in a town on Madeline island in Lake Superior near the Wisconsin-Minnesota border. Vizenor states that after the creation of the first

earth, the man sent by the spirit of the creator told human beings that they "must fast and find out things by dreams and that if they paid attention to these dreams, they would learn how to heal the sick" (3). Vizenor points out that this is how dreams come to have therapeutical power.

The Heirs of Columbus expounds Vizenor's principle 'Identity is a choice, but identity is a responsibility (Breinig 159). In this novel, Stone Columbus, one of the tricksters, defines himself with a self-chosen identity. Here Vizenor explores the tension between self-definition and freely accepted commitment on the one hand and historical and physical determinants on the other. The reappearance of the characters, events and motifs from *Bearheart*, *Gnaveer* and *Trickster* in *Heirs* creates an intertextually related corpus of texts that recalls the structure of the oral tribal tradition. In *Heirs*, as in other novels, Vizenor isolates language and narrative from all established conventional forms. Vizenor comments:

Philosophically, I think we should break out of all the routes, all the boxes, break down the sides. A comic spirit demands that we break from formula, break out of program. I suppose I am preoccupied with this theme because the characters I admire in my own imagination and the characters I would like

to make myself be break out of things. They break out of all restrictions. They even break out of their blood They break out of invented cultures and repression. I think it is a spiritual quest in a way.
 ("Follow the Trickroutes" 290)

In *Heirs* Vizenor ends colonialism through his own imagined creation of a tribal nation dedicated to healing. He also transforms Columbus to a crossblood Mayan. The novel subverts the Columbus myth and Columbian heritage as the protagonist Stone Columbus leads his followers, friends and animals to the western island of Point Assinika with the intention of founding a new nation after the manner of Columbian exploration and westward migration.

Most of the characters in Vizenor's fiction seek refuge in different places. The tricksters in *Bearheart* journey through a vision window and attain ritual knowledge, the trickster in *Greiver* takes avian flights from the hostile environment in China to Macao, and the heirs of Columbus in the novel by that name escape to a Utopian island off the west coast. Vizenor leaves his characters in their original place only in *The Trickster of Liberty*.

In *The Trickster of Liberty* Vizenor presents a whole family of trickster figuration. The novel represents contradiction and reversals. Even though the characters are associated with classes and identities

which are representative and recognizable in a contemporary world, they all transform constantly in a state of contradiction. The novel emphasizes the power of storytelling by focusing its attention on a family of tricksters descended from the mixedblood Luster Browne. Through the character of Eternal Flame, Luster's daughter and former nun, the power of stories to heal wounded psyches is illustrated.

A refusal to create classifiable characters, the privileging of communal aspect, the play with language and its liberation from imposed cliches are the strategies employed by Vizenor in his novels. Through these reversals Vizenor unveils in his fiction the rich, complex and contradictory experiences inherent in the native American oral literatures.

CHAPTER II

DARKNESS IN SAINT LOUIS BEARHEART

Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart (1978) is Gerald Vizenor's first novel. It rejects all representational ideals and creates a presence founded upon a reality embedded in native American oral narratives. The novel is committed to *Ojibwa* heritage and carries the message that survival for 'postindians' is possible only through a revival of oral traditions and imagination. *Bearheart* breaks the stasis of classified structures and maintains the primordial dynamism implied in the traditional native American narratives. It upholds a comic stance and defies the finality of closure. To use Roland Barthes's terms, the text of *Bearheart* is 'writerly' or 'plural' where meaning is part of a process free from the ultimate signifieds. The novel points out the inadequacies of the structured realities of everyday life and denies the existence of determinate truths. As Louis Owens notes, *Bearheart* is 'radical and startling' and at the same time one of the most traditional of native American novels in that it makes extensive use of *anishinabe* oral tradition while employing postmodern narrative strategies ("The Trickster Novel" 143). Alan Velie gives the concise summary of the novel in the following words :

A futuristic fantasy, *Bearheart* takes place in the United States after the country has run out of oil.

In its desperation for fuel, it turns to lumber, commandeering the trees on the White Earth reservation of the *Anishinaabes* where the protagonist Proude Cedarfair lives. Realizing the futility of fighting the government Proude and his wife Rosina set out on a cross - country Odyssey attracting a bizarre crew of displaced persons, mostly mixed blood Indians, as they go. These pilgrims include Sun Bear Sun, a 300 pounder who carries a small white woman, Little Big Mouse in a holster of his belt, Benito Saint Plumero, an *Anishinaabe* clown who had done time in jail for murdering his rival for the favors of a bronze statue, Belladonna Darwin Winter Catcher, the daughter of a white reporter and *Lakota* holyman who met at the occupation of Wounded Knee and Lilith Mae Farrier, a white woman who worked as a teacher on a reservation until the tribal elders raped her and their wives ran her off in disgust. ("Indian Gothic" 73)

The tricksters in the novel represent a cultural reality that functions as a positive way of negotiating multiple cultural systems.

Their liminality invests them with the power to parody languages and world views and makes them mediators of conflicting systems of values. They are "tribal mixedbloods with good stories and memories" (*Bearheart* 186). The "foolish gestures and mindless conversations" of the pilgrims bring in "more clearness and meaning" (160) in the novel. *Bearheart* thus destroys all notions of finality and declares that "there are no last words to this world" (188).

The narrative frame of *Bearheart* observes the episodic tale - within-a-tale pattern of native American mythology. It is an organic combination of the symbolic, the mystical and the fantastic with an extreme and crude naturalism. The novel ruptures the notion of the world as a closed unity and opens up the potential to envisage human consciousness and social reality as unfinalizable. "Non-facts" relay reality in *Bearheart* and the world is defined in relation to language and myths. The novel is a ritual narrative and incidents here occur without explanation as they do in the American Indian trickster cycle. The novel, to use a Bakhtin's term is 'polyphonic' and carries a multiplicity of voices that interrogate the structured elements of an artificial society. *Bearheart* presents a community who empower themselves through rituals and confront the danger of decimation with courage. The adventures of the pilgrims of truth take place on the high roads, in the hostile cities of hunters, among the crowds of cancer victims, in prison

and ritualistic erotic orgies. In the antagonistic space of their immediate existence, they survive due to their shamanistic ability to transform and restructure obstacles. The novel opens with an account of the injustice and violence done to the family of Proude Cedarfair, the protectors of Cedar Circus, by the federal governments who wish to cut down the trees and "burn it for paper work" (20). In order to survive, the characters move backwards in time "for harmony with nature," journey to an evil third world filled with contempt for the living and fear of death and seek a fourth world where the evil spirits can be outwitted by animal languages. In *Bearheart*, tradition is situated in a modern context and tribal consciousness is shown to be opposed to the consciousness of urbanized industrial cultures. The novel presents the rupture between two systems - one based on wholeness and the other on fragmentation and division. In spite of the fact that politics has played a vital role in deciding the fate of the characters, the internal rules of order in the novel come from the interplay of rituals, dreams and traditions. The emphasis is on both the animal and human sides of the trickster and his ability to create power even through his weakness. The events in the novel authenticate the fact that imagination can reclaim the world's most desecrated spaces. Proude Cedarfair's journey is a negation of the European concept that wilderness will become visible only when it develops productive values. Proude Cedarfair testifies through his pilgrimage that new worlds are

attainable through the energies of the performative language of the tricksters.

The fictional space in *Bearheart* occupied by men, animals, birds and spirits foregrounds the playfulness of the native tricksters, the timeless tradition of regenerative stories, the *anishinaabe* concept of the four worlds and the constructive and destructive aspects of life and reality. In *Bearheart*,

the earth turtles emerge from the great flood of the first world. In the second world the earth is alive in the magical voices and ceremonial worlds of birds and the healing energies of plants. The white otter is the carrier of animal dreams in the new hearts of humans. The third world turns evil with contempt for living and fear of death. Solemn figures are slashed open on the faces of tribal dream drums. In the fourth world, evil spirits are outwitted in the secret languages of animals and birds. (1)

In *Bearheart* Vizenor incorporates the sacred cosmological myth of the creation of the world by the earthdiver, *naanabozho*. *Naanabozho*, the traditional trickster of native Americans appears here under different transformations. In this novel, the *anishinabe* migration story acts as a backdrop for the search for knowledge.

Proude soared through his breath to the *migis* sandridge where he undressed and swam through the brume to the graves of his fathers in the water. In four deep breaths he inhaled all the waters in the lake. In the oral tradition of whales and past tribal travels he became water and fish and made the new earth on the backs of sacred turtles. Proude sat between turtle and otter and the animals on the new earth. Birds soared through his voices and the clouds were first formed from sacred cedar smoke. The crows walked through their blackness into his arms from the water. (139)

Proude represents the compassionate trickster in *naanabozho*.

Like *Nanabozho* Proude is always on the move. It is true that he was originally reluctant to leave his home in Minnesota and was driven from the reservation by collision between the federal government that wanted the trees and a corrupt tribal chief. Whatever the impetus, however, once Proude starts his travels he doesn't stop, traversing Western American until he finally escapes into the fourth world. Like the traditional trickster, he survives by his wits. Like *Naanabozho*, he has the

ability to change shape. (Velie, "Trickster Novel" 133-34)

Benito Saint Plumero, another trickster pilgrim in the novel is in the tradition of *naababozho*, the irresponsible buffoon who commits incest with his sister. Velie notes:

the other face of *Nanabozho* - *Nanabozho* the menace who kills his brother and marries his sister, *Nanabozho* the buffoon who tries to share his meal with the trees and gets stuck in a branch, who tries to fly like a bird but falls to the ground - that *Nanabozho* is portrayed in Benito Saint Plumero, alias Bigfoot. Bigfoot is a small mixed blood with 'the guileless face of a clown' (31), 'outsize feet which moved in the grass like huge rodents', and a huge penis, which he calls 'President Jackson' and uses to seduce the thirteen women of the scapehouse of 'weirds' and 'sensitives', a refuge for women poets who are avoiding the crass masculine world. (Velie, "Indian Gothic" 77)

Plumero's insatiable appeties and cheerful promiscuities are only a reflection of the ways of the traditional trickster, who unabashedly

seduces and impregnates mice, frogs and humans of all ages. Saint Plumero remains in the realm of the ever - possible and "takes on a much more pivotal, central cultural role than do the wily tricksterish animals we call coyotes" (Anderson 63). His crowning as a "double double saint" and his various other disguises endorse Jarold Ramsay's concept of the trickster as

an imaginary hyperbolic figure of the human, repressively energetic and apparently unkillable, whose episodic career is based upon hostility to domesticity, maturity, good citizenship, modesty and fidelity of any kind; who in Freudian terms is mostly id, a little ego, and no super ego, who is given to playful disguises and shape-changing; and who in his clever self-seeking may accomplish important mythic transformations of reality, both in terms of creating possibility and in terms of setting human limits. (*Reading the Fire* 27)

In *Bearheart* we find a mythically mediated form where language constitutes reality. The trickster, in this novel, is "first and foremost a sign in the semiotic sense, a sign in a language game, a comic holotrope . . . a product of language who must be seen in a linguistic context" (Velie, "Trickster Novel" 131). He is a culturally centered, communally

created, highly complex comic figure who cannot be understood outside the context of his discourse.

The novel is a postmodern challenge to those categories that delimit the human potential to grow and bears out Raymond Federman's comment that "all great fiction to a large extent, is a reflection on itself rather than a reflection of reality" (Hutcheon viii). It emphasizes the fact that "in tribal language and religion there are connections between vision, word and place" (Vizenor, "An Interview with Gerald Vizenor" 48). Words in *Bearheart* evoke emotion and convey real meaning. The opening chapter "Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart" is poetic and works as a ceremonial prayer (Keady 61).

Like the traditional trickster tales, *Bearheart* is self referring and auto-representational. The novel often moves to the level of surrealism. The Brechtian technique of defamiliarization used in the novel subverts all chances of closure through a single determinate meaning. The formal and thematic self-consciousness of *Bearheart* makes it what Linda Hutcheon calls, "a narcissistic narrative" where the process involved in the artistic production is emphasized. As Hartwig Isernhagen points out, "self definition, creativity, the creation of reality is here always a differentiation from what is already known, and Vizenor clearly thinks of the construction of self and reality in terms of acts of defamiliarization" (124).

Bearheart aims at new forms of authenticating reality through cultural conventions and mythical discourses. Discourses define meaning in *Bearheart* as Vizenor, like Bakhtin, employs languages within real social situations. Language gains social significance and subverts social conventions and authority. Like other postmodern novels *Bearheart* refrains from totalizing reality and demonstrates fragmentation. It is, to borrow an expression from Barthes, an open-ended process of 'structuration.' Vizenor has adopted the techniques of parody and the carnival to rupture the hierarchically structured reality conceived by social classes. He develops a new sensibility in *Bearheart* by using weapons of hyperbole, surrealism, violence and satire. *Bearheart* celebrates the human power to imagine and survive by making use of "laughter linked to genres of rogues, fools and clowns" (Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination* 170). Through carnival laughter, the pilgrims liberate themselves from theoretical categories, cross cultural boundaries and survive in the realms of the possible. The novel possesses the grotesque fantasy and the anatomical and physiological analysis inscribed in the oral traditions of the native Americans. The grotesque body of Bigfoot is the central image of the fantastic realism woven in the novel. The exaggerated bodily protuberances of the trickster that stand for fertility and growth reveal the complex communal perception of human life. It is, as Alan Velie notes, "the undying body of all the people, comically debased so that it may be

festively reborn" ("Trickster Novel" 95). It is not the body in the modern sense of the word "because it is not individualized. It is contained in the people, a people who are continually growing and renewed . . . the image of the grotesque body also expresses a defeat of time and death. The grotesque exaggeration of mouth, belly and genitals affirm the physical body as open to the world, encompassing it and endlessly reproducing it and itself" (Velie, "Trickster Novel" 205).

Bearheart though rooted in a particular tradition and cultural setting, transcends the barriers of culture and language and carries cross cultural references to other world traditions. It is from the genres associated with the native American and European folklore tradition that the novel acquires its devices for constructing usages of language. As Zubeda Jalalzai points out, "the conjurer, the captive and the trickster overlap on discursive boundaries and come together in *Bearheart* to play out the fundamental tropes of American literature" (26).

In the society of simulations and indeterminacy where it is difficult to distinguish the true from the false and the good from the bad, the stories offer solace to the pilgrims. The world in the novel has become, as Baudrillard suggests, a space where all dichotomies between appearance and reality, surface and depth, subject and object have collapsed into a self-reproducing universe of 'simulacra' controlled by

'simulation', models and codes (Kellner 77). While journeying through a world where signs are separated from their referents, the characters try to recapture those structures of communication prevalent in the primordial period which include words attached to referents and uttered in a context that holds open their possible reversals by others. Proude's act of going through the vision window is a truly symbolic act of escape from codes and models. *Bearheart* denies the surface appearance of things and accepts the essence in rituals and myths. The interpretive strategies of the novel question all privileged forms of rationality. While moving in a world that fosters consumerist mentality and that replaces subjects for objects in positions of privilege, the pilgrims propose a logic of vision and dreams and adopt the trickster strategy to stimulate regeneration. They undermine the codes that represent hyperrealities. In their struggle for personal and communal survival, the pilgrims adopt human and animal identities to do good to a culture that encourages manifest manners and resists trickster shape-shiftings. When the real is no longer what it used to be, the pilgrims resurrect the trickster figure and treat representation itself as a simulacrum. As tricksters themselves, they adopt only those structures that are responsible for the production of meaning. The structures that they adopt manifest themselves in the form of stories.

All the stories told by the pilgrims in *Bearheart* are dynamic, generative and open-ended. They illuminate and enrich the epistemological frameworks of both native American and western cultural traditions. They all nurture survival and psychic renewal. The interactive quality of the stories in *Bearheart* is illustrative of Michael Holquist's definition of Bakhtin's dialogism as a condition in which "everything means, is understood, as a part of a greater whole - there is a constant interaction between meanings, all of which have the potential of conditioning others" (426).

In *Bearheart* Vizenor makes use of the 'dog husband story' of the traditional native American oral narratives through the story of Lilith Mae and her boxer lovers. Stith Thomson refers to 'dog husband story' as a story originating in the North Pacific coast and Alaska and spreading to the western plains and down to California (355). It is when Proude Cedarfair tells the story at the last dinner of the starving priests of the sacred order of Gay Minikins that it is first introduced in the novel. Proude's stories liberate the arbitrary signs of language from fixed hierarchies and ground them in nature. Before Proude leaves the priests, he narrates to them the story of a shaman crow, a child girl, a mongrel and four puppies who lived in a tribal village near the river on the prairie.

Through uncommon dreams the child girl visited different worlds at night . . . Her visions separated her from the people in the village where she was born. She moved in the magical flight of shaman crows and the languages of tribal animals. One night while her favourite mongrel was sleeping at her feet, she dreamed that the animal had become a man . . . She travelled with him and made love with him on the warm banks of the river. Soon her parents discovered that she was pregnant. The people in the village began to gossip that she had given herself to an animal . . . She was alone and did not suffer from the gossip, but her parents depended on the praise and acceptance of other families in the village. The common father of the child girl was preparing to sacrifice his daughter to save his image when the shaman crow warned her in a dream . . . She escaped into the darkness while her father set fire to the house of reeds where she was living with the mongrel lover. Her lover died in the fire and the families abandoned their familiar summer village near the river. Aided by the shaman crows, she gave birth to five puppies. Evil befell on the

'humans' when they killed and ate two of the puppies. From the owls and crows, the 'humans' knew that their misfortune was due to their cruelty towards animals. When the shaman crows told them to purge their tribal blood and praise their animals to save their hearts, they began to celebrate and worship the animals. But when the humans died of hunger and the mongrels became fat [. . .] spoiled and selfish [. . .], the crows were discouraged with the terminal creeds of humans. In visions the crow spoke with the child mother of the mongrel children [. . .]. She agreed that if the crows could gather the powers to turn her mongrel children into human forms she would return to her human families and teach them to love both animals and themselves.... But when she was old and wrinkled and her mongrel sons and daughters were themselves peaceful parents, the whitemen arrived and poisoned the families with selfishness When whitemen removed tribal families from the prairie and woodland, the shaman crows turned tribal children into mongrels because white people would not eat them. (59)

Proude, through this story counteracts the priests' passive desire to starve to death by pointing out "the wisdom of the shaman crows" (62) that refuses to accept any terminal creed.

The objectified versions of the 'dog husband story' of Proude generates a present reality in Lilith Mae's love for her boxers. Lilith Mae tells Inawa Biwide, another trickster character in the novel, stories of humiliation and her experiences with dogs:

I finished college and went to work on the reservation teaching in an experimental school and the women there made a fool out of me. *Abita animosh, abita animosh*, half dog, they shouted to me when I fed dogs. I fed two or three school mongrels when school was out in the afternoon. As the weeks passed more and more dogs came to school, not for school but to be fed when school was out. It was plain and simple that it was getting out of hand when two dozen dogs were hanging around my house waiting to be fed every afternoon. So I hit on the idea of filling the back of my travel van with dog food and driving around the reservation feeding the dogs. I would drive up, ring a small dinner bell I found at antique sale, and then lower the ramp from the rear doors of my van so the dogs would walk up

and in to eat . . . The women would shout at me
. . . They laughed all the time . . . they must have
thought I was making love with all these dog. (88)

About the boxers who later became her lovers, she says that she has hated them and cursed them and not allowed them to eat in her van. But inspite of it all, she says

they followed me everywhere. Always begging for food . . . They were the only dogs I refused to feed on the reservation. The only two, and now like a noose around my neck I am leashed to them forever.
(88)

From Lilith Mae's personal story, Inawa Biwide could understand that she was bodily violated by the school board members. When their wives found out what had happened between Lilith Mae and their husbands they loaded her van with several hundred pounds of dog food and told her to leave the reservation. Lilith Mae tells Inawa Biwide how her van was chased by the reservation dogs :

It made me sad seeing all those dogs who believed in me, not the people mind you, they made fun of me, but all those dogs who trusted and appreciated me. They never made fun of me. It made me sad and I was crying. One by one the mongrels dropped off the chase until only the two boxers were running behind

the van. They must have run more than ten miles so I stopped and let them in the back to eat. I was still crying and lonely and they were so grateful that they could finally eat from the van that they have been with me ever since. They know how to take care of me now, but I still hate them because they do remind me of my step father. (89)

As a follow-up of this story, Inawa Biwide tells a story told by his grandmother about a child who gave birth to five mongrel pups.

It was their custom that animals sleep at the foot of their beds . . . but one dog became a dream man during the night and made love with the child [. . .]. Her father and mother were shamed they burned their possessions, killed the lover mongrel and left the pregnant child alone to die. But the crows knew of her love for animals and directed her to a place where she could find fire and warmth. The crows brought her food and sacred objects from the woodland and prairies and helped her care for the five mongrel babies . . . But the crows are not just good to people. The crows are cosmic clowns . . . wise fools and tricksters. When the mother went out to gather food near the river, the crows brought the

mongrels into human form through humor and taught them to dance. One day the mother caught them laughing as human and scolded them until the babies were ashamed and turned back into mongrels. The crows became hostile and swooped down on her for being so mean about humans. Mother was so ashamed that she praised her mongrels back to human form, burned their animal blankets and taught them how to be good hunters. The mongrel humans became great hunters like the crows and when the frightened villagers, the ones who had left the mother to die, were suffering from famine, the mongrels brought them food. The tribes gave them the power of their lives. The mongrels and their mother were honored but no one told the secret of their birth. The crows know which of our lives are birds and animals and humans. (89-90)

Inawa Biwide's version of Proude's tale emphasizes the harmonious co-existence of animals and humans as recounted in tribal narratives. These stories reflect Lilith Mae's love/hate relationship with her boxers and the underlying message of the novel that redemption is possible through an epistemological awareness of the secrets of one's origin and transformative powers. There is a polyvocal play of narratives in the

animal husband stories of Proude Cedarfair, Lilith Mae and Inawa Biwide. Lilith Mae's copulation with the dogs endorses the mythic tribal transformation and the primordial coexistence of "The Peoples" of the mythic time. These stories take the readers to a native cultural context where there is a fundamental relationship between animals and human beings.

There are in *Bearheart* stories told by sister Willabella, one of the 'sensitives' in the scape house, Bigfoot and Matchi Makwa. Through these stories the characters establish the 'real' world where there is no representation and no play on hyper realities. Through the 'telling' and 'listening' of stories, *Bearheart* testifies to Bakhtin's concept that "ideological creation is not within us, but between us"(Bakhtin, *Formal Method* 8). The characters combine oral traditions, personal narrative and symbolic and mythic events in these stories. Story, in *Bearheart* is "quaint essentially a mediative enterprise. As such, it is both interpretive and preinterpretive. It is always as much about the subject mater which is the manifest occasion of its own elaboration" (White 4).

Sister Willabella's survival story states how she became "the sole survivor" after a plane crash in the jungle. In the accident she was badly wounded and worms and insects ate her body parts.

Worms covered my body and fed on my tender parts. The worms wormed through the openings in my ears and nose and vagina. I could feel them crawling inside of me Then, when I crossed the river to a tribal village on the other side, hundreds of fish grabbed at the worms and took parts of my flesh with their razor teeth. (37)

Matchi Makwa's stories to the pilgrims are migration stories about "the cities and the people in their futures" (45). The stories of Bigfoot create a new consciousness and a new world that reveal the underlying psychic needs of a human being and the necessity to fulfill them for spiritual health. Bigfoot tells Inawa Biwide his vision stories. He tells him how once he drank the vision vine given to him by a white anthropologist and how he started to see "colors and places" (80) and "spiral worlds of blue and green and yellow" he had never known before. He narrates

I swooped down like a crow and listened to strangers thinking, people hating and making love. I heard women in bed with one thinking about another. I learned who were my friends and enemies, swooping in on them to leave thoughts about myself with them and then listening to what they thought about me.

It took the insecurities out of friendships and romances I could locate my enemies and protect myself and I learned how to focus on tics and tell the meaning. I learned how to read muscles and sounds and I could speak several languages. (80)

In one of his stories he tells Inawa Bewide of how he fell in love with "a woman on big bronze feet", a bronze statue whom he saved "from her terrible isolation in the park" (78). When she was stolen by a white man, Bigfoot killed him. He tells his companion trickster how he could retrieve the statue :

I waited and waited and then one fine morning in the summer I was canoeing on the lake near where I had killed the white faggot when she appeared before me like a vision in the water. I thought I was dreaming or throwing her figure ahead of me in my loneliness. There she was, resting upright in about eight feet of clean water. I slipped off my clothes and dove down to be with her. You may not believe this, but I wept with her under water. She drew me to the lake that morning, I knew that, when the water was still because if there had been a slight wind I would not have seen her under a rough surface. Well, what happened was that the white faggot had

hidden her in an ice house and come spring when he was dead and the ice melted she slipped into the water and waited there for me to find her. Well, there you have it, our love stories. (83)

As the tales are told, the listeners tend to question the culturally determined assumptions about identity, meaning and reality. They move back and forth through the texts of the stories and their interpretations and adopt a perspective that initiates in them a dynamic process of self-correction. Vizenor considers "telling a story as dangerous as hunting, dangerous because your life depends on seeing and catching something. It's dangerous because it is an encounter with the unknown, something generally understood, but specifically unknown that may come together, alive or present in the telling or hunting. To hunt, to tell stories, to write is dangerous. It's also survivance" ("Head Water" 54). In these stories where myths and rituals are dominant, the past and the future exist linguistically in the present. These stories are an epistemological structuring of those experiences which upset and redirect our notions of reality. In these stories, the 'tellers' link what they see in the present to what they remember of the past. The trickster stories in *Bearheart* have the healing power of the cultural conversations of the ancient times.

Bearheart presents a world where "the animal people" and "the human people" coexist harmoniously and continue the process of cultural regeneration initiated by the traditional trickster. The characters invent strategies through their trickster energy to develop an epistemological perspective that would evoke a cultural healing at both personal and communal levels. Trickster energy is used as the principle of human rebellion and resistance. Rituals act as the 'real' on which human life is reconstructed. The trickster discourses liberate and provide space for acts of resistance. The marginalized pilgrims attain visibility through the power of words and survive by resisting the hegemonic systems that seek to contain them. Like other novels of Vizenor, *Bearheart* points to the artificiality of culture and the struggle of the natives of America to survive. Their existence outside the confines of rigid social structures gives them the power to challenge manifest manners and manifest destiny.

The mixedblood characters in *Bearheart* cross all static boundaries and define new limits to their activities through their self authorizing rituals in order to discover meaningful areas of signification. They exercise the traditional trickster's cunning and his power to create when exigencies of survival arise. In the novel such a situation arises when they are persecuted by the dominant whites. The pilgrims draw survival strategies from the resources of their own rich traditions and

refuse to be absorbed into the dominant colonizing culture. They retain their indigenous identity and create pathways to survival. Bigfoot's action of popping "his wide violet umbrella" to resist "the hostile audience" suggests that survival on the interstate has become "more verbal than spiritual . . . more open than closed, less secret, little political" (157).

Survival for the pilgrims is, as Vizenor notes in one of his interviews, 'survivance', "a conditional experience rather than a mere response to domination or victimization." "It is inventing a world view," "a new kind of existentialism and a source of Identity" ("Head Water" 54). "Survival is a keen view, the vision of eagles, the forearm of a bear and the ritual of a spider building his web on the wind" (181). It is as Rosina Parent puts it, a search for "a place to dream again" (210).

Bearheart is about the travels of the pilgrims through "terminal creeds and social deeds escaping from evil into the fourth world where bears speak the secret languages of saints" (xiv) and it reflects James Ruppert's concept that "terminal creeds lock the true believer into a moral system that lacks imaginative freedom" (94). Unfortunately some of the pilgrims become victims of terminal creeds and generate new signs which deny referents and which consider absence as the presence and the imaginary as the real. They retain their faith in simulations and as a result lose their balance which takes them to their destruction

and death. *Bearheart* foregrounds the struggle against the terminal creeds that impede imaginative and cultural survival emphasizing the fact that "beliefs and traditions are not greater than the love of living" (11).

The Word Hospital where people "find tongues in trees, books in brooks, phrase from the mouths of fish, oral literatures on the wings of insects, sermons in stone, good words here and there" (161) becomes the centre of terminal creeds where "the machines (are) humanized while humans (are) mechanized" (163). Justice Pardone and Doctor Wilde decide to remain in the Bioavaricious Word Hospital where people "speak about nothing" and where responses are structured in a binary system of affirmation and negation and make it their "last chance to be part of the real world" (161). Double Saint's response to their desire to stay in the Word Hospital that "there are no simple answers in a hospital for word wars" once again affirms the novel's message that words and meanings are to be traced in the imagination and trickster tales and not in "conversation stimulators" (164).

One of the most important terminal creeds to be deconstructed in *Bearheart* is the romantic concept of the 'Indian' as invented by white society. The novel aims to revive the true identity of native Americans, as Owens says, "to free Indian identity from the epic, absolute past that insists upon stasis and tragedy for native Americans (*Other Destinies*

231). Belladonna Darwin - Winter Catcher, daughter of Old John Winter Catcher, "a man of great *Lakota* vision" becomes a victim of 'narcissism' which, Bishop Parasimo points out, is "a form of isolation" (185). Belladonna adopts an invented Indian identity and speaks about tribal values which do not have any reference. She ignores the warning of the hunters at Orion that "terminal creeds are terminal diseases" (185) and stifles her possibility to imagine and grow. She becomes a victim to manifest manners and tells the hunters what is in general to be expected of an Indian:

The tribal past, our religion and dreams and the concept of mother earth, is precious to me
Living is not good for me if a shaman does not sing for shadows in my dreams. Living is not important if it is turned into competitions and material gain. Living is hearing the wind and speaking the languages of animals and soaring with eagles in magical flight. When I speak about these experiences it makes me feel powerful, the power of tribal religion and spiritual beliefs gives me protection. My tribal blood is like your great red wall My blood moves in the circles of mother earth and through dreams without time. My tribal

blood is timeless and it gives me strength to live and deal with evil. (192)

Belladonna's emphasis on blood quantum and her assertion that "Indians have more magic in their lives than white people" prompts a hunter to ask for an explanation for the word 'Indian' as used by Belladonna. "Tell me about this Indian word you use, tell me which Indians are you talking about, or are you talking for all Indians . . . And if you are speaking for all Indians than how can there be truth in what you say?" (191). When Belladonna explains, "An Indian is a member of a recognized tribe and a person who has Indian blood" (191), the hunter retorts with the words, "Indians are an invention" (191). Vizenor's concept of the Indian identity is best expressed by the hunter when he says,

you tell me that the invention is different than the rest of the world when it was the rest of the world that invented the Indian An Indian is an Indian because he speaks and thinks and believes he is an Indian, but an Indian is nothing more than an invention Are you speaking as an invention ? You speak from terminal creeds . . . not a person of real experience and critical substance. (192)

The hunter defines the true identity of a real native American in the following words:

The perfect hunter leaves himself and becomes the animal or bird he is hunting . . . the perfect hunter turns on himself . . . He lives on the edge of his own meaning and humor . . . the humor is in the contradictions of the hunter being close and distant at the same time, being the hunter and the hunted at the same time, being the questioner and the questioned and the answer. The believer and the disbeliever at the same moment of mental awareness. (189)

His emphasis is on the need to accept all the ambivalences and contradictions in life in order to reach the ultimate reality. Belladonna gets her 'just desserts' that leads her to her death for having succumbed to terminal creeds that pervert her vision of reality. One of the pilgrims who does not live in the world of inventions is Proude's wife, Rosina. When the women in the scape house ask her "questions about identities, her dependences, her sexual and political responses to men, and her rituals as a person" (35), she does not have abstract answers. "Her life was visual and personal. She did not see herself in the abstract as a series of changing ideologies" (35). Though terminal

creeds reign supreme in the minds of some of the pilgrims, there is the perpetual path back to balance and psychic healing. *Bearheart* is, as Owens suggests, "a liberation, an attempt to free us from the romantic entrapments, to liberate the imagination" (*Other Destinies* 231).

There is a wild play of trickster humor, ironies, cultural myths and social metaphors in *Bearheart*. The conversations in *Bearheart* overturn "colonial surveillance, monologues, and racial separations" (Vizenor, *The Trickster of Liberty* x). As the pilgrims travel through the interstate highways of knowledge "monologues, terminal creeds, and privileged representations are deconstructed. Mythic verism becomes the only criterion of accuracy. Ultimately Vizenor's tricksters outwit evil but never kill it because humans must learn to live imaginatively with contradictions" (Ruppert 104). *Bearheart* conveys the fact that negation is the only possibility available within a monologic world view. When Proude, the Shaman healer advocates positive affirmation, Sir Cecil Staples, the Evil Gambler in the text negates life and courts "the secrets and surprises on the road to death" (122).

Bearheart seeks to promote growth and balance through memory and imagination. The reality evoked in the novel is related to the traditional tribal narratives. The interstate highways deconstruct the familiar structure of families and oral traditions become once again central to man's experience in this world. Vizenor states in *Bearheart* :

Oral traditions were honored. Families welcomed good tellers of stories, the wandering historians of follies and tragedies. Facts and the need for facts had died with newspapers and politics. Non facts were more believable. The listeners travelled with the tellers through the same frames of time and place. The telling was in the listening. When the sun had set, travellers and moths were drawn to flames. Stories were told about fools and tricksters and human animals. Myths became the centre of meaning again. (158)

As the world in *Bearheart* is filled with corrosive forces, Proude, the *anishinabe* Shaman facilitates the process of renewal by stabilizing the order through vision and dreams. The characters and actions in the novel are mythologized -

Actions are linked less with causation than with continuance on a mythic plane, so that events resonate with significance on a number of epistemological planes, both native and non-native. Vizenor develops a psychological dimension of essentially mythic characters though only to subvert his reader's expectations.

Stylistically, he pursues narrative strategies similar to other contemporary writers in order to present a satirical critique of American society and native American survival. (Ruppert 18)

Proude's pilgrimage and bear transformations validate Vizenor's comment that "the trickster is in eternal motion and transformation" (*Summer* 13). The translated version of a Pawnee song that states "I am like a bear, I hold up my hands waiting for the sun to rise" (xix) and the words of Bearheart that "we apologize, the bear and me, if we have offended real people in real funeral places" reinforce the vital role played by the Great Bear in the novel. Proude Cedarfair is endowed with "the cleverness of crows" and "the vision and ceremonial powers of the bears" (12). It is "the roar of the bears in his memories"(4) that guides his path to survival. Proude experiences two levels of consciousness - the one evoked from his human place and the other from his vision as a bear. Proude "dreams in sudden moods," determines his thoughts from morning dreams" (5) and transforms himself into the Great Bear of the sacred *Ojibwa* medicine rites and escapes from the third world of evil to the fourth world of vision and knowledge. Proude's transformation into the bear justifies "the notion that visible forms are deceptive and that human and animal forms are interchangeable" (Barnouw 247).

About human / animal transformations in *Bearheart*, Regal - Cellard
 comments

The Chippewa, and Vizenor in particular, are fond of this transformational story. The bear embodies strength and spiritual wisdom, shamanic power. To frighten the federal humanoids coming to fell his Cedar trees, Bearheart screams. "ha ha ha ha haaa!" and as a war cry but also as an expression of distress and as what Vizenor likes to call "trickster signature." The bear can magically move from one place to another, and when he is overcome by despair Proudé turns into a bear and "soars" back to his Cedar Circus to swim in the lake of the *migis*, the shell that, as Vizenor explains elsewhere, guided the *Anishinaabe* from the East to the source of *misisibi*. ("Vizenor's *Griever* : A Postmodern little Red Book of Cocks, Tricksters and Colonists" 99)

The crows in *Bearheart* possess mediating qualities as in the native American cultures. They save the pilgrims from many hostile situations through their wisdom. When Jordan Coward, a federal official comes to Cedar circus to evacuate Proudé and Rosina from their sacred place "the clown crows dropped from the trees and one by one in crude black formation packed and hacked at the back of his huge fat

head.... the crows clawed at his closed fists and the dogs jumped against him knocking him down" (20). Animal transformations occur to the tricksters in *Bearheart* in moments of crisis as in the tribal myths. At the time of inquisition of Sun Bear Sun by the totalitarian rulers of Santa Fe, the pilgrims "soared through the patio and over the walls with the seven clown crows. Resting in the cottonwood trees the pilgrims and the black crows flapped and swooped over the abandoned buildings and automobiles and landed on the benches in the Plaza" (229). Inawa Biwide took "magical flight with the ghosts of other pilgrims over the woodland rivers and cedar fires" (228) and often talked with private Jones, the reservation mongrel, "out of time and place." At Pueblo Bonito, when the vision bear told Proude and Inawa Biwide to enter the fourth world as bears, they "flew with vision bears . . . from the window on the perfect light into the fourth world" (239).

In *Bearheart* Vizenor has introduced characters who engage in finger conversation just like the tricksters in native American oral performance. Bishop Parasimo is a healer and hand talker. Like the inchoate trickster whose body parts communicate separately, Bishop Parasimo's hands react as if they had existence of their own. He liked his hands and often spoke to them when he was alone :

In public his hands, the right one in particular, often followed his speech as if the two were personal

critics of the spoken form and content. In the cloister his hands spoke to each other in shadows on the white walls. His right hand was the most assertive and cultural conversationalist. His right hand had opinion and terminal creeds. (94)

There is, as in traditional narratives, a celebration of the rights and pleasures of the body. Bigfoot's body acts as a "house of signs" suggesting liberated sex. The pilgrims' sexuality "is not suppressed, it is completely liberated and joyous" (Regal- Cellard, "Doubling in Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart*" 100).

Vizenor advocates contradictions implied in the native American and oral narratives in *Bearheart*. "His is not, however, an attempt to avoid claims to absolute truth or uncontested meaning. Rather, for Vizenor, contradiction is the essence of oral tradition in its emphasis on variation, its play between text and interpretation, its imaginative freedom, its subversion of absolute definitions of reality and its ability to guide without demanding" (Ruppert 94). Contradictions in *Bearheart* manifest themselves in the sex reversals of Pio Wissakodewinini and the metamask transformation of Bishop Omax Parasimo.

Pio Wissakodewinini is 'neither man nor woman.' He is, as Paula Gunn Allen observes, "male and female, many-tongued, changeable,

changing and who contains all the meanings possible within her or his consciousness" ("Border Studies : The intersection of Gender and Color" 311). Pio was twice convicted for raping white women and was sentenced 'to become a woman.' The sex change and the transsexual surgery and freedom on hormones" (75) converts Pio from an enormous simple man into an aggressive woman who finds a place in the leadership of the liberation movement. Pio is presented in the novel as "a person who is not sure of his sexual identity." When Pio could no longer fill his prescriptions for female hormones "her pendulous breasts shriveled, his beard returned and her voice wavered and vibrated. The mammoth papa woman clown seldom spoke now. He joined the grande tribal caravan in search of a special tribal herb which would bring back to him her new woman dreams and voices" (75).

The metamasks of Bishop Parasimo upset the conventional role expectations of masks by functioning against misrepresentation. The Bishop complicates the process of identification in his pursuit of truth through the three metamasks that metamorphose him to sister Eternal Flame, Scintilla Shruggles or Princes Gallroad and brings in contradiction to the trickster world of the novel.

The life in the novel is anchored in a familiar world and events take place in a time, that has what Bakhtin calls a "natural everyday cyclicality" (Velie, "Trickster Novel" 132). In the chronotope of the novel,

time unlike - Vizenor's notion of mythic time, becomes visible and space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time and events. The message implicit in *Bearheart* is that responsibility and laughter are essential to liberation and healing and that one should not give oneself to chance. When the pilgrims arrive at What Cheer, Iowa to gamble for fuel with Sir Cecil Staples, Proude declares flatly that "Nothing is chance There is no chance in chance . . . Chancers are terminal creeds" (107). Vizenor criticizes the role of chance that diminishes responsibility. Early in the novel

the tribal religions were becoming more ritualistic but without visions. The crazed and the alienated were desperate for terminal creeds to give their vacuous lives meaning. Hundreds of urban tribal people came to the cedar nation for spiritual guidance. They camped for a few days, lusted after their women in the cedar, and then lacking inner discipline, dreams and personal responsibilities moved on to find new word wars and new ideas to fill their pantribal urban emptiness. (12)

Bearheart is a postmodern fiction that subverts all the realistic conventions of character and narration. In this novel the tricksters,

clowns and animal humans, create contradictions through their wildly imaginative stories and actions and "walk out of the known world backwards." Living in the world where 'telling' is 'listening,' the characters enact transvaluations thereby restructuring the conventional notions of possibilities. *Bearheart* is "a concordance of narrative voices, and a narrative realism that is more than mimesis or a measure of what is believed to be natural in the world" (190).

The scape house of the "weirds and sensitives" deconstructs all the privileged notions of space. The life of the culturally centered communally oriented women in the scape house is a vehement attack on the dominant bourgeois postcolonial world view. In the house of the women poets where "the outside is inside"

the animals were asleep on the floor. Cats were poised on the shelves and mantle pieces. Birds were perched on the thousand plants and trees and hundreds of rails and posts and roosts in the fragrant green house. Insects sounded from the potted earth [. . .]. The women in the scape house ate the cats and dogs and birds and fish that lived with them. (33)

All the norms regarding social roles and society are perforated and disintegrated in *Bearheart*. The discourses in the novel function as

a critique of all repressive, authoritarian ideologies. The evil gambler in the novel learns even as a child that "biological families are not the centre of meaning and identities" (121). The characters deconstruct their social roles too. Proude, the leader and defender of the cedar sovereign nation abandons his social role and turns to "the cleverness of crows and the visions and ceremonial powers of the bears" (16). Lilith Mae gives up her profession as a teacher and joins the caravan "to confess her sexual sins, hoping to recover passion in her passionless emotions" (78). In *Bearheart* all societies remain fragmented. Through the perforations, Vizenor satirizes native and non-native social stances and definitions of identity.

The clowns whom the pilgrims meet near Walatowa Pueblo create a new relationship to reality. Through immediate and crudely familiar contact with reality, they create a new awareness in the pilgrims. Like the trickster clowns in myths, they act and speak in an open - ended present. They are modelled in the carnivalesque tradition. They project the ultimate reality in human life through their apparently frivolous words. They deconstruct reality when they say "places are not places . . . weeds are not weeds . . . We are not moving from dreams to dreams" and "Time and space between the starting and the stopping makes upward downward and backward forward and noward" (233). They accept reversals in their journey towards truth and teach the pilgrims

that "you should be walking backward . . . Two backward walks make one good forward in the world of fools" (232). The pilgrims are exhorted by the clowns to walk "backward like grass hoppers leaping and then waiting for directions at unknown landing" (233). Louis Owen aptly describes the novel as "a trickster narrative, a post apocalyptic allegory of mixedblood pilgrim clowns afoot in a world gone predictably mad" (248).

Every utterance of the tricksters in *Bearheart* is a 'move' in a language game. The narrative voices that are heard in *Bearheart* sufficiently express what Bakhtin calls, "the polyphonies of life." Proude's words that carry the speaking voice of *naanabozho* in his encounter with the evil gambler possess a "choral vitality" (xxii). What Bakhtin has said about Dostoevsky's novels is applicable to *Bearheart*. Like the novels of Dostoevsky, there is in *Bearheart*, "a plurality of independent and unmerged voices and consciousness, a genuine polyphony of fully valid voices" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 6). What is special about the stories in *Bearheart* is that the insight that is inherent in these stories is the motivating force behind the actions of both the speaker and the listener.

The pilgrims in *Bearheart* are "the postindian warriors" who are "new indications of narrative creating, the simulations that overcome the manifest manners of dominance" (*Manifest Manners* 5). They move

beyond systems of oppression into purity, myth and liberation. Their tales survive all critical closures, representations and preconceived conditions of culture and perform the dynamic trickster function of regeneration and new emergence.

CHAPTER III

GRIEVER: AN AMERICAN MONKEY KING IN CHINA

Griever: An American Monkey King in China published in 1987 is dedicated to "Mixed Bloods and Compassionate Tricksters." In this novel Gerald Vizenor has employed the topos of the native American trickster to function as a sign of the harmony that exists in the native American system of meaning and belief. *Griever* is a search for meaning through a reality that literally is meaningless. It centres upon Griever, a trickster who has knowledge of culture and consciousness and who strives to balance the energies of good and evil in the world. He is his own form and content and can transcend temporal and spatial repressions. Vizenor situates Griever in a postmodern context. Griever moves in a world, which is not circumscribed by human clock-time with its now-points. Griever's essence, as with other tricksters in native American mythology is predicated upon metaphor. As such he signifies, in stories about people, that the past and the present have the same rhythm.

Griever is an infusion of mythic accounts, historical and personal stories and experiences from several cultural sources. Vizenor holds the view that

the landscape of tribal memories are heard, read and remembered as personal and new ceremonial stories.

The natural world is created in personal stories; the healers heard their elusive mythic union with birds and animals in personal narratives [. . .]. Some personal visions and stories have the power to liberate and heal. ("Critical Metaphors of the Ghost Dance" 227).

Gerald Vizenor's search for a cure for the evils of the modern world leads him to parallel trickster traditions in world literature besides his own *anishinabe* trickster narratives. In *Griever* in addition to the *anishinabe* tricksters, the Chinese Mind Monkey, Sun Wu-K'ung, the Afro-American tricksters Esu-Elegbra, and Signifying Monkey, and Indian Buddhist saints- the Bodhisattvas – occupy various situational spaces to signify the author's antipathy towards finitude and closure. The novel lends a positive gesture towards healing the ruptures caused by the destructive value systems of the Chinese capitalistic society. In spite of its censure of authoritarian tyranny and the excesses of capitalism, the novel is an attempt to convey the essence of the *Ojibwa* and Chinese cultural legacies.

Griever defamiliarizes the familiar and thereby projects the quality of postmodern contradiction. The novel reflects the postmodern condition in its efforts to represent the multiplicity of human existence using a much wider range of discourse than the approved, scientific, textual, empirical approach.

Griever, like many postmodern ethnic texts is a 'dialogic' novel to use a Bakhtinian term, as it has other voices to the trickster tales. It is a 'polyphonic' novel containing deep and complex layers of experiences. The focus of the novel is on the endeavours of a teacher from the White Earth reservation to save China from impotency and degeneration. The redeemer in the novel considers himself to be the incarnation of the Chinese trickster figure, the Mind Monkey and assumes a trickster-like stance as he attempts to subvert the socialist system in China. As a spectator and an actor, the trickster in *Griever* is half-human and half-simian. Vizenor blends in his protagonist the characteristics of the compassionate and intellectual native American trickster with the heroism, sharp perceptiveness and rhetoric talent of the Chinese and Afro-American trickster monkeys. The experiences of the protagonist in the novel are a discourse in dialogue with other utterances made in the native American, Chinese and Afro-American trickster traditions. These narrative discourses act as a 'meta-language,' controlling, interpreting and evaluating the other discourses evolved in the novel. *Griever* has an intertextual fictional frame as the oral narratives of the native Americans. There is in *Griever*, as Vincent Leith points out while discussing intertextuality, an "infiltration by prior concepts, figures, codes, unconscious practices, conventions and texts" (287). Along with its 'double voiced' quality, it also displays a variegated use of stylization including the picaresque, the grotesque, the gothic and the

carnavalesque. The novel is highly structured and carries the essence of the carnival in its aspects of ambivalence, change, death-rebirth and destructive creative pattern. Rabelais's erotic and culinary grotesque as seen in the bawdy episodes and the pantagruelian meal at Maxims carnival (204-205), the Gothic elements represented by the blind woman Hua Lian and the shrouded woman Kangmei and the use of idiosyncratic verbal inventions like "transportation was limousinized, food was banquetized, clothes were westernized and the nation was pavilionized" (175) are examples of stylization in the novel. The novel takes on the character of an adventure story while also embodying trickster resistance. It is based on the protagonist's quest for ancient manuscripts. Its intertextuality emerges through its references to the Chinese classic, *The Journey to the West* translated by Anthony C. Yu, and Octavio Paz's *The Monkey Grammarian*. The protagonist, Griever de Hocus, like *The Journey's* pilgrims, travels west to find the original manuscripts of his tradition and is inspired by the trials and tribulations of the Monkey King who attains Buddhahood and literary immortality while attempting to procure the Buddhist scriptures. Octavio Paz's *The Monkey Grammarian* from which Vizenor has quoted in his epigraph, refers to the Monkey Hanuman, a trickster in Hindu mythology, who was 'the ninth author of grammar' and who could "jump in one bound from India to Ceylon, move the Himalayas, and take hold of the clouds" (Regal-Cellarad, "Vizenor's *Griever*. A

Postmodern Little Red Book of Cocks, Tricksters and Colonists" 331). Like Hanuman, Vizenor's hero Griever crosses the ocean and engages in the act of redeeming the Chinese people.

Vizenor has employed the revisionary techniques of parody and pastiche in *Griever* by connecting the protagonist with the tricksters of various other traditions. Griever's conscious use of language brings him close to Esu Elegbra and the Signifying Monkey. Esu-Elegbra is a trickster and a messenger of the Gods who figures prominently in the mythologies of Yoruba culture and the Signifying Monkey is a trickster in the Afro-American tradition who acts as the trope of tropes. Both are trickster figures who "serve in their respective traditions as points of conscious articulation of language tradition aware of themselves as tradition, complete with a history, pattern of development and revision and internal principles of patterning and organisation" (Gates xx-xxi). In *Griever*, as in the myths of Esu-Elegbra and the Signifying Monkey, is registered certain principles of formal language use and its interpretation. The novel is a meta-discourse that carries reference to and representation of trickster reality through self-reflexiveness. What Louis Gates has observed about Esu Elegbra is applicable to Griever. Like the African trickster, Griever is "the element of displacement and deferral as well as its sign" (Gates 42). Like Esu, Griever, the protagonist acts as "the guardian of the cross roads, master of style and

of stylus, the phallic god of generation and fecundity, master of that elusive mystical barrier that separates the divine world from the profane" (Gates 6). Like Esu and Signifying Monkey, Griever travels through space and time and acts as a mediator. Like them, his mediations are tricks. Griever connects truth with understanding and the sacred with the profane like these tricksters. His qualities include "individuality, satire, parody, irony, magic, indeterminacy, open endedness, ambiguity, sexuality, chance, uncertainty, description and reconciliation" (Gates 6).

The linguistic world of *Griever* is not unified, singular and closed, instead it comprises a multiplicity of tongues, mutually animating each other. The metatext of the trickster tradition interacts with the real text of Griever's experiences in China. He, like the Signifying Monkey, "dwells at the margins of discourse, ever punning, ever troping, ever embodying the ambiguities of language" (Gates 527).

Griever exemplifies Arnold Krupat's statement that "Indian Literature presents itself exclusively in the form of oral performances, not textual objects, no matter how scrupulous a transcription may be it is inevitably a declension from the narrative as act" ("An Approach to Native American Texts" 117). It is the dynamic reality of *anishinabe* experience that is reflected in *Griever*. It exhibits tribal consciousness based on wholeness wherein physical, social and psychological events

are unified through connecting structures based on tribal ritual tradition. It is an oral discourse structured rhetorically and containing the double voices of the oral and the written along with the double-voiced discourse relating to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of narrative. The story opens and closes in a dialogic mode with letters to China Browne.

The theme of transformation common in native American mythology is central to the novel. The protagonist's transformation into a monkey denotes his trickster capacity for creative metamorphosis. "Being human and simian, he can be considered as both the Monk Tripitaka and his Monkey Sun Wuk'ung, who underwent seventy four transformations" (Rigal-Cellard, "Vizenor's *Griever*: A Postmodern Little Red Book of Cocks, Tricksters and Colonists" 332).

Unlike the achromatic and ahistoric Indian tribal narratives, *Griever* functions within the frame of specific chronology and history. Space in the novel contains past and present fused together in meaningful sequence; time is related to quotidian reality, and life is presented in the physical geographical space of modern China.

Griever de Hocus, the protagonist of the novel is born of a brief encounter between his Indian mother and a caravan clown. He is not an ordinary teacher from the White Earth reservation, instead he is an 'expressive' and 'speaking' being inexhaustible in his attempts to create meaning and signification (Todorov 24). Instead of adopting the

metamorphosis of a Coyote or a Hare, the traditional *anishinabe* trickster, he accepts the identity of a Stone Monkey, the traditional Chinese trickster figure and engages in an eternal quest for sacred knowledge. According to the Chinese oral narrative, the Chinese Monkey trickster was born from a huge stone egg fertilized by the wind on Flower Fruit Mountain. He became adept at magic arts and learnt the skills of flying through air and changing his shape at will. At a great feast given in his honour for slaying a monster, he drank too much and caused havoc. While he was sleeping, the servants of the king of Hell captured him and got him chained in the infernal regions as a punishment for his disruptive activities. Breaking his bonds, he stole the register of judgements and deleted his own name and the names of all monkeys from it. When the Lord of Heaven made him Grand Overseer of the Heavenly Stables to keep him quiet, he broke up Heaven and withdrew to Mount Hua-Kua. He proclaimed himself Governor of Heaven and Great Saint. The Heavenly Host made him the chief of the heavenly Peach Garden on his assurance that he would abide by the divine laws. But wild with anger at not being invited to the Peach Festival, he ate all the food prepared for the feast and stole the pills of immortality. While he was in Mount Hua-Kua, he was captured and brought before the Jade Emperor who condemned him to death, a punishment that could not be meted out to him because of the peaches and pills. When the Stone Monkey threatened to destroy Heaven, the

Jade Emperor desperately sent for the Buddha. On the Buddha's query as to why he wanted to possess Heaven, the Monkey responded by stating that he was immortal, invulnerable, adept at transforming himself in seventy two different ways and hence qualified to govern Heaven. The Buddha agreed that if he could jump out of his (Buddha's) palm, he was surely entitled to rule Heaven. So the Monkey leaped into the air and sprang across Heaven to the farthest confines of the earth which finally turned out to be the base of one of the Buddha's fingers. The Buddha created a magic mountain and shut him within it and he would have remained there for ever had the Bodhisatva Kuanyin not obtained his release. He was asked to accompany Thangseng on his great pilgrimage to the western paradise to fetch the authentic version of the Buddha's teachings. Thangseng had fitted on the Monkey a helmet which contracted upon his skull when he was wayward and wanton. As the Monkey acquired enlightenment and accomplished his task the helmet disappeared of its own accord (Christie 126).

Throughout the novel, Griever exhibits the idiosyncrasies of the Stone Monkey. He is 'a mind monkey' (24) and a 'natural clown' carrying a 'holster' to 'shoot clocks' (25). He imagines that just like the Stone Monkey, he is also born from a stone on Flower Fruit Mountain and that his fate is inextricably twined with that of the Stone Monkey – "He became a mind monkey and chewed clouds and moved incredible

distances between deep inhalations. One morning in his dream he became the master of monkey, he talked backward, and he disturbed common manners in the world" (128). He is "a mixedblood tribal trickster, a close relative of the old mind monkey, he holds cold reason on lunge line while he imagines the world with colored pens, he thinks backward, stops time like a shaman, and reverses intersections, interior landscape [. . .] Griever discovers events, an active opera and audience all at once on rough paper" (34). He, like the trickster Monkey disturbs the rigidities of an established culture. He seeks to liberate cultures from what Louis Owens calls, "spatial and temporal repression" ("Ecstatic Strategies" 24). His subversive actions endorse Vizenor's desire to be an 'upsetter' rather than a mediator and a balancer (Vizenor, "An Interview with Gerald Vizenor" 42).

Like his creator Vizenor, Griever 'upsets' the cultural structures and challenges the Establishment in China. In the course of the novel Griever adopts for himself the name of the Monkey trickster *Sun Wu-k'ung*. 'Wu-kung' is the religious name given to the Monkey King in Chinese folklore when he goes in search of enlightenment and immortality. The name has been translated as "Awake-to-vacuity" (Yu). Anthony Yu notes that this name recalls the Buddhist concepts which point to the emptiness, the vacuity, and the unreality of all things and all physical phenomena" (Yu 38). Griever, like the traditional trickster of

Chinese mythology recreates and renews reality often through outright revolt and sometimes through clever defiance and sly indiscretion. Parody in the novel questions notions of the real and the authentic. Deriving strength from his cultural resources and through *anishinabe* trickster power, Griever resists the corrupt social and political systems in China and empowers human relations. He moves back "over culture lines, a shaman over the veils and hollow beams, down the stairs in ritual time, down to the meadows where animals and trees heal in the same language" (32). Even as a child it is said that Griever understood reality through perforations and cracks. He "remembers uncommon landscapes, the cleaves and rutted patterns from his childhood. His memories are bundled and marked with emblems and he imagines stories about other people from their scars, prints, carved hearts, crude crosses gashed on trees, new cultures scored on desks and public corridors, and from natural wrinkles, faults on faces and the earth" (27). Griever creates his own reality. In his drawings the past, the future, life and death lose their reality. In the novel in the incident where the butcher kills the chickens, Griever resurrects them on a paper and even sets them free. Vizenor states in *Griever* : "Griever opened his holster, drew the scroll, and with three colored pens he resurrected the dead chickens. The cockerel strutted across the rough paper with hairless humans bound to his shanks" (34). Like the Monkey trickster whose transformative powers energize him, he is determined "to mind the

attention of the world" (92). His power and "the wild pitch of the mind monkey" endow the people whom he encounters with vitality. Like that of the trickster, Griever's beneficence results from the breaking of rules and the violating of taboos. He interferes in the established system and through his acts of interference teaches humanity that that which is socially peripheral is ultimately the central and the real.

Griever represents an archetypal, psychic structure of extreme antiquity. He is a refined trickster, a person fond of jokes, a shape shifter, half-animal and half-divine. But he is much humanized and made more vulnerable than the traditional trickster. His flight is more reminiscent of the Monkey King's in *Journey to the West* than that of *naanabozho*. In his act of signifying the immediate reality of modern China, he is like the Signifying Monkey of the Afro-American literature. This plurality of trickster transformation denotes one form of his power.

In *Griever* there are frequent references to Chinese opera and Chinese art. Chinese opera is an analogue of native American story telling. Mackerras notes, "Until the communists took over, the opera was a staple of the major religious festivals, held each summer at temples throughout China" (94). In *Griever* "Chicken liberation was better understood as a comic opera. The audience was drawn to the trickster and his imaginative acts" (40). Vizenor explains in an

interview how he was fascinated by the Chinese Monkey King Opera while he was working as a teacher in China. He says :

in the fall, a month into teaching over there, I was invited to see a production of some of the scenes from the Monkey King opera. That experience changed every thing for me. The Theatre was overflowing with Chinese, of course, and at first I was overwhelmed by the audience – not simply because the place was so jammed but because the audience was dynamic, so completely engaged in the production even though there's no applause. I'm sure everyone in the audience must have changed seats at least twice . . . people would go out to the lobby to gossip, come back in when their favorite scene was about to be performed, and then rush right up to the stage. Then they'd leave again, and nobody would applaud. At first I was distracted by this rich and powerful dynamic between what was happening on the stage and the audience – and also by the smell of garlic and all these other good things. Of course, what's going on is also revolutionary, but not in this case revisionist or social realism, the way most theatrical

productions were in China. In other words, this Monkey King material hadn't been converted to serve the state. The revolutionary state accepted this not as bourgeois spiritual pollution, but as folk culture original literature that represented the Chinese consciousness. They accepted it for what it was because it was in their soul – and the soul in this case was not dangerous to the communist party. This was on-the-street stuff, a bit like puppet theatre, not an elitist – Communist Party performance. So there it is. This probably sounds naïve on my part, but it's true. And these wonderful distractions with the audience – I started paying attention to the play, and of course it was only then that I began to recognize all the stuff I had read about the Monkey King. Then, in one of those occasional strokes of insight you get, I suddenly saw the *trickster* figure. When I saw this stuff performed in this other context, there it was, suddenly alive, and I was thrilled. I knew immediately that I had a book. I didn't know what it was going to be exactly, but I knew I had a book somewhere. When I got back, I still didn't have a book, although I did have a

powerful theme – the idea that the only figure in a story who could confront the oppressive bureaucracy and contradiction existing in the People's Republic of China would have to be a mind monkey or trickster. The trickster Griever bashed at habits and rules in an established historical context. (Vizenor, "Head Water" 52)

Vizenor is drawn towards the Chinese drama because it is 'non-representational.' In the epigraph to *Griever* Vizenor quotes the observations made by James. J.Y. Liu on Chinese drama :

Chinese drama is largely nonrepresentational or non mimetic, its main purpose is expression of emotion and thought, rather than representation or imitation of life. In other words, it does not seek to create an illusion of reality, but rather seeks to express human experience in terms of imaginary characters and situation

One of the characters, Wu Chou, a former opera actor enlightens the people around him like the elders in the *anishinabe* community through his "theatrical gestures" (22). And towards the end of the novel, as Griever and Kangmei, another trickster character in the novel, take flight to Macao, they become "part of some new airborne monkey opera" (234).

Like Chinese opera, Chinese art too holds an assumption allied to native American thinking. Simon Leys observes :

While western artists applied their ingenuity to deserve the perception of the spectator, presenting him with skilful fiction, for the Chinese painter, the measure of success was determined not by his ability to fake reality, but by his capacity to summon reality. The supreme quality of a painting did not depend on its illusionist power but on its efficient power, ultimately painting achieved an actual grasp over reality, exerting a kind of operative power. (21)

Griever is a reflection of the Bakhtinian concept that 'every utterance is related to the previous utterance' (Todorov 48). The protagonist "receives the word by the other's voice and it remains filled with that voice. He intervenes in his own context from another context, already penetrated by the other's intentions. His own intention finds a word already lived in" (Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 131). Culture, for Griever, consists in "the discourses retained by collective memory, discourses in relation to which every uttering subject must situate himself or herself" (Todorov x).

Griever presents a cultural phenomenon through the diachronic development of self-consciousness by means of myths. It is a challenge to the traditional novelistic mimesis. Here the author cedes the fictional landscape to the reader's mind through which the reader is made a witness to the novel's self-analysing development. Vizenor's deep interest in theories of myth and his awareness that dreams are crucial to Indian aesthetics have led him to introduce certain dream sequences in the novel. The boundaries between art and life, dream and waking, physical and mental reality are often indistinguishable in *Griever*. Dreams and his lived-experiences form a coherent unity as Griever writes to China Browne "China, there were these incredible episodes in the dream that seemed to have something to do with my being here, now in the present" (16). "Voices" come to Griever in "dreams." In his dream "the plane was transformed into a mansion, then a mountain and passengers became bears" (14). Through the protagonist, Vizenor stresses the fact that tribal people imagine their social pattern and places on the earth and exist in mythic time. Griever states in the novel that imagination "is what burns in humans" and that "we are luminous when we dream" (32). Tribal memories and dreams are the only real world for them, "all the rest is bad television" (28). It is Griever's practice to turn the mattress over and loosen the sheet before he goes to sleep to protect his dreams as is customary in his community.

Griever finds out things through dreams and visions. He asserts "we are not methods to be discovered, we are not freeze . . . We remember dreams" (32). He somersaults through time and space and achieves through dreams the knowledge of the Monkey King, the bear women who saved the first silk cultures from evil and the shaman, the stone man whose descendents became healers in tribal cultures around the world. His knowledge, that culture is recorded and transmitted in the imagination and that the "imagination is the real world" (28), "a dance to discover interior landscapes" (200), takes him to the land of bears and shamans. Even though Bears are not a Chinese motif, they guide the trickster's visions in *Griever*. Shitou, the stone shaman in the novel while breaking stones "tells stories about bears and the old stone cultures that came down from the mountain and settled near the sea"(72). Griever in his dream, is drawn to a bright light which later turns out to be a bear, a shaman. Griever writes to China Browne that the bear that appeared in his dream led him

to the kingdom of Khotan where she showed me several bear shamans on a mural from the silk cultures. One fire bear wore a black opal ring surrounded with faceted azure-blue stones. She told me that bears mined blue jade and the rare lapis lazuli at secret places and traded the stones on the silk

roads. The bear wore a small blue rabbit on a chain around her neck . . . I could feel her heat, smelled wet hair behind me, and then the bear touched me on the shoulders with her paws. The bear led me into another mansion buried on the desert. She was silent when we passed mountain scenes, stone people and wild fires on murals, bears with monkeys on their shoulders, monkeys with bats and lotus flowers embroidered on the back of their coats, and at the end of the wide murals there was an old man with butterflies on his hands . . . The Shaman told me that the mountain bear women saved the first silk cultures from evil . . . At the end of the murals, behind a wide door, there were baskets filled with bear bones and blue stones, and thousands of manuscripts, histories of Shaman bear cultures from the mountains that surrounded the deserts. She pushed me into the room, closer to the bones, and told me to choose one birchbark manuscript to take with me. Outside, she opened the scroll and held me to the secrets. (189)

Vizenor links the bears with the Monkey by having Griever, the Monkey King reach out for the bear on his balcony in order 'to be the bear' (16).

In his dreams, he is informed that the bears mined blue Jades and traded the stones on the silk roads. He is even asked to take a birch bark scroll that contains the stories including the past and the present history of China and the Mind Monkey, the Chinese trickster. This vision contains all the mythic elements that give coherence to the novel: the blue stones and the black opal ring that Griever sees later in the novel, the bones which finally turn out to be those of the unwanted children killed in the pond and the shaman whom he sees along with the opal and the manuscript and the old man with butterflies on his hands who turns out to be Wu Chou. The dreams in which he relives some of the Mind Monkeys adventures, stimulate him. From one of the dreams he comes to know about the birth of the Stone Monkey. The Mind Monkey that he saw in his dream subdued the dragons, started fires with little words in conversation, stole the sacred peaches from the Grand Festival of Immortal Peaches and earned immortality. Stimulated by the dream, Griever consciously structures his behaviour after the Sun Trickster, the Mind Monkey and allows his face to be painted like a Monkey king as he appears in the Chinese opera by Wu Chou, another trickster figure in the novel and becomes " a mind monkey with a new mask, a tribal conversion in wild histories" (140).

Reality and dream become indistinguishable in *Griever* when a mute child follows the trickster through the crowd from the train station

to the guest house. "His dark face appeared in mirrors, reflected in windows, bounced from light to water, and paused at critical intersections. No matter where the trickster turned, the child was there." From Griever's leather holster he, "selected red and blue pencils and continued to draw on the concrete outside window. He colored the mask and outlined the bones in blue." Even the mosquitoes entered from the real world to the dream world as

hundreds of mosquitoes circled our heads and bodies, but none landed on me until I turned from the child We were both mute on either side of the screen . . . we seemed to move at the same time, wavered together through the screen, and then it happened. There was a pale blue light around his head and chest, and then, much to my surprise, he grew taller right there in place The telephone rang and shattered the silence. The blue light burst from his head and shot from his face and arms through the screen, right through me to the telephone, like lightning to a streamer. When the light passed through me, I became the child, we became each other, and then we raised the receiver to our ear. (59)

All the dream sequences in the novel suggest that dreams often come to the trickster's aid to assist him in his understanding of reality.

Griever's power emerges from his liminal existence. Marginalised as he is as a mixedblood and an outsider, he occupies the spaces between different ethnic groups. He effaces all spatial boundaries and lives beyond all bounded communities. He shuns a clearly defined social status and is associated with market places and cross roads. He lives in between two races and two worlds, belonging to neither and yet to both, which endows him with a superior power of evaluation. Like the trickster in the *anishinabe* tradition, Griever defies the final definition of time, place and character. From his reversals and transgressions come creativity and liberation. But he does not hold himself within the frame of the trickster as defined by anthropologists, for, anthropology, according to Vizenor, is an invention and an extension of the cultural colonialism of western expansion (Vizenor, "Gerald Vizenor" 157). Griever says

we are luminous when we dream . . . Imagination is what
burns in humans. We are not methods to be discovered,
we are not freeze, dried methodologies we remember
dreams, never data, at the world end. (332)

Griever understands "the sudden reversals in time and memories" (32) and remains open-ended to what Vizenor calls "narrative chance." He "bears the uncommon comic touch of a trickster, that elusive and postmodern human conversation heard over the winter in tribal stories"

(Vizenor, "Critical Metaphors of the Ghost Dance" 228). He is a storyteller who brings together the oppositional forces of the mythic and the real life. In *Griever*, "Griever raised his arms like a simian and leaped over the wooden animals that grazed on various romantic and classical backgrounds. He brushed the painted curtains and moved a river, two panda bears and a dark pagoda wavered on a mountain" (138). Griever's actions are characterized by the reverse behaviour of the trickster clowns who acquire their magical powers through the violation of taboos. Through "backward speech" and "backward walk" Griever initiates in the Chinese community a spiritual awakening. The Monkey King, in the novel undergoes experiences of 'survivance' when the Chinese society turns against him and expresses the fundamental contradiction in human existence, namely the contradiction between individual and society. Griever is shocked at the injustice done to the prisoners by the Chinese government and is determined to take control of the situation and liberate them at any cost. Like *naanabozho*, the earth diver of the *anishinabe*, he gambles with destiny by risking interaction with the overpowering evil forces in the novel and acts as a mediator. He overturns manifest manners and celebrates the values of the tribal visionaries and healers. Like the Signifying Monkey, the 'backward' trickster in the novel travels through space and time and celebrates the metaphors of liberation. He redefines the hegemonic structures of the Chinese capitalist society.

Griever is a picaro whose transgressions against moral and civil codes place him in marginal relationship to Chinese society. He has "an openness to life's multiplicity and paradoxes" and lives "at the edge of society's respectable environs" (Ballinger 21). Griever, like the traditional trickster in native American oral narratives, is of obscure origin and of unclear social status but his origin does not make him marginal. It is through his character and actions that he acquires liminality. His wandering from place to place and his failure to bind himself physically to the established social order and psychically to socialized humanity, make him, in the words of Karl Luckert, an "archaic all person" (7). Griever is "primordial" in his powers and amorality. Levi-Strauss's characterization of the trickster applies to Griever to a certain extent. Like the trickster delineated by Levi-Strauss, he "occupies a position half way between two polar terms and retains something of that duality - namely an ambiguous and equivocal characters" (44).

Instead of being a conventional trickster with gluttony, deception, inordinate sexual appetite and creative or destructive powers, Griever represents a process of becoming. He stands for a 'sign' or a 'holotrope'. He acts as a figuration that is "whole, free standing, both signified and signifier." He exemplifies Vizenor's view that "Freedom is a sign and the trickster is a chance and freedom in a comic sign. Comic freedom is a

'doing,' not an essence, not a museum being, not an aesthetic presence. The trickster as a semiotic sign is imagined in narrative voices" (*Narrative Chance* 9). Griever is a tribal trickster. He is "a liberator and healer in a narrative, a comic sign in communal signification and a discourse with imagination" (Vizenor, *Narrative Chance* 187). Like Battle Wilson and Wu Chou, the other survivors from the tribal past in the novel, he lives at the margins of the human and the animal, the real and the legendary.

As a ritual based novel *Griever's* emphasis lies both on the ideological content and the mediating structures of the oral tradition. Vizenor, as a postmodern postformalist, aspires for the synthesis of form and content. The novel is a full and authentic report of human experience. It has 'formal realism' (*Narrative Chance* 128). The protagonist is tied to an every day reality in a society that requires much purification. Griever's mission is "to balance the world between terminal creeds and humour with unusual manners and ecstatic strategies" (*Earthdivers* xii). He struggles towards a higher level of unity of a qualitatively different order. Having derived his name from the compulsive practice of 'Griever meditation' that cures "common colds, head aches, heart aches, tired feet and tired blood," he sets on the task of healing humanity from "lonesome white people with no shadows" (56). Griever's disruptive acts are performed with the purpose of

subverting the new social and ceremonial order forced upon the citizens of China by the communist regime. The modes of satire and signifying empower Griever to subvert accepted notions. He 'loosens' the 'seams' of knowledge by shaking the established order through his irreverent humor. He makes us laugh at others, and laughs at himself through self-reflexive humor.

Griever is a teacher who puts up with everything in China except the hypocrisies and pretensions of the Foreign Affairs Bureau. He liberates seventeen hens and a cock from a chicken cut throat in a local market and the cock later becomes his constant companion.

He is the liberator of the slaves and the enemy of the enslavers. He is a 'holosexual' who frees birds and never plucks flowers. Vizenor endorses Griever's power as a culture hero in these words. "Mind Monkey from practiced stories would have done no less than emancipate the birds in free market. Those who liberate, in traditional stories are the healers of the culture" (40).

Regal-Cellard observes, "as for Griever, whose name reveals his propensity for empathy, Vizenor makes a point at the very beginning of the novel, of having the wise warrior clown Wu-Chou assure China Browne that he was "never evil, never, never" (24). Everytime some one is hurt or defeated, Griever buries his rage in panic holes shouting into the earth his affliction or trying 'to protect the people he loves,' 'to

balance the world' " (318). He is the only teacher who is outraged at the news that interceptors from the Soviet Union have shot down a South Korean airline over the sea of Japan. He is disgusted with the way in which the Chinese restaurant floors are covered with spit and bones, the way the wheat is winnowed by being spread on the roads to be run over by trucks, and the cuisine, which includes 'fried puppy and barbecued rat.' Griever rebels at the way Chinese traditionally treat women examples of which are to be seen in the old woman's bound feet, Egas Zhang's drowning of his pregnant daughter and of women giving up their seats to men in the bus. He dislikes China's racism displayed in the treatment of Kangmei and the segregation of Algerian and African students at the Tianjin University.

Griever displaces the meanings of established structures by deferring them through the play of signification. The oppressed aspects of Chinese society like the unhygienic surroundings and the Chinese practice of keeping everything locked and chained are ruptured through Griever's basic mode of expression - direction through indirection. In spite of the locks and keys, Griever, the Mind Monkey, can with the use of acrobatics substitute "the stars and stripes for ever" for a Chinese patriotic music that is usually broadcast at dawn around the nation. The hypocritical and absurd speech of the Mayor on the improved financial and economic condition and his comment "the

causes of science, culture, education, sports and sanitation are prosperously developing. The people's life has been greatly improved" act as a misnomer in a background where 'the smell of shit was too much" (183). Griever offers an indictment of China's abuse of human rights and shocking conventions like bound feet and mass murders. He attacks the Maoist revolution but more than that he rails at the colonization that has prepared it, the one begun by missionaries followed by the military and the merchants. There is satire even in the name Matteo Ricci given by Griever to his cock. "Ricci was a missionary, an Italian Jesuit. He was taken prisoner right here on the trial of the hare and the hounds. Three hundred eighty four years and seven days ago, to be specific" (52). The cock's name is definitely not a tribute to the missionary, instead it is an attack on missionaries and the western obsession with precise historical periods.

Vizenor, through Griever, recommends the positive values of a bourgeois culture. Griever's meeting with Wu Chou, the warrior clown who used to play Monkey King in the opera house, inspires him to acts of rebellion against the communists, such as liberating a truck full of political prisoners. Griever acts as narrative mediator, intervenes to effect communication between the soldiers and the prisoners and renegotiates the terms of the discourse. His actions in a society in decline are therapeutic. His acts of healing are inspired by a boy in his

personal vision who guides him to restore regenerative power in those around him. The boy gives him an implied warning of the imminent danger by drawing the pictures of a prairie schooner pulled by a small horse, a lake with an island, brick homes surrounded by oversized swines and a man with a round mask with a wide evil smile. The Monkey King and the vision child acquire a singular identity in the novel.

Griever has all the attributes of the carnival like eccentricity, laughter, parody, profanation and doubling. As in the carnivalesque tradition, mirror motif plays a vital role in the novel to show contradiction between the ultimate reality and its representation through fixed structures. Vizenor states "with the mirror I'm working on image, icon, reflection, mask, and only through the mask can we discover anything and may be nothing. It's playing on multiple images, and it is a device to break down the romantic expectation of the real representation" (Breinig 152). Sandie's comment that "Griever needs a mirror" emphasizes the play of mirror in a folklore tradition. Griever's request for a mirror to see his mask is rejected by Wu Chou with the argument that "monkeys are immortals and immortals never appear in mirrors' because "The Monkey King is . . . not a photograph" (140). The tiny mirrors that Shitou wears on his arms and waist testify to his trickster nature.

Mask is another major motif in Vizenor's novel *Griever*. A masked man is one of the drawings Griever makes for a mute child, a child of Chinese peasant folklore who mysteriously grows large before the protagonist's eyes. Griever dreams of a room full of masks including the broken toilet paper mask of his arch enemy, Egas Zhang, director of Foreign Affairs for Zhou Enali University in Tianjin. Other examples of the mask motif in this novel include Griever's having his face painted to look like the Chinese Monkey King, the heavy make-up covering the face of Hua Lian, an old former actress, and the shroud worn by Kangmei. Gingerie, another teacher from the east carries a mask decorated with chicken feathers when she attends the Marxmass carnival. Griever paints his face, neck and ankles black on the day of carnival. And finally when Hester's body is carried to the terrace, the stone man and the trickster cover her with a brocaded cloak, feathered mask, silver shoes and moon cakes.

Griever, like the *anishinabe* culture hero tumbles into a water world in Shuishang water park. This water park, one of the privileged spaces of the novel, "is the atrium in colonial concessions, carved from class reveries" (111). As in the *anishinabe* oral tradition, a mysterious island the 'obo island' emerges from behind the waterpark. Griever concludes his pilgrimage when he discovers Shitou and obo island. 'Obo' is a tribal Chinese term meaning 'Cairn' (164), a place where

shamans gather and dream. 'Obo' is the sacred topos of Griever's China as it harbours all the shaman and tribal survivors Griever encounters either in real life or in visions. It "bears three maiden hair trees, one white willow, four small brick houses, a concrete water ditch, a stone shrine and red banner near the levee, five humans, seventeen sows, three breeder boars, one wide barrow several unnamed shoats and runners and a basket ball court" (164). Obo island represents the regenerative cultural context of the *anishinabe*. Some of the tricksters, who assemble in this island are Wu Chou, Shitou, Hua Lian and Kangmei. These tricksters like Griever, have the abilities to mediate between states of reality. They stimulate him in his acts of mediation. Wu Chou, the warrior clown, who played the role of the Monkey King in the opera 'Havoc of Heaven' initiates Griever into his role as the Monkey King. "Wuchou, which means warrior clown, a name he earned from the classical theatre, was an actor before the revolution. He is remembered for his performances as the Monkey King in the opera *Havoc of Heaven*. When he was too old to tumble as an acrobat, he studied the stories of tricksters and shamans in several countries around the world" (23). Shitou, the stone man who 'breaks stones into laughter' with one hand is removed from the mundane existence of the audience by the stories that he tells about the old stone cultures. Through Shitou, Griever proudly acknowledges his relationship 'to the stone in his own tribal origin stories' (72). In Obo island, Shitou

instructs him on stone-breaking, and exhorts him to dream that the stone is an egg with a bird inside waiting to be released. "Everything breaks even minds and hearts" he asserts without realizing that he is destined to break the hard news of Hester's death to Griever. Hualian whose name means 'picture' or 'painted face' is a blind old lady who has painted her face red and white and who refuses to alter her memories to please the new masters and shadow capitalists. Her blindness is seen as an inner exile, an external prison in a new land. She is favoured with a sixth sense, an acoustic kinesthesia. She can remember total conversation and visual details from several perspectives. She has the ability to mediate between Griever's dreams and the waking world. Kangmei, another trickster character in the novel is the daughter of Battle Wilson by Ega's wife. She has mastered the esoteric art of communicating with Griever. Even when he visits Obo island, Griever's search for truth continues, "Tell me" he asks Kangmei "What did the scroll tell about the future, how can we live for ever?" However, Kangmei does not answer his question, for she has learned from the blind woman in the park that vital energies breed and mature in silence and that 'true words' are 'never spoken' (101). Speaking into the mirror which reverses sound rather than light, she begins by stating the ultimate Buddhist reality, the ultimate answer to all questions, "Nothing." She translates the mute pigeon Yaba Gezis' responses from silence into

sound, but until the bones of the children are found on the night of the Marxmass Carnival "the children in the pond" remain bereft of meaning.

The life of the tricksters on the island testifies to the native American concept that communication implies community. The existence of the tricksters as a community behind the Shuishang park presupposes the fact that language which is essential to human existence is intersubjective and social. In his concept of man as a verbal and social animal, Vizenor is more akin to Bakhtin than Freud. For Vizenor man is not 'id' but the 'other' wherein a man's utterance gets completely signified. As Voloshinov clarifies, "the speaking subject taken from the inside, so to speak, turns out to be wholly the product of social inter relations. The road which links the internal experience (the 'expressible') to its external objectification (the 'utterance') lies entirely in social territory" (107).

Griever is a liberator, but because the Chinese community is slow to act, their response to his call for freedom is feeble. They understand the metaphor in Griever's comment "when a bird gets too big, it breaks the cage"(33). But unfortunately they refuse to act on it. There are several instances of such slow responses in the novel. The first instance of such a response is when Griever frees a nightingale from a cage. Even the bird "held the crown unmoved when the miniature gate opened" (33). It is only when a plume tickles his nose and he sneezes

that the scared bird loses her place and drops through the gate to freedom. China Browne, a writer who comes to China from White Earth reservation in search of Griever is trapped in the wheel of becoming. Though related to Griever, she is obsessed with bound feet and worries about those 'wild moments' when she would lose 'connections with time,' when she would be suspended without a season and severed from the moment. The prisoners on the truck, seven men and one woman are silent when the Monkey king unties their swollen hands. Griever's assurance : "Sun Wu Kong, that is my real name" is dismissed by the prostitute with the comment "Monkey kings are myths for the poor and the oppressed" (154). When Griever proposes an 'ultra light escape' to the coalman who has been piling coal behind the guest house, he reacts negatively with the words "Not tonight." Even Hester Hua Dan with whom Griever is in love refuses to be freed from the tyranny of her father, the evil gambler. In spite of Griever's soothing words that nobody will take their child in this world, she refuses to take flight with him to the White Earth reservation on the pretext that she has never travelled in a plane before, holding back the real reason for being glued to China - her fear, her resignation to paternal power and her dedication to the nation. Griever's futile attempts to redeem the victims of a sham structured society lead him to the ultimate realization that "no one here will ever be free" (54).

The trickster's encounter with the evil gambler and the conflict between good and evil present in all narrative traditions, manifests in *Griever* in the confrontation between Griever and Egas Zhang. Vizenor creates in *Griever* a world where traditional myths and everyday reality are interwoven in new variations. In his work the mythic process is a part of everyday reality. It is simultaneous with it in ways similar to the vertical chronotope Mikhail Bakhtin envisions in chivalric romance where "one must see . . . this entire world as simultaneous" (*Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* 157). In Vizenor's texts, mythic reality is

always in the process of evolving; it is never finished; it is not an absolute. The myth of the gambler used as a direct text, as an indirect text, or as variation on the traditional materials creates the evolving simultaneity of mythic and everyday realities and establishes a test of balance. Even though Vizenor's trickster novels are comic and satiric, the Gambler is there to remind us that the comic text might deconstruct itself at any time through narrative chance to become tragic. Characters who face the gambler must take risks, must submit to narrative chance, however, through variations on tribal rituals, they often restore momentarily, the balance of good and evil. (Barry 21)

The evil forces in the novel are Egas Zhang, who lives in a world of narrow realities and a society that does not respond to Griever's challenges. Griever moves among the political and social figures like the Mayor and Egas and perceives the volatile space where transformational reality takes place. Egas is wile and he "chain smokes and smiles over each word. His cheeks curl, rise and fall, even when he listens, and he punctuates his thin head to the right, the side he favors in conversation" (15). Egas, like the evil gambler in the *anishinabe* tales, is uneasy at the stolid indifference of the Mind Monkey. Griever finally balances the good and evil in the world of this novel by giving him a strong dose of estrogen under the guise of bear paw powder which would effect upon him the final transformation of a mutant hermaphrodite. Krupat observes that, "Egas Zhang's colonial name is derived from Egas Monitz the father of lobotomy who won the Nobel Prize. Lobotomy emblemizes the brain destroying system. The metaphor is spun out again at the end when Egas kills his grand daughter (the baby Hester bears) named Kuanyin after the bodhisatva who captured the mind monkey in the *Journey to the West* performing thus the ultimate lobotomy" (*New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism* 325). The novel ends with the temporary defeat of Egas. Velie states that "the traditional ending in *Anishinaabe* myth, as well as the tales of other tribes, is for the trickster to win and the gambler to die" ("The Trickster Novel" 127). But the death of Hester Hua Dan states

that the opposing forces of life cannot always be balanced and that even 'a backward walk' towards sacred directions is inadequate to bring harmony when life asserts itself over rituals. *Griever* reminds us that "there is another reality which must be taken into creative account along with the sacred, timeless, cosmic reality: that is the human reality of the paradoxical here and now" (Babcock 148). In his review of *Griever* Dexter Westrum comments,

Even though Griever isn't entirely successful, he is not defeated. As he puts it: "we were lost and asked (the Chinese) to make a map in their heads to tell us where they were so we could find out where we were. They know where they are, but we are in the air" And that is the joy of Vizenor's work. The important thing is not to subdue the people who think they know where they are, but to keep them off balance by not taking them as seriously as they take themselves. Griever will not be overcome by reality, but will stay up in the air away from the foundations, savoring delicious ironies where nothing is sacred. (160)

Since *Griever* is set on the pattern of the oral tradition it includes many of the techniques of oral tradition like satire, hyperbole, invective and bawdiness. It is comic in the same way that the native American

tradition is comic. It has, employed satire to puncture the desires of the people in power. It has, to take a term used by Ishmael Reed, "magic populism" which is "a variation of the usual social realism approach . . . it takes the side of the poor against the rich, and it takes aim at some of the same targets as the early populist movement, the church, for instance, the concentration of wealth in the hands of the few, and racism" ("Interview with Melwatkins" 610).

The pre-human flux, the ambiguity and the shifting of human-animal identity, present in native American myths, characterise the world in *Griever*. Griever, the 'talking animal' inspires the tribal stories and teaches human beings culture. Like an animal, he is often on the move in the dark hours as when he escapes at the crack of dawn or when he goes up the radio tower. Griever mounts things, bounds and leaps and there by violates "the diurnal pattern of expectation" (Babcock 159). Just like the traditional trickster, Griever blurs temporal and spatial distinctions through his monkey transformations.

Griever, like the traditional trickster lives 'interstitially' (Babcock 154). There are many interstices in *Griever* like the floor and walls. People are associated with cracks and scars. The text recounts an instance of Griever, while as a boy witnessing a white man having sex with a small luminous woman with scarred breast. There are many

synonyms for interstices in the novel like 'narrow seams' 'crack of dawn' 'scars' 'faults on faces and the earth' (27).

Griever transgresses all the social taboos including that connected with sex. In spite of his identification with Monk Tripitaka and his Monkey Sun Wu-k'ung, Griever's sexual appetite is more than that of these tricksters. Monkey is pure mind activity and the Monk has spent ten lives in abstinence. Unlike these tricksters, Griever exhibits a higher degree of inclination towards sex. He violates the endogamous law and sleeps with Hester Hua Dan. Wu Chou's words to China Browne that Griever is the cock of the town carry sexual suggestions. Griever with his cock perched on his shoulders is an allusion to the trickster who carried the oversized phallus on his back in a box (Radin 19).

Griever is a 'holosexual clown.' The term 'holosexual' indicates "the entire sexual erotic energy of every cell in our bodies, in order not to reduce this rich and complex energy of eroticism and sexuality to the restrictive binaries of gender" (Vizenor, "Chance of Survivance" 26 Aug. 1996).

There is no development as such in Griever's character as he learns nothing that he doesn't already know. There is only the recognition of truth by him with increased intensity. Griever's question to Kangmei, "Tell me now, right now, what is the secret in that

manuscript?" (229) and her answer that it contains a secret recipe for "blue chicken made with mountain blue corn and pressed blue berries" once again endorses Griever's conviction that truth can not be contained within the frame of words. Regal-Cellard comments that "the derisory revelation the scrolls contain might signify on the one hand, that it is illusory to look for texts that would grant immortality, illusory to seek to return to a mystified past, because one must adapt to survive and to perpetuate ancestral wisdom without refusing the present, and in so doing live on the hinge between two worlds, within and without, to create a new consciousness of existence" (334).

By puncturing facades and stereotypes and by freeing the flow of energy to balance, Griever, 'the socio-acupuncturist' creates a new island founded upon love and coexistence. Freed from all the masks of fixed cultural identity, he ultimately soars to freedom in avian dreams and acrobatic outrage to be reintegrated into the mythic reality of his tribe. The novel by presenting the marvelous world of the trickster once again reaffirms the trickster's immortality and the power to survive.

CHAPTER IV

THE TRICKSTER OF LIBERTY

The Trickster of Liberty: Tribal Heirs to a Wild Baronage (1988), Gerald Vizenor's third novel is a series of modern trickster tales. It is a record of *anishinabe* cultural tradition and dismantles the image of native Americans as a 'colonized' people. The novel "elude(s) historicism, racial representation and remain(s) historical" (*Trickster* xi). It creates "spaces of freedom" through humor and rhetorical strategies and suggests the necessity of free play of signs for post Indian survival (Jahner, "Cultural Shrines Revisited" 23).

In *The Trickster of Liberty*, Vizenor adopts an interpretive framework to inscribe otherness to point out what it means to be of mixed Indian and European heritage. Here he has incorporated motifs and incidents from native American mythology. The traditional trickster motif is employed by Vizenor in *The Trickster of Liberty* as an "imaginative weapon" (Owens, *Other Destinies* 254) to attack in Vizenor's own words "reductionism, animadversions and the hyper realities of neocolonial consumerism" (*Narrative Chance* 4). The hyper reality which Vizenor challenges is a 'new linguistic condition of society' where the theories that rely on 'materialist reduction' and 'rationalist referentiality' remain impotent (Poster 2). Like Baudrillard, Vizenor is convinced that American culture is dominated by fabricated simulations

as a result of its quest to find the real. Through *Trickster* Vizenor proves that in a world where the relation of word, meaning and referent is broken, only the semiological system embedded in the oral narratives can help man to structure a unique reality. Vizenor's Trickster rejects all traditional assumptions about referentiality and acts as 'a comic holotrope,' 'a universal language game' (*The Trickster* ix-x) that holds open the possibility of reversals. The novel defies the world of 'simulacra,' 'models' and 'codes' where signifiers act as 'traffic lights, emitting meanings to which there is no linguistic response" (Poster 4). Vizenor's basic theme of 'trickster survivance' manifests itself in the struggle of the tricksters to survive in a world constructed out of models or 'simulacra' which have no referent in any reality except their own. They finally succeed in surviving through the creation of 'an urban turtle island' of meaning. Vizenor borrows the techniques of parallelism, circularity and repetition from oral tradition and creates a powerful unified story by connecting the seemingly perforated and fragmentary narratives.

The Trickster of Liberty is a collection of stories which represents the process of myth making. In its structure the novel resembles the trickster oral narratives that are told as a cycle of tales among the *anishinabe* and the *winnebago*. It is an illustration of the flexibility and creativity implicit in the native American myths and legends. Local and

global issues arise in this novel for which the characters formulate wise and creative solutions based on tribal values. The tales in *The Trickster of Liberty*, just as in trickster mythology foster potential learning experiences. Vizenor's novel, while situated in a modern world, retains the fundamental characters, plot and moral of native American myths. Within the polyphony of *The Trickster of Liberty*, each heir of the wild baronage has a distinct unmerged voice, but they all together form a sovereign nation where communal existence matters as in the *anishinabe* communities. The archetypal trickster figure *naanabozho* manifests himself in a variety of contemporary characters in this novel. These derivatives of *naanabozho* who people the novel as the heirs of the wild baronage are the trickster figures or the *metis* earthdivers who inhabit the functional space of the novel and perform compassionate acts like their prototype. They relentlessly challenge the self - serving anthropologists, corrupt Indian officials and bureaucracy through their storytelling that is marked by tribal humor, pun, parody and irony.

The collection of tales that make up *The Trickster of Liberty* has as the central protagonist Luster Bow Browne, a mixedblood trickster. Browne, it is said, renounces "the strict summons to mature in a base and possessive civilization" by accepting the untamed land which is "as worthless as the peerage" he received (3-4). Luster Bow Browne defies silence and isolation, and deriving power from his ambiguous

marginality sets things straight like the traditional tribal trickster. He creates an identity as the Baron of Patronia by choice of will and through the trickster strategy of transforming garbage into something very productive. Vizenor uses the "notions of waste, garbage and the like to explore the possibility of a search for meaning in precisely that which is rejected by the dominant culture. The metaphor and its associated strategies tend to reject the entire hierarchy of values of the dominant culture at the same time that they develop a considerable potential for antagonism towards that culture" (Isernhagen 126). Browne's children and grandchildren who grow up listening to "wild stories, trickster and creation stories" become tricksters in their turn armed with "mythic satire in magical connection with the oral tradition" (18). The novel concentrates on the acts of liberation of the grandchildren of Luster Bow Browne who form a community. Notable among them are China Browne, a magazine writer, Tune Browne, founder of the New School of Acupuncture at the University of California, Tulip Browne, private detective, Eternal Flame Browne, nun and founder of the Patronia scape house for wounded reservation women, Father Mother Brown, Priest and founder of a tavern and sermon centre; Slyboots Browne, aviator and builder of microlight planes and Ginseng Browne, an international trader. They learn to imagine their connection to the earth not through the conventional mode of learning but through oral training from their grandmother

Novena Mae Moccasin who, the novel says, "wrote words and names on leaves and scattered them on the hard snow; the children collected the leaves and told stories with random words, their words, their voices on the rise" (10). Like traditional tricksters, they transcend all categories and traditions and liberate terms, concepts and people by creating conditions of possibility.

The trickster myth is given a clearly recognizable form in *The Trickster of Liberty*. The novel embodies the memories of an archaic and primordial trickster past. Vizenor makes use of the archetypal figure of the trickster as the model for the central characters because the principle of ambivalence in life is best realized in the figure of the trickster. The trickster, the earliest and the most amazing archaic figure is in this novel placed in the context of a consumerist society. As prototypes of the traditional trickster, the characters in the novel escape crucial situations by outwitting white people and fellow Indians with cunning and laughable exploits. The mixedbloods in the novel epitomize the process of integration. They represent the reality of things. They act as a positive force and explore the possibilities for benign intervention. Their mixedblood heredity becomes an ideal vantage point for understanding the arbitrary and fictive nature of cultural identity. The novel carries the message that one must come to terms with the principle of human ambiguity and also realize the relationship between

good and evil. The heirs of Patronia are endowed with a powerful imagination, a wealth of the trickster stories and a comic temper to endure "the ruthless brokers of tragic civilization" (13). They question tragedy, praise chance and reconstruct language and reality. They challenge the conventional systems, establish their ingenious enterprises, and tell trickster stories in places like White Earth, Berkeley and China. Vizenor's tricksters in *The Trickster of Liberty* outwit evil, but never destroy it because they know the ultimate truth that "humans must learn to live imaginatively with contradictions" (Ruppert 104). Through the trickster simulacra, Vizenor seeks to promote growth and balance. Vizenor explains the trickster convention and the function it performs in the following words:

The trickster is reason and mediation, the original translator of tribal encounters, the name is an intimation of transformation, men to women, animals to birds, and more than mere casual representation in names. Tricksters are the translation of creation; the trickster creates the tribe in stories, and pronounces the moment of remembrance as the trace of liberation. (*Manifest Manners* 5)

The Trickster of Liberty is an *Ojibwa* oral narrative as it has 'tricksters', 'birds' and 'animals' in the centre of the tales. Like the *anishinabe* stories, the novel is about people and not about facts. Here ideas and visions are encoded in compassionate human gestures than in words.

There is a transvaluation of roles in *The Trickster of Liberty*. The despised and the oppressed in the colonized culture become symbols of salvation and rebirth. In order to provide the community with psychic renewal, the tricksters "recast tunes, overturn(ed) time, and reverse(d) magnetic directions in the manifest white world" (10-11). They break the academic boundaries and transgress the limits of academic discourse. The socioacupuncture which Tune Browne teaches "reverses the instrumental documents, cold data is deflated, historical time is dissolved, and the pale inventory and consumers of tribal cultures are exposed when the pressed in captured images are released" (46). By releasing the "captured images," the tricksters of liberty endorse their signatures as the comic liberators of the new word wars.

The Trickster of Liberty violates traditional narrative patterns. The novel is placed in a postmodern fictional context and contains an intertext which is open, performative and deconstructive in nature with the play of chance, irony and indeterminacy. Vizenor sees the world in terms of interaction and coexistence. For Vizenor "oral cultures have never been without a postmodern condition that enlivens stories and

ceremonies, or without trickster signatures and discourse on narrative chance - a comic utterance and adventure to be heard or read" (*Narrative Chance* x). Vizenor presents the trickster as a postmodern figure who possesses a stylistic or positional dimension. Regarding the application of postmodern strategy in his fiction, Vizenor comments "I use the postmodern conditions The conditions are that, first, no story is the same. The conditions are postmodern because of their connection to oral expression which is usually a kind of free-floating signifier or a collection of signifiers" (Vizenor, "Head Water" 53). The postmodern mixedblood tricksters are comic. They defy isolation and balance the powers of good and evil in a way similar to the storyteller in oral tribal cultures. Vizenor links trickster and postmodernism through a definition similar to Jean Francois Lyotard's definition of postmodernism "incredulity toward meta - narrative" (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* xxiv). The heirs of the Baron of Patronia share an irreverence toward meta-narratives which are composed of coherent explanatory systems.

The Trickster of Liberty affirms Bakhtin's concept that "an idea does not live in one's isolated individual consciousness - if it remains there, it generates and dies. An idea begins to live, i.e. to take shape, to develop, to find and renew its verbal expression, and to give birth to new ideas only when it enters into genuine dialogical relationships with

other ideas, the ideas of the other" (*Problems of Dostoevskys Poetics* 64). As discourse, the novel is related to other discourses through what James Clifford refers to as "the intersubjectivity of all speech" (41). The novel has dialogic orientation as "discourse comes upon the discourse of the other [. . .] (and) enters into intense and lively interaction with it" (Todorov 60). The ongoing discourse of a particular trickster family in the novel embeds in it larger, older and mythic fields of discourses while encoding reality. It conforms to a circular and holistic view of phenomena endowing each event with multiple significance. The contradictions that are the essence of oral tradition, the play between text and interpretation, imaginative freedom and the subversion of absolute definitions of reality provide the novel with its dialogic dimension. The application of a mythical world view in *The Trickster of Liberty* opens a context for what Wolfgang Iser calls "the pleasurable misreading." The trickster tales in the novel give different layers of interpretations and perspectives that are constantly modified by a completely different set of epistemological codes. *The Trickster of Liberty* is open - ended in its mediation and bears out Wolfgang Iser's statement that "the reader's communication with the text is a dynamic process of self-correction, as he formulates signifieds which he must continually modify" (67). There is a shift of meaning in the novel. Vizenor argues that the shift is essential as the novel is based on "tribal discourse, more discourse. The oral and written narratives are language games,

comic discourse rather than mere responses to colonialist demands or social science theories" (*Narrative Chance* 4).

Vizenor foregrounds myths, memories and oral history in *The Trickster of Liberty* and makes them interrogate journals, legal language, social science and colonial categorization. Commenting on the oral elements contained in native American novel writing, Kenneth Rosen remarks that "the form becomes the content, the manner itself is clearly one of the most important aspects of the novel's message" (58). This comment is equally true of Vizenor's novel *The Trickster of Liberty*. The trickster figure is a product of the whole complex social situation in which it is placed. It affirms the Bakhtinian tenet that meaning cannot exist outside the context of social interaction. This whole complex social situation represents for Vizenor the 'holotrope.' He describes the trickster's role in this discourse as a series of "figures of speech," a "comic holotrope," "the imagination" and as the "voice we choose to hear and believe in literature" (*Narrative Chance* 192-194). Vizenor has introduced in *The Trickster of Liberty* "mythic verism" which is "a discourse, a critical concordance of narrative voices, and a narrative realism that is more than mimesis or a measure of what is believed to be natural in the world" (*Narrative Chance* 190).

The Trickster of Liberty, like the native American oral narratives is self-reflexive rather than a reflection of reality. Vizenor has made use of

the postmodern poetics of the interaction of the literary and the theoretical in this novel. *The Trickster of Liberty* provides a commentary on its own thematic and formal aspects by making use of the paradigmatic cultural form of the native American trickster tradition. Like other postmodernist writings *The Trickster of Liberty* plays with the possibilities of meaning and form. It exemplifies Meredith Howard's observation, "all telling modifies what is being told" (xi). Since the formal aspects of the novel are akin to Brechtian techniques of defamiliarization, all chances of attaining closure are subverted. The novel provides a site where as Edward Said notes, "the writer thinks less of writing originally, and more of rewriting. The image for writing changes from original inscription to parallel script" (135).

The narrative form of *The Trickster of Liberty* founded as it is upon myths has enabled Vizenor to engage in a great variety of language games. It has provided him with the greatest possible flexibility of utterance. The rules that specify the properties and uses of Vizenor's utterances are derived from native American mythology. Moves in the language games of *The Trickster of Liberty* are often made simply for the pleasure of invention. Vizenor's trickster is a "comic nature in a language game, not a real person or 'being' in the ontological sense" (*The Trickster of Liberty* x). The critical and hermeneutic knowledge that the heirs of the Baron of Patronia, the characters in the novel gain from

these games help them to overturn "racial separations" (*The Trickster of Liberty* x). Vizenor brings in the traditional trickster in this novel to evoke the fluidity of meaning inherent in traditional trickster language and identity. The mixedblood heirs of the Baron of Patronia "convene in stories." The text shows "their compassion and imaginative transactions as tricksters" (18). Here the consciousness and cognition of reality is achieved through formalistic conventions. The novel is an affirmation of Bakhtin's conviction that "man is conscious of and conceptualizes reality through language" (*The Formal Method* 133).

The characters in *The Trickster of Liberty* challenge all finalizing definitions and "uncover distinctions and ironies between narrative voices" (Vizenor, *Narrative Chance* 192). They are not reduced to the position of objects who move according to the authorial voice. They are transformed into subjects with a plurality of independent voices that carry mighty life-creating and transforming power. Through their liberating gestures, the external world is drawn into the process of self-awareness. Vizenor situates this novel in China where China Browne engages in an open dialogue with an old Chinese woman in order to free her from the codes of hyper realities and simulations. The trickster's action of saving the woman from the river initiates in her the process of liberation. Her dialogical encounter with the trickster of Petronia assists her in attaining cognition of her own inadequacies. The woman

who has been hostile to China Browne at first, gives her a 'box of herb' and her 'cloth cap' as a token of her love and gratitude and leaves her, deciding never to be the victim of those ideas that are pretensions to truth.

The mythic dimension in *The Trickster of Liberty* articulates the intimacy between myth and cultural memory. Memory in this novel is used as a path toward cultural recovery. The tricksters live in a cultural and linguistic community where the play of myth and memory predominates. Vizenor's fictional world encompasses "the memories of tribal tradition, all aspects of it, the linguistic and non-linguistic" (Jahner, "Cultural Shrines Revisited" 24). Tulip Browne, one of the Tricksters "haunts memories with her personal power"(62). Her investigation and retrieval of the stolen computer from the Native American Indian MixedBlood Studies Department through memory and stories acts as a critique of all narrow conventional definitions of interrogation. Her words "My report will be in the oral tradition and told to you I will describe several scenes and imagined events as stories There will be no written report" (72) reveal the fact that the trickster activities in this novel are primarily based on memory and imagination.

The Trickster of Liberty presents the dynamics of performative storytelling. The stories in the novel express the wonder and wisdom implied in the oral narratives. The trickster tales in the novel define and

continue life and act as signs of change and survival. They are not an abstract body of stories, but an epistemological structuring of human experience. According to Vizenor, a story is a "visual reference to experience."

The stories are much more humanistic, they grow out of real or imagined experience, both those are real or true or mythic – I'm talking about contemporary stories now, not the sacred or origin stories that reveal experience in play or how people perceive reality. But those stories come out of a visual reference, and what I mean by visual is not television or films but recollection of multiple senses of an experience in memory and when you decide to tell a story from memory, you can tell it from a number of points of view. (Vizenor, "Gerald Vizenor" 155)

The stories of the tricksters and the stories within the stories in the novel upset and redirect the accepted hierarchies of convention. They hold a mythical and epistemological perspective and move beyond the privileged representation of science. *The Trickster of Liberty* endorses Brian Swann's opinion that the native American "story has a life of its own: an entity existing independent of its narrator" (xii).

Vizenor's *The Trickster of Liberty* emphasizes the power of storytelling. Stories are told to integrate into the novel characters and themes from Vizenor's other works. From a Chinese gate keeper and clown in China, China Browne hears the story of how Griever heroically freed chickens from a local market a major episode in *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*. The heirs of the Baron of Patronia engage in the act of storytelling. Luster Bow Browne, the Baron of Patronia told wild stories as well as trickster and creation stories. He also told his children to scream into panic holes. The stories told by Griever de Hocus are about 'meditation' and 'broken wheels.' China Browne's stories to the old woman in China are about the origin of her name and the baronage on the reservation. The stories in *The Trickster of Liberty* contain contradictions that are essential for survival. About the power of the story to survive Vizenor comments, "In that generation, the tribes had been decimated by diseases, the cruelties of civilization had possessed the tribes of their land, but not their stories" (*Manifest Manners* 163). It is these stories that give the heirs of Patronia the power of adaptability and endurance. Their stories heal and energize psychic renewal. The characters in *The Trickster of Liberty* are "tricksters in the blood, natural mixed blood tricksters, word warriors in the silence between bodies" (18) who bear their 'medicine' in their 'voices', in their 'stories.'

The Patronia scape house run by Eternal Flame acts as a centre for story telling. Eternal Flame, a former nun, established the White Earth scape house as a "haven for lonesome and abused women" (104). She invites the tricksters - Griever and Mouse Proof Martin to tell stories to heal the wounded psyches. To the women hidden behind the cedar screens, the tricksters tell stories of Benito Saint Plumero, possessor of a huge phallus who appears in *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart*. The scapehouse acts as a place of reversal where women, not priests, listen to "men and their wild confessions" (91). The dichotomy of confession/listening is demythologized in the storytelling context of the scape house. The men who enter the booth for confession - Griever de Hocus and Mouse Proof Martin - function as "their own consolation" (91). The women behind the woven cedar screens in the booths, instead of hearing 'remorse' and 'contrition' hear 'the best humor' in 'wild stories.' The group of tales provides the readers with the idea that "one story is only the beginning of many stories, and that stories never truly end" (Fielder 56). Mouse Proof Martin's stories about his arousal over lost shoes, and his stories about Doc Cloud Burst, the creator of the organization named the San Francisco Sun Dancers and Sarah Blue Welcome, "the noted author and looter of the Plains Indian Sun Dance" and the stories about the wild puppet "Four Skin" serve the function of developing a unique relationship between the mythic world and the lived experiences of the every day life. Like Scott Momaday,

Vizenor presents the vision of his tribe in *The Trickster of Liberty* through stories that combine the expressions of dream and vision.

Vizenor believes that chance is a very important element of storytelling. In one of his interviews he says, "Things just happen, you cannot account for them" ("The Trickster Heir of Columbus" 113). In *The Trickster of Liberty* actions define meaning and things happen without any rational explanation. Regarding the play of chance in the world of tribal tricksters, Vizenor says, "Tribal Tricksters arise in imagination, create the earth, chance, praise, impermanence, humorous encounters, and totems, and liberate the mind in these stories. My tricksters are tender on the wild rise in dreams, memories, myths, and metaphors now, and hold their chances over the wicked seams in ecclesiae. The best stories are survival trickeries on the borders, marcescent blues on the margins, on the colonial curbs, the rest would be simulations" (*Interior Landscapes* 73).

The heirs of the Baron of Patronia engage the world with a spirit of liberation. Liberation, in traditional oral narrative is linked to chance. 'Chance' is a term given by Vizenor to mean the principle or force that is antagonistic to power. In Vizenor's words "Freedom is a sign, and the trickster is chance and freedom in a comic sign" (*Narrative Chance* 13). Vizenor elaborates this interconnectivity further: "The trickster and comic liberator craves chance in agonistic imagination to

lessen the power of social science and bourgeois humanism" (*Narrative Chance* 192). A concept associated with chance is choice. Vizenor believes that identity can be created either through chance or through choice. The tricksters in the novel define themselves, adopt self-chosen criteria and legitimate them through their discourses.

In *The Trickster of Liberty*, as in the *anishinabe* myths and legends, there are many trickster healers who mend the 'lonesome' and cure the sick through stories and shamanistic acts. Father Mother Browne who earns the title 'Double Father' when he is ordained a priest, "liberated and healed the animals and birds that were penned inside the humans" (104) through stories and other trickster strategies. The church became "a wild haven where even the shaman mongrel Pure Gumption could heal on the communion table." "Pure Gumption, the shaman mongrel who glowed and healed with her paws and tongue, inspired the priest more than dead letter supplication and absolution" and taught him "the animal art of healing with the paws" (103).

For the heirs to the wild baronage dreams are a source of personal empowerment. The dream is ontological, a primary source of knowledge and power - "Dreams express complex moments of encounters and manifestation that surpass the constraints of purely rational aspects of mind but also deeper and more subtle potentials. Through dreaming, the temporal immediacy of everyday consciousness

is unbound from its immediate sensory and empirical conditioning and flows into an altered awareness in which past, present and future can merge into atemporal continuities" (Irwin 229). In one of her dreams in China, China Browne has the vision of her grandfather. In her dream Luster Bow Browne tells her that when the tricksters moved the hands of the tower clock, the time in the whole town moved back. He makes her understand that this was the pleasure of a compassionate tribal trickster.

The tricksters who occupy the narrative space in the novel do not hold "time down to the tick tock on the clock." Vizenor makes use of oral tribal time that reflects "the integrative nature of ritual consciousness" (Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* 94). By living the myths, the tricksters emerge from mundane chronological time and enter a "sacred time at once primordial and indefinitely recoverable" (Eliade 46). The tricksters of liberty "read the minds of those who look(ed) to the tower for their time "and" set the hands back to calm their nerves" (27). Tune Browne, the trickster who "roved near the border with mongrels," "never paid much attention to time" (43). "He never minded clocks or function words." His art of socioacupuncture is 'a means of survival,' 'a dream voice out of time' (46). He fights against "hollow hypothesis" and lectures on "panic holes and how to hold back the clocks" (52-53). He says, "The present is a natural reservoir where tricksters learn to dive

and swim the back stroke" (53). Swimming the back stroke is a break from the normal, a symbolic trickster ritual that represents the reverse of the accepted behaviour. Another reverse behaviour which the heirs engage in is backward speech which is the commonest form of reverse behaviour in the traditional archetypal stories. The trickster inversions that we encounter in *The Trickster of Liberty* have ethnological evidence in trickster stories.

Eccentricity in dress and demeanor, systematic trampling over rules and norms; full licence to ignore prohibitions and break them; ambivalence; magical power; backward speech and reverse behaviour, individualism, asocial characteristics, insolence, buffoonery, phallicism, vulgarity, a sort a madness - all these traits are common to both clown and trickster. (Makariu 66)

The heirs through these reversals relay a knowledge that remains beyond the limits of hyper reality. In *The Trickster of Liberty* humor, as a mode of reversal, is primarily represented in the heirs' sociocultural incongruities resulting from actions considered illogical in the reality of the contemporary society. Vizenor's concept of reality is posited on the recognition of trickster humor. The characters deconstruct their social roles and identities. They occupy a 'culturally central,' 'liminal,'

'powerful' and 'power-interrogating' position which is an authentic "place to be in and of itself, and for itself" (Ammons xi). Eternal Flame Browne has a wild spirit. She is much too passionate and adventurous, too sensitive and inspired "to be at peace in a habit or cloister." She abandons her religious position as a nun and starts a scape house for lonesome and abused women at Patronia. Father Mother Browne is a trickster who knows that "cold reasons blundered on ecclesiastical rails because he was closer to the animals in a human than he was to the mind of a primate" (102). He renounces priesthood. He accepts "the identity of a woman with a new name in a new wild world" (119) and creates a space where none of the categories of gender, sex and species is privileged. Slyboots Browne, an "unbound wild dreamer and an avian heir to the tribal baronage" deconstructs his social role as a manufacturer of terrain vehicles and becomes a maker of microlight air planes.

Throughout the novel *The Trickster of Liberty* Vizenor deconstructs identity and the conceptual systems that govern these identities. The novel is a denunciation of the stratified societies where the official cult has very little relation to the living beliefs. The tavern, 'The Last Lecture,' described as a circular cedar structure with bar and booths on one side and a theatre, with tables and chairs on the other becomes the last word for those who come to drop into "their new

names and social identities." It is in the 'Last Lecture' that they are liberated from the dilemma caused by the inventions and cliches that embody and justify exploitation. Marie Gee Hailme, in her last lecture at the tavern makes the confession that she and the other Indian teachers were mixed bloods who were married to whites and had never really lived in reservation communities. Out of their ignorance, these teachers, 'the first generation of Indian education experts' force the Indian children to accept their 'biased views.' Through the last lecture delivered by Marie Gee Hailme, the director of Urban Tribal education, Vizenor points out the unmeaningness of "the invented curriculum units" (110) imposed on the native American students. Vizenor questions the fabricated simulation that reduces the tribal cultures and social science monologues to "absolute fakes" through the figures of the radical activist Coke De Fountain and a spurious tribal author Homer Yellow Snow. Coke De Fountain epitomizes the hypocrisy of some Indian radicals that Vizenor deplors in many of his works. Coke De Fountain is described thus in the novel:

He was an urban pantribal radical and dealer in cocaine. His tribal career unfolded in prison, where he studied tribal philosophies and blossomed when he was paroled in braids and bone choker. He bore a dark cultural frown,

posed as a new colonial victim, and learned his racial diatribes in church basement. (111)

In spite of his pretensions to being an activist all that he can do is to inspire his urban warriors with cocaine. The last lecture becomes a purifying ritual for the tribal author Homer Yellow Snow who sheds his pretentious 'tribal identities' and artificial 'blood recollections' (116) in the sermon centre and steps into the new world with three new names. However, these 'invented Indians' are treated with gentle satire. They are allowed a last lecture in the tavern and discharged into a new identity.

The tricksters in the novel engage in the pleasures of tribal 'striptease' and demythologize the power theories and linear social structures. They create and celebrate new identities. What Vizenor says in general about trickster tales is appropriate to *The Trickster of Liberty*. Instead of "the absence of the real" there is "the rush of the real in these stories" (*Manifest Manners* 23). These stories can be understood as 'simulation.' 'Simulation' Vizenor explains in *Manifest Manners* is "not feigning, instead it is a postmodern strategy for enacting the play of tribal consciousness, a means of ousting the invented Indians with humour, new stories, and the simulation of survivance" (5). *The Trickster of Liberty* is an open-ended engagement with *anishinabe*

culture and a resistance literature on the 'colonized images' of contemporary society.

The trickster/urban earthdiver as entrepreneur is a dominant theme of Vizenor's fiction. The tricksters/urban earthdivers in the *Trickster of Liberty* establish their ingenious enterprises and tell stories at places like White Earth reservation, Berkeley and China. Slyboots Browne "the most devious, clever and artful of the tricksters at the baronage" is a 'wild dreamer' and an avian heir to the tribal baronage. At the age of sixteen, he introduces the first bingo games into the baronage. When the games become successful and catch the rude attention of the government, he sells the rights to bingo on the reservation and founds a new game of chance called 'tribe.' He decides to establish the Patronia Microlight Muskeg Rover, a universal terrain vehicle. Although the politicians and foreign delegations admire the plan, the Government subsidizes a much cheaper imported all - terrain vehicle from a third world country. When the enterprise loses its funding, Slyboots retains the equipment and converts it into microlight airplanes. He becomes successful in his attempt when he founds the Patronia Airborne Warriors. He flies from reservation to reservation lecturing on tribal aviation. Ginseng Browne, another character in the novel depicts the flux of competing ideas in the modern world. Ginseng earned an international reputation as a trader in the rare wild Ginseng,

"a medicinal herb that is believed to be a stimulant, anti diabetic and carminative tonic" (149). He is an epitome of trickster reversals -

The Trickster Ginseng, had a wild breath: he was serious, silent most of the time, intense in rooms with out windows and he talked with mongrels. He learned seasoned stories from his grandmother Novena Mae Iron Moccasin, stories on the baronage, and he had no desire to travel outside the reservation where he did not understand the gestures. The world came to his window in search of wild ginseng. (133-134)

When China National Medicine and Health Products Import and Export Corporation of the Peoples Republic of China won a contract to buy the rare ginseng that grew on the baronage, the minister of culture decides to erect the statue of The Trickster of Liberty on the meadow, but stops the work when the company closes their trade mission on the reservation when Ginseng is indicted in the federal district court on the charges of "international root rustling" and for the "violation of the endangered species treaties." The statue of *The Trickster of Liberty* subverts the American myth of liberty. It is planned in grand style and intended as a counter part to the Statue of Liberty. But the Trickster statue is never finished, the work is halted at crotch height a typically

sexual trickster image. The half finished structure stands as an ironic political commentary on the situation of liberty and democracy in the world.

The tricksters in the novel are culture heroes who consciously assist the creatures of the earth in their pursuit of survival. They are noble, generous, caring and farsighted. They possess a vision of the ultimate good of human societies and a motivation to act for it like the archetypal characters that they symbolically represent. Tune Browne's gesture of freeing the mongrel from the cruel scientists and Eternal Flame's gesture of saving a boy lost in the woods and thunder storm are compassionate acts of trickster liberation.

Names too play a dominant role in the *Trickster of Liberty* as in the *anishinabe* tradition. Traditionally an *anishinabe* would have six different types of names ranging from nicknames to sacred names. These names are not revealed to strangers. The tradition of nicknaming is emphasized in the context where Terret Pan-Anna, the Chairman of the Native American Indian Mixedblood Studies Department at the University of California – Berkeley gives an explanation to Tulip Browne regarding his strange names 'Pan-Anna' and 'Terrocious.' After telling her his name and position, he continues, "But you can call me Terrocious" (70). 'Terrocious' he later explains to Tulip, "was a short sentence in public school. When I was in high school, the principal was

so angry with me once that he combined the words terrible and atrocious when he cussed me out" (73). Pan-Anna is actually the name given by the then Vice President Theodor Roosevelt to the first native American child at the 1901 Pan-American Exposition. Terret's grandfather was 'so impressed with that exposition name that he adopted it as our surname' (75). The word 'Terret' stands for a metal ring in a harness through which the reins are passed. The word is suggestive of pain and survival and the need for liberation and change. The emphasis on the act of naming, the names themselves and the way in which the names are originated are revealed in Tulip Browne's chance encounter with Ronin Bloom, a street person. The following conversation between Ronin Bloom and Tulip Browne convey the importance that personal names have for native American tribes :

"No woman ever said that to me before", he mumbled and covered his knee. "You got nice legs too. Do you live in the hills or something?"

"Yes, with a mongrel".

"What's his name?"

"White Lies."

"Shit, is that a real name?"

"Reservation name"

"You heard about crazy papers?"

"No, but you said something about that back at the Krakow on the Vistula", she said, "Should I have crazy papers?"

"Definitely, with a dog named White Lies, you definitely need your own crazy papers", he said and laughed. (66)

Vizenor's introduction of the name White Lies, besides being a strange name for a dog, carries a suggestion of the lies told to the natives by whites right from the period of contact.

In *The Trickster of Liberty* Vizenor has initiated a comprehensive rethinking of the inanities of a consumer society from a mythical perspective - one that relies on both imagination and stories. *The Trickster of Liberty* is a "postmodern construct which permits all narratives, Euro-American and Native American, male and female, animal and bird, city and reservation, colonizer and colonized, comic and tragic" (Hardin 39). The Earthdiver stories in *The Trickster of Liberty* are recreational as in the tribal trickster traditions. The tricksters in these stories survive through the very act of 'telling' and heal the wounds of the marginalized. They state the ultimate trickster message: "there are no separations The war goes on in our stories Our seasons are the same at last We must go on" (*Dead Voices* 140).

CHAPTER V

THE HEIRS OF COLUMBUS

The Heirs of Columbus (1991) is an ethnocentric, epistemological and cultural 'survival story' that foregrounds the marginalized discourses of native American oral traditions. It brings together, in tension and dialogue, opposing characters from different historical ages, social levels, civilizations, along with other realities of human life. It declares Vizenor's decision to 'commit himself to fighting for the survival of tribal people with the pen rather than the sword or gun' (Krupat, *Turn to the Native* 81). The story is structured in a postmodern frame and it moves through space and time between myth and history. It is an indictment of closure and finality and acts as an emphatic gesture that represents the indeterminacy in interpretation itself. The novel fights against the essentialism of history and celebrates imagination and dreams.

As a postmodern writer Vizenor is, as Lyotard observes while discussing postmodern conditions, "in the position of a philosopher. The text he writes, the works he produces are not in principle governed by pre-established rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgement, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work" ("Answering the Question: What is Postmodernism" 49). In *Heirs* Vizenor breaks all conventional narrative and thematic patterning.

He introduces a new structural frame for his narrative with an opening passage from Sartre and an epilogue citing a reading list on history, religion, science and theory. His purpose is to signify on the ideas of native American myths as both presence and absence. The novel provides a social model in the form of a community of heirs which allows for the projection of a particular image of human community. The period when animals and men were brothers is kept alive among the tribals in the novel as they are reunited with animal spirits through rituals. The emphasis of the novel is on the curing aspect of the stories in the oral traditions of native Americans. Vizenor states in one of his interviews; "I see fiction as having the healing power of stories, or liberation. At least that's the way I want to write and the way I feel about literature" (Breinig 162). *Heirs* can best be understood when viewed against the following comment made by Lavonne Ruoff:

When medicine men learned to throw themselves into a trance, they often acquired secret animal languages, reminiscent of older times; animal helpers taught them spells and songs to cure their patients. Oral tradition often⁹ took place within a prescribed mixed media setting. Costuming, animal impersonation, floor painting, masking, mnemonic devices, song, incense, musical instruments, pilgrimage, hand gestures, dance,

physical suffering, hallucinatory plants – all could be chosen as part of the expressive choreography that would most effectively transport men back to the magical atmosphere when their fate was in their own hands. They sang and told stories about what they valued. ("American Indian Literature: A Tradition of Renewal" 19)

The phenomenon of storytelling as a curative art form that can bring about renewal is represented in the stories told by the heirs. Inspired by the spirits in the native American myths, the heirs liberate themselves from theoretical categories and preserve the past. They speak in animal languages, sing ritualistic songs, tell sacred stories, impersonate the spirits through masks and make use of hallucinatory plants to escape from the evil gamblers in the cities. They resist their imposed historical identity as they absorb Columbus into their own tribe. They get out of the dominant culture's history and prove that none of the established rules apply to their tribal way of life. As in the oral tradition the characters here function as vehicles for possibilities. They, as tricksters, take contradiction as a way of life. In spite of the novel's connection with Christopher Columbus's discovery of America, *Heirs* is not revisionist history. It is a life lived in the imagination as instructed by the spirits in the native American mythology.

History, for Vizenor, is not a linear chronological description of past events. It is circular in nature adhering to a mythic time that includes the present. In *Heirs* Vizenor ends colonialism by imagining Columbus as an Indian and creating a tribal nation dedicated to healing. Christopher Columbus, the Admiral of the Ocean Sea from Santa Domingo is made to return to his homeland in the New World through racial memory. As Kirkpatrick Sale observes, the heirs in the novel are "healers in Indian country, who dream of the original Admiral and repeat the stories that live in their blood. They know that the Mayans took civilization to the ancient Greeks and that Columbus was a descendant of these Indians, inheritor of their 'blue radiance.' His 'discovery' was simply a coming home, a living out of the stories in his blood, during which he became liberated as he became reduced by a native 'hand talker' named Samana when he landed in the Caribbean. Subsequently his spirit, scorned in the old world, came to reside at 'the head waters of the great river in the New World' " ("Roll on Columbus, Roll on" 488). Vizenor assimilates the lauded mariner into tribal tradition and celebrates Columbus as a wayward coyote, a tormented crossblood Mayan on his mother's side. Vizenor subverts the discovery myth by identifying Columbus with a postmodern tribal trickster. In *Heirs* "Columbus arises in tribal stories that heal with humor the world he wounded, he is loathed, but he is not a separation in tribal

consciousness. The Admiral of the Ocean Sea is a trickster overturned in his own stories five centuries later" (185).

Vizenor derives an "imaginative pleasure" (Breining147) from the trickster tales. By inscribing trickster simulation in *Heirs*, Vizenor challenges all the hyper realities related to representation and finality. The novel is, Vizenor writes, quoting Milan Kundera, "a territory where no one possesses the truth" (185). Vizenor's interpretive structures in the novel negate Columbus' western gaze that perceived only "naked servants with no religion" (184). Vizenor observes, "the record of his first stare inscribed the end of peace on the islands and the source of loneliness in the New World" (184). Barry. E. Laga comments, "Columbus' inscription reveals a conceptual system that divides up the world along the lines of skin color, religion, fashion and, perhaps most importantly, language, for what is essential to notice is that it was not necessarily Columbus' gaze but the recording of that gaze, the semiotic inscription of a conceptual frame work, that ultimately oppressed Native Americans" ("Gerald Vizenor and His *Heirs of Columbus*" 72). The myth of Columbus is deconstructed as he is presented in the novel as a storyteller and a trickster who 'has found his homeland at the head waters" (10). He is created in this novel as a person descended from "the peaceful union of Mayans, North Africans and Middle Eastern population" bearing "the Sacred Mayan signature" (Laga 102).

By burying the bones of Columbus at the House of Life, the tribals incorporate him into the tribe and its stories. Once Columbus is absorbed into the stories of the tribe, he ceases to be a burden of history and begins to serve as a source of psychic renewal. The novel states that Stone Columbus has derived a part of his power as a trickster from Christopher Columbus: "That season the rush of aspen touched him [Stone Columbus] as a child on his first return from a furnace in a government school, he came back a second time in the arms of the notorious Ice Woman, and then he drowned in his bingo caravel and heard the push of bears. None of these stories would be true if he had not inherited the unwonted surname and the signature of survivance from the Admiral of the Ocean Sea" (5).

Vizenor is committed to postmodern trickster fluidities with their comic infinite openness and sense of natural rights and responsibilities. The tricksters in the novel appear in human form and act as a danger to the institutional power in a social setting. They are capable of creating a new culture that gives them their sense of place through a creative dialectical process in spite of the tensions of 'discovery' and 'liberation' involved. They are 'hototropes,' 'whole' and 'freestanding' functioning as both 'signifier' and 'signified' (Vizenor, *Narrative Chance* 131). They break the cultural structures through their trickster antics and liberate society imaginatively from the rigidities of determinism. They call for an

escape from "terminal creeds" and 'manifest manners.' Like the traditional trickster figures, the mixedblood tricksters in *Heirs* violate all institutionally established constructs and endorse Vizenor's exhortation "to break out of all the routes, all the boxes." The heirs "break out of things. They even break out of their blood" (Vizenor, "Follow the Trickroutes" 290). They function as mythic metaphors and as metaphors their forte lies in ambiguity and marginality. Destined to play the roles of cosmopolitans and strangers, the heirs are 'betwixt' and 'between' all fixed points of classification. They deconstruct and reconstruct as they live out the meaning of basic metaphors. They "hear the bears that roam in trickster stories, and the cranes that trim the seasons close the ear" (Krupat, *Ethnocriticism* 184). They unsettle the western institutions that fix identities and resist closure by creating balance through their therapeutical efforts. Through them Vizenor restores "the play and pleasure of an imaginative figure that is transformational, which is a contradiction, which is not a developed character because it isn't representational" (Breinig 150). Krupat argues that the popularity of trickster discourse in recent years can be attributed to Vizenor's "ironic structuration" (*Ethnocriticism* 118).

The Heirs of Columbus displays what Bakhtin calls 'heteroglossia.' The language in the novel is constituted by word and intentions of previous users directed towards the other as subjects. It possesses, to

use a term by Philip Thody, "infinite transcribability" (96). It is a postmodern novel with polyvocal voices that constitute knowledge and consciousness. Kirk Patrick Sale calls it "an inventive, experimental non-novel" ("Roll on Columbus, Roll on" 486). The wide fictional framework of the novel brings together Columbus, the religious politics of 15th century Spain and Pocahontas and also the life of the tribals in the American reservations. *Heirs* is "a mythopoeic space -age chronicle about bingo barges, healer genes and laser caravels. It is a historical satire where the reader sails along from Samana Cay to Point Assinika in the waters between Washington State and Canada, from ship to museum, from crime to punishment, from myth to myth" (Cook-Lynn 2). In this novel the use of satire is ritualistic as it is employed to cure the ills of the world. Current political and intellectual issues, pursuits ranging from U.S. foreign and education policies to native American tribal sovereignty, from genetic therapies to the restitution of tribal objects and human remains are satirized here.

The Heirs of Columbus cannot be called a traditional narrative, it is instead a series of connected dreams. Dreams play a vital role in the lives of the mixedbloods in *Heirs* since a cultural environment strongly based on visionary experiences forms the bedrock of their existence. Dreams help the heirs to evolve a spiritual and tribal cultural history. Through dreams the characters move away from the temporal and

spatial immediacy of everyday consciousness and flow into an altered awareness in which the past and the present merge and interact creatively. In *Heirs* Christopher Columbus appears in the dreams of the heirs. The fundamental human potential of the heirs to dream acts as a source of personal empowerment. Dreams become an integral part in the formation of their self and socio-cultural environment. They become a meaningful experience that invests the trickster characters with an inner coherence. In the world of *Heirs* there is no separation between the world-as-dreamed and the world-as-lived. Dreams are ontological in *Heirs* since they function as a primary source of knowledge and power. They are the underlying infrastructure of the shared collective perceptions that motivate the actions of the community. Dreams reflect the plurality of the creative transformation implied in the native American oral tradition. For the heirs, dreams become a medium of knowing and experiencing the everyday reality of their immediate world of experience.

In *Heirs*, the past is not pictured as nostalgia. The use of irony and paradox in the novel signals a critical distance within the world of representation. It thematises the postmodern concern with the radically indeterminate and unstable nature of textuality and subjectivity. There is postmodern denaturalizing and subverting of the conventions of the narrative. This is the kind of novel that works

toward the primordial power of survivance as exhibited by the native American tricksters through metafictional self consciousness and parodic intertextuality.

Heirs is structured on the struggle of a tribal community, who believe themselves to be the genetic heirs of Christopher Columbus, to create a new ground of meaning in their liminal existence. Motifs and characters from other novels like *Trickster*, *Bearheart* and *Griever* engage in free play in *Heirs*. True to the native American tradition which defines people as a whole, the heirs lead a communal life and share reality through rituals and sacred stories. The collective community psyche of the group generates in them, what Jung calls, 'collective representation.' They hold a collective identity founded upon myths and stories and share dreams and visions. But their existence is not confined to the ritualistic past. The present reality has meaning for them and it is in the present that they tell stories.

For all the polyvocal openness of Vizenor's work, there is always the commitment to *anishinabe* myths and ways of storytelling. The heirs derive their impulses from the participants of the oral tradition whose creative powers bring change and innovation each time a story is told. Their purified vision of language as the creator of reality instills in them the conviction that "they are created in stories" at the head waters of the Mississippi in Minnesota. A stone tavern in a mount at the

source of the Mississippi becomes the centre of story telling where the tribal heirs of Columbus gather to relate the "stories in the blood." Stories take up the performative functions that require responsibility on the part of the speaker as they represent reality. The first stories are considered as tricksters in the creation stories of the *anishinabe*: "the stones once told stories, trickster stories, now the stones listen at the mount. The stones heal and remember, the blue radiance of creation and resurrections" (13). For the heirs, storytelling stands for awareness and respect for the oral tradition. As the storyteller is open to a plurality of voices he acts as a medium to sustain the group. The heirs warm the stones at the tavern with their stories in the blood. Like *naanabozho* who "invented meditation with trickster stories" and "created this New World with the sand a muskrat held in her paws," the heirs of Columbus "created one more New World in their stories and overturned the tribal prophecies that their avian time would end with the arrival of the white man" (5). The heirs tell stories about creation, the bear codex and the hand talkers, the Ice woman and moccasin games, panic hole tricksters and saints and the resurrection of Stone Columbus. Binn Columbus, one of the heirs, who is adept at hearing the voices of shadows lives with her boxes, three men and eighteen children in a cabin in the wood near the head waters. "She hears treasures in a card box and secrets in cedar chests. She hears words in piano benches, closets, even in pockets" (19). She hears stories from

folds and containers and even remembers marvelous stories from common trash on the reservation.

Stories are told to revitalize healing and survivance. Vizenor notes in "Native American Indian Literature : Critical Metaphors of the Ghost Dance" that "the landscape of tribal memories are heard, read and remembered as personal and new ceremonial stories. The natural world is created in personal stories; the healers heard their elusive mythic union with birds and animals in personal narration" (226). In *Heirs* stories come from the bones of Christopher Columbus and Pocahontas (Matoakah), tribal relics rescued from the museums, from Panda and the bicorobots, and from Stone Columbus and the radio show. Stories as Vizenor observes in *The Heirs* "compose and name individual identities within tribal cultures," but "are not an obvious opposition to communal world views" ("Critical Metaphors of the Ghost Dance" 227) Stone Columbus, the tribal descendant of Christopher Columbus is a trickster storyteller. He says, "Stone is my name The stone is my totem, my stories are stones, they are tribal stones Stones hold our tribal words and the past in silence, in the same way that we listen to stories in the blood and hold our past in memories" (9). Stone Columbus is an heir of Columbus and of a stone which possesses the stories and words of the tribe. Stories are heard in the novel when the medicine pouches are repatriated - "The pouches were returned to

the tribe, and the stories are told once more at the head waters . . . the remains were buried at the House of Life" (61). Stories create spaces in the novel which integrate artificial intelligence into the tribal community: "Panda and three robots were trained to heal with humor; their memories held the best trickster stories, and modern variations, that would liberate the mind and heal the bodies of children" (158). The stories of Miigis, Felipa Flower's daughter, are stories about the world she saw in dreams with birds. At Point Assinika, the tricksters cure the children with "stories and humor. What they say become, in some way, the energy that heals. This story energy somehow influences the genetic codes and the children are mended in one way or another " (164). In *Heirs* Binn Columbus heard the story of Felipa Flower's death from her blue moccasins:

Binn held the moccasins to her ear and said that two men tied her down in a room, one man touched her breasts, the other man with the blood on his cheek watched and then he injected a poison into her thigh. Felipa dreamed that she was a mistlethrush in the tree over the church, she flew into a wicked storm and never returned. (175)

Thus in *Heirs* it is the "myths rituals and stories [that] summon a spiritual balance, an imaginative negotiation in a very dangerous natural world" (81).

Vizenor makes no attempt to take character development in these characters beyond their linguistic level. Against the backdrop of Bakhtin's mediations on language and society, the heirs exist as pure abstractions, an image out of time and oblivious to the condition of historic possibility. They are not individuals, instead they stand for the various aspects of a composite tribal identity as Truman Columbus, the 'shouter' shouts "we are created in stories, the same stories that hold our memories and thousands of generation in these stories" (14). Their identity is structured in and as language. They are made of words and their essential being consists in a verbal dimension. It is the stories that they remember in their blood that keep their culture alive and rescue their identity and enable them to reconcile their cultural past with the present and the future. They are 'trickster signatures' and discourses on narrative chance' that 'enliven stories and ceremonies." (Vizenor, *Narrative Chance* x). The trickster in *Heirs* is presented not as a figure, but as a figuration that stands for a composite effect of language in a narrative tradition. "Tricksters . . . are not real people, tricksters are figures in stories" (86). Tricksters have no presence, no

tribes "but of a certain condition that transcends discoveries and translations" (80).

For the tricksters in *Heirs*, the creation myth of *naanabozho* acts as a point of reference. Vizenor states in *Heirs* :

The *Anishinaabe*, the Woodland tribe that founded this obscure tavern, the oldest in the New World, remember that *Naanabozho*, the compassionate tribal trickster who created the earth, had a brother who was a stone . . . *Naanabozho* was the first human born in the world, and the second born, his brother, was a stone. The trickster created the new earth with wet sand. He stood on his toes as high as he could imagine, but the water rose closer to his nose and mouth. He could dream without a mouth or nose, but he would never leave the world to the evil gambler and his dark water. The demons in the water caused him to defecate, and with pleasure, but his shit would not leave, several turns floated near his mouth and nose. *Naanabozho* was at the highest point on the earth and could not move, so he invented meditation with trickster stories and liberated his mind over his own excrement. The trickster created this New world with the sand a muskrat held in her paws. (5)

. The heirs remember that "*Naanabozho*, the compassionate tribal trickster, who created the earth had a brother who was a stone, a bear stone, a human stone, a shaman stone" (5). Stone Columbus, the stone trickster surrogate in the novel is a healer in his stories who spreads the therapeutic message in the CARP Talk radio. He alludes to *naanabozha's* trickster brother called Flint or Stone Boy in the traditional trickster stories. The mythic significance of stone is discussed by Gerald Vizenor in *Dead Voices*. "The last born trickster was a stone, a hard stone. With the birth of the stone, there were birds and animals, flowers and insects on the earth . . . stone. the last born *manidoo*, seldom moved from his place on earth . . . At night the brothers shared their adventures with stone because he could not travel" (25-26). Even though *naanabozho*, his brother tried to kill him, he broke into "thousands and thousands of pieces and flew into four direction of the earth" (27). Stone Columbus, the stone trickster surrogate in *Heirs* is a "proud mariner on a moored reservation, a trickster creation on an ocean sea in the new tribal world" (11). He is a bear shaman and a dreamer. As he dons the blue mask with golden eyes and ears, a high forehead and aquiline nose, his identification with the great explorer is complete. He declares on talk radio that samana, a hand talker from the stone tavern and the head waters of the great river, touched the soul of Columbus and "lured his spirit to the head waters, and here we are, the tribal heirs to that primal union" (19). He

remembers that the 'real' Columbus found in the stories of his blood and the blood of the heirs has inherited the tribal signature of survivance and possesses a dream outsized for his age at that time. In the old world Christopher Columbus had never known 'a settled life or an identity with any one stretch of earth, whose only real home from childhood onwards seems to have been the sea, an inconstant and limitless sea whose interminable gray waves offer no habitation for the human animal, a man whose strongest wish, it seems, was always to go somewhere else, who by his own account was consumed for at least a decade by a compulsion to sail to the unchartered west and who once he had gone out again and yet again, until he had gone to the next island, and the next and the one beyond that, a restless rootless man" (Sale, *The Conquest of Paradise* 54). Like the tribal trickster he accepts, 'chance and mortalities' and is always on the move surmounting the discouragement of the Spanish Court and violating all institutional certitudes. He remembers the stories in his blood and transgresses the purities of society's accepted strata and convention. *Heirs* contains intimate details of his physical and psychic state from the size and deformed shape of his penis to his anxiety over a secret letter written at sea on his return from the first voyage to the New World describing his experiences with 'blue storm puppets' and 'a handtalker with golden thighs' (44). In that letter which was sealed in a container to survive the 'demonic' storm he reveals his discoveries, insecurities, silences and

sense of separation, the vision that persuaded him on the ocean sea and his wild pleasure and liberation with a hand talker named Samana. Vizenor calls Columbus "a wounded adventurer, the third person discoverer of mother earth. He landed and discovered marvelous shamans, tribal cultures with crystals, wild rice and casinos. Christopher Columbus discovered the eternal haven of simulations" (*Manifest Manners* 107).

Drawing on the tradition of trickster experiences and storytelling, and interweaving histories, science, and fantasy, Vizenor includes Columbus in the lineage that runs from the ancient hand talkers and seductive spice traders to an admiral on a sovereign bingo casino moored in Lake of Woods. Vizenor states that Columbus

inherited the signature of suvivance and tribal stories in blood from his mother, and she inherited the genetic signature from maternal ancestors. The women, the bearers of the genetic signature and their heirs were once active in spice and parchment trade. The survivors were obscure descendants of the healers and hand talkers from the New World. That blue radiance has been carried in the blood and stories by adventures, traders, mystics, dancers and puppeteers in the old world. (28)

By reimagining Columbus in the tribal way, Vizenor intends to free the native Americans from western oppression. "I made him an Indian" Vizenor states, "I am the first person who made him an Indian, so he can stop being a victim too" ("Gerald Vizenor-ism" 20). *Heirs* thus becomes a panacea of liberation both for the colonized and the colonizer. This is achieved through a subversion of the Columbus myth and the Columbian heritage.

By making Columbus a cross blood Mayan and a postmodern trickster, Vizenor incorporates magical realism and fantasy in the novel as in the oral tradition of North America. Columbus' encounter with the puppets in Corsica and Lisbon, his mysterious meeting with Samana, the blue hand talker who eased his pain 'with lust and wild rapture; and the details of his exploration read like an oral narrative. Vizenor's love for haiku poetry adds charm to the narrative in sentences like "her hands were wild, an immortal silence that burst in a blue radiance, the decks were blue, touch wood from the head waters" (40). Columbus also appears in the dream of the heirs. They dream that "samana dove from the stern castle into the shadows at the mouth of the river, a blue radiant stream trailed her to the beach. Columbus removed his scarlet tunic and followed her in the water. That night he abandoned the curve of his pain in her hands and thighs and entered her maw to become a woman, a bear, a hand talker" (40).

Heirs moves from an essentially historical realist mode, through formal self-consciousness and experimentation into a new kind of ironic history as Stone Columbus takes his followers, and animals to the Western Island of Point Assinika to found a new nation. There is a reversal of the Columbian myth, a 'contradance' as the heirs, like the tribe in the *anishinabe* migration story, move to a utopian island off the west coast to create a new turtle land where regeneration and healing are possible. Stone Columbus makes a 'choice' of liberation and triggers a process of curing the wounds caused by the historical event of the European discovery of America. The heirs buy land at Point Roberts, Washington, move the stones in the stone tavern to the new nation and complete the high copper Statue of Liberty built by the Chinese to honor their exclusive rights to buy the golden ginseng from Ginseng Browne, an heir to the wild baronage. In the new land the heirs experience "the wild and marvelous moment of tribal sovereignty" (122) as Stone Columbus like the Great Discoverer unfurls the red banner with the blue bear paw on the new shore. The sovereign nation of Stone Columbus and the heirs is a 'free state with no prison, no passports, no public schools no missionaries, no television, and no public taxation" (124). Genetic therapies, natural medicine, bingo cards, and entertainment are free to those who come to be healed and those who live on the Point. Bingo, as chance, played through ritual and for generosity, acts as a positive force in the novel. In the 'natural nation' of Point Assinika

"humour rules and tricksters heal" (126). Like the ancient shamans the heirs conduct healing rituals to re-establish reality and order when a break with it has taken place due to the dangers of chemical civilization.

Vizenor's use of a combination of genetics and story in healing leads the reader through a series of historical medical associations. Through the use of humor and manicure, Vizenor refers to the beginnings of healing science in the past mysticism of Shamans. Healing began in most cultures with laying on of hands and determining the basic elements of the body. As Teets, one of the manicurists in the therapeutic centres in Point Assinika, trims the finger nails of children, they dream that they have come to "the last place on the earth that would heal their wounds with no condition" (446). Manicure implies diagnosis by touch and has a mystical reference when the manicurist is an ex-priest: "Padrino de Torres . . . persuaded the captain and the judge to sit for a manicure. The judge knew him as a priest and she was surprised that he had turned to hands" (177). The priest heals through hands and the heirs heal through humor. In *Heirs* the connection between technology and myth exists more to show up the inadequacies of modern techniques in comparison to ancient healing practices. Through the novel Vizenor proves that "our computer memories and simulations are not yet

powerful enough to support what shamans and hand talkers have inherited and understood for thousands of years" (136).

Stone Columbus decides to heal 'the tired tribes' by pursuing genetic therapies and biogenetic research on survivance. Dr. Pir Cantrip an honorable Sephardic Jew and a group of scientists assist Stone Columbus in isolating the genetic code of tribal survivance and radiance from a flake of dried blood in the casket of Columbus. This genetic code is the native signature of "seventeen mitochondrial genes that could reverse human mutations, nurture shamanic resurrection, heal wounded children, and incite parthenogenesis in separatist women" (132). In the new nation, children are reborn with the genes of survivors and with the touch of little blue people, and through listening to the stories.

Like the animals and beings in the myths, the characters in *Heirs* become cocreators of the world. Their act of healing akin to traditional tricksters implies liberation and responsibility – liberation from conventions and the realization of a new kind of responsibility to the world. The border land of Point Assinika is not a place of escape for the tricksters. It accepts all and offers mixedblood status through genetic implant. "Germans, at last could be genetic Sioux and thousands of coastal blondes bored with being white could become shadow tribes of *Hopi*, or *Chippewa* with gene therapies from Point Assinika" (162). Even

the biorobots in the healing nation are 'tender' and 'responsive,' trained to heal the children with humour. "Their best memories held the best trickster stories, and modern variations that would liberate the mind and heal the bodies of children" (158). As thousands and thousands of abandoned and abused children come to "the new nation on their last dreams to be healed with the humor of their ancestors in the stone, the protean trickster, the vision of shamans, and the heirs of Christopher Columbus" (147), the tribal community in the new nation attach body parts to the mutilated as in the mixed blood trickster stories. The healed children bear the genetic signature of survivance from the ancient Maya hand talkers and Christopher Columbus. The heirs succeed in healing the wounded when the government has failed to save them. It is their 'stories in the blood' which find the secret of creation and heal the abused.

Vizenor undermines the fundamental notions of tribal and genetic identity in *The Heirs of Columbus*. When tribal cultures become victims of "reductionism and transvaluation" (*Narrative Chance* 10), Vizenor aims to present the real in order to provide hope for communities decimated by genocide. *Heirs* deconstructs identities and the systems that govern them. Like the other novels of Vizenor, *Heirs* also dismantles the static notion of 'Indianness.' In *Point Assinika*, the healing centre of Stone Columbus, the Jews, Germans and "thousands

of coastal blondes bored with being white" get their identity refixed. The scientists bring about a reversal through their ability to transform all those who come to the centre into native Americans. They inscribe 'a universal identity' and encourage, "a return to other values as measures of human worth" (162). Their play is, as Stone Columbus claims, not in "the scientific method, but in the pure pleasure of creation" (150). Vizenor deconstructs even the conqueror/conquered dichotomy in the novel. As Michael Hardin notes, "the rather simple and standard colonizer / colonized and conqueror / conquered dichotomies are problematized if the individual who provides the 'discovery' which opens up the Americas for conquest is descended from the same population which is later decimated and also father to some of those who are oppressed after the 'discovery' " (31). Assinika acts as a space that allows heterogeneity. Chaine Riel Doumet, 'the best investigator' hired by the tribe to report on the stone tavern and the megabingo barge, comments,

Stone resists the notion of blood quantum, racial identification, and tribal enrollment. The heir is a crossblood, to be sure. His point is to make the world tribal, a universal identity, and return to other values as measures of human worth . . . the notion of a universal

tribe would cause no harm, because there was nothing to lose but racial distance. (162)

Point Assinika becomes the centre of tribal memories and the genes of survivance in the New World. In Assinika where "the scientists deliver the genetic signatures" and where "the tribal healers touch the wounded and hear their creation stories," the genetic therapies of healing promote a positive relationship between science and tribal communities (141).

The heirs honor tribal identities and not political boundaries on the earth. They permit Bingo Gamblers to enter the Felipa Flowers Casino freely without being subjected to inspection. The casino also acts as a centre for transformational identity. The Pale man with no name, Stone's father who manages the casino is a transvestite, a poseur, who poses in turn as first ladies either Eleanor Roosevelt, Nancy Reagan or his favourite Lady Bird Johnson. His strange instruction to his male casino attendants that they must cross dress, for 'regrettably men are no longer that interesting unless they dress as women' (131), while deconstructing the biological determinism, carries an implication of moving oppositionally as well as back and forth, of an integrated whole as characterized in the timeless 'pre-human flux.'

Implicit in trickster stories is transformation and innovation which liberate the mind and contribute to the 'survivance' of the tribe.

There is juxtaposition of animal-human identities in the novel as in the animism that the *anishinabe* cherish. Through the shamanic practices of human-animal transformation, the heirs prove that there is a loss of vitality when belief is institutionalized in normative cultural practices. In their primordial experience of 'Dasein,' they find a new wilderness in the city. Memphis, the black panther, while remaining in the last outpost of human time, shouts, "we imagined each other out there in the beginning. Panther and brother, cedar and bear, we were the same stones, the same blue heat, and we imagined who we would be, stone or panther, someone warm, in the world" (16). The 'talking animals' in *Heirs* declare that it was mixedblood, crossblood mongrels who 'created the best humans, we had that crossblood wild bounce in our blood.' "Stone heard the bear in his blood," Truman "trained a great bear shadow over the stones" (15), "Memphis remembers the bears and trickster creation stores at the tavern" and Caliban, the great white reservation mongrel and heir to the stone, "remembered the same stories of imagination as the panther and the shaman bear" (16). Memphis when she is called as a witness in the federal court to answer question about the shamanic repatriation of medicine pouches and human remains, reveals her animal identity by laying both 'black paws' on the rails. The heirs, through their authentic behaviour and dedication to the essential purity of life, prove that they are "animals on hold with interior vision" (70).

The *anishinabe* trickster tales act as a model of referentially in *Heirs*. They become the means for confronting the crisis of contemporary urban society and transcending the process of victimization. The earthdiver myths are employed in relation to Vizenor's characteristic themes – the dangers of the dominant culture, the power of story and imagination, the invented 'Indian' phenomenon, the distortion of history and social sciences and the survival of the tribal cultures. The stories that Vizenor imagines in *Heirs* are humanistic, where the trickster is placed as a mixedblood entrepreneur. Born on the reservation, the trickster mariner in the novel makes a fortune of more than a million a season when he becomes the captain of the Santa Maria Casino, a bingo barge in the boundary waters between the U.S. and Canada. The mixedblood mediators who incarnate the powers and values of the *anishinabe* trickster create their own social structures in modern colonial America. When the traditional trickster acts as the 'vehicle' of the basic metaphor of the earthdiver, the heirs function as the 'tenor' and realise the world through "inversions and opposites, sacred and secular reversals" (*Earthdivers* 123).

As in the case of trickster narration, *Heirs* breaks away from the established linguistic structures and formal patterns. It does not have a conventional narrative and thematic pattern. Vizenor states, "I lean a bit more toward the margin, toward the deconstruction approach to

discovering the play in the word (as) there's symbolic possibilities in all words . . . I choose words intentionally because they have established multiple symbolic meanings" ("Gerald Vizenor" 158). The narrative structures of *Heirs* possesses a multiplicity of voices. It subverts the claims of truth and is wild, disruptive and discursive like the trickster tales. It has, what Derrida refers to as, the 'trace' structure of the sign, as the reality in the novel exceeds the present and spreads out across other sign structures found in native American mythology. Vizenor states in *Heirs*: "Words are traces, and stories hold the wild traces of the told and heard, the sounds of imagination and creation" (81). The narrative contains traces of the older narratives while still being new and imaginative. The novel is, in the words of Wolfgang Iser, "a volume of fantastic tales that are beautiful, satiric, and like the book's predecessors, at times bewildering" ("Breaking Away: The Novels of Gerald Vizenor" 274).

As in other novels of Gerald Vizenor, in *Heirs* too there is a play of chance manifested in the conflict between the tribes and the dangerous *windigo* who arrives to wreck the new nation. *Heirs* exemplifies the fact that 'the trickster and comic liberator craves chance in agonistic imagination to lessen the power of social science and bourgeois humanism [. . .] the comic liberator is healer in linguistic games, chance, and postmodern imagination" (*Narrative Chance* 192). Vizenor's

texts reflect the mythic, ceremonial as well as the secular aspects of the games of chance often connected with the gambler figure. 'Chance' for Vizenor, stands for all the possibilities that the compassionate trickster must face. The *windigoo* looms large in the backdrop as a threat to the tribals' ability to balance the forces of good and evil through humor and stories. In *Heirs* the moccasin game, is directly played between the *windigoo*, a clean handsome deceptive water demon and the tribal dreamers and animal helpers. In the moccasin game, four objects are covered with two pairs of moccasins. One object is marked and becomes the chance of the game. The best moccasin game songs tease the players into choosing the moccasin that covers the unmarked object. Tension prevails as in the original conflict between *naanabozho* and the *Evil Gambler* as the children are threatened with total annihilation if the *windigoo* takes the moccasin with the marked coin. The gambler becomes a threat to, but also a test of balance for the compassionate trickster as the demon *windigoo* insists "the tribe is a game, but evil and fear are chance, and nothing in the world is more real than the moccasin game . . . This is your last chance to save the game and the real" (21). As the tribals lose the first and second rounds, they frantically appeal to the Ice Woman, the ancient silent hand talker who rescues them by freezing and immobilizing *windigoo* by blowing a cold wind – a variation of the whistling on the wind motif. Natural balance is threatened in the novel as the *windigoo* who has been kept frozen by the

Ice Woman is stolen by racist field agents and thawed out. When the remains of Pocahontas and Felipa Flowers are sealed in vaults at the House of Life near the base of the trickster of liberty and when the heirs are about to hold a reburial ceremony for the tribal women, the *windigoo* "the handsome cannibal . . . the mutant demon with no vision, no shadow and no interest in the planets" (176) makes his appearance and tells the heirs that the time has come at last to finish the moccasin game. As he is about to destroy the new nation, Stone Columbus, like Proude Cedarfair in *Bearheart* engages him in the moccasin game recreating the essential conflict of all *anishinabe* myth and wins the game by making him realise that who ever wins really loses. Stone Columbus places a dose of the destructive herb of war associated with the *Lakota* mystic Black Elk and which he sees in a vision under one of the moccasins. When the *windigoo* is warned that "the war herb would end the tribe, the heirs, the children, the nation, the world you are eager to devour," he realizes that a world with robots alone would not suffice and that even "a demon needs human beings" (182).

While the new world at Point Assinika seems doomed, the evil gambler withdraws over the threat of a war herb. As the gambler recedes to the shadows, he insists that the game never ends and that no chance is his last chance. The possibility of another conflict with the *windigoo* is not destroyed, but only controlled and brought into balance

as Vizenor once again leaves his text open ended. By winning the game and restoring the balance, the heirs prove that they are the original citizens of America with deep-rooted oral traditions even though they are stripped of land and denied the rights and privileges of legal citizens. Silhouetted against the shimmering waters of the seas and the wild blue lights on the ships, the heirs stand in at the last outpost of human civilization. As the laser figures of the Great Discoverer, the tribal dreamers and the tribal women merge in the single epiphanic moment, Admire, the dog whistles, the mongrels bark, the heirs and children shout to the morning stars to come home.

Heirs remains within the established pattern of the myths of origin and transformation. But it is left unfinished. In its openness, it indicates that "we are becoming. There is no final solution. There is no last word" (Fuentes 244). The novel asserts that the trickster has not gone away, he has not been relegated to the enclave of the native American oral tradition - "his name may have changed, his animal mask exchanged for another, but the Trickster is still around somewhere, just going along" (Wiget, *Native American Literature* 21).

CONCLUSION

A detailed analysis of Gerald Vizenor's novels reveals that Vizenor has used myths and traditions from his own *Ojibwa* and other native American cultures in his fiction. Vizenor's stories are like the stories of Bagese, the tribal woman in *Dead Voices*, meant to be "heard through the ear, not the eye" (6). They transit the dynamics of an ever changing native American mythology and are told after the *anishinabe* storytelling tradition. His sources are from native American mythology and other cross cultural fields of discourse. The interpretive and self-reflexive mode of oral discourse pervades the text and the context of Vizenor's fictional world. He examines various structures of society through characters who are at once mythic and realistic and investigates how the traditional ways of knowing function in a multicultural world. He suspends all that human beings have taken for granted about language, reality and the possibilities of human experience. Like the traditional narratives, his novels are explorations of particular ways of knowing and learning. Vizenor presumes that myths possess meaning. By incorporating the mythic structure in his fiction, Vizenor teaches his readers the knowledge in myths. His novels are open - ended interrelated cycles of trickster tales that contain the belief, wisdom, creativity and humor of the indigenous people of North America. As

with the trickster stories, the reading of one novel acts as a preface to the next.

Vizenor has made the native American traditional trickster the central figure of his writing. He has adopted the trickster topos from other literary traditions besides his own and explicated the cross-cultural differences inherent among tricksters of the world traditions. His mixedblood tricksters reflect a primordial culture and act as mediating characters in the human world of contradictions. His tricksters perform the function of complex mediation between and among conflicting value systems.

Vizenor's act of writing is an act of liberation of the native American and humanity in general from the old, oppressive conceptions of reality. His fiction proves that conquest has not killed native American thought, experience and spirituality. The complex relationship between trickster strategies and the white hierarchies of power recur as the underlying theme of his works. His novels carry the message that "performance and human silence are strategies of survivance" (*Manifest Manners* 16). His tricksters tell us what it is to live on the margins where the meaning lies between two cultures. Vizenor's writings honor their survivance in literature. His stories are created with a new sense of survivance which counters the manifest manners of domination. They proclaim a tribal heritage that

contributes to the 'survivance' of tribal peoples even in the urban wilderness. His trickster characters like Griever and Stone Columbus engage in subversive trickster strategies to redefine all the definitions of culture through their discourse. They remain in the margin and resist silencing through their acts of liberation. They "function not so much to call cultural categories into question as to demonstrate the artificiality of culture itself. Thus [they] make available for discussion the very basis of social order, individual and communal identity" (Wiget, *Native American Literature* 91).

Vizenor's fiction defies all classifications based on the clear-cut boundaries that define academic discourse. One of his objectives in writing is to demythologize the static definition of native American identity that victimizes native Americans and threatens their cultural survival. His novels raise questions about native American identity in the form of cultural conversations with previous texts. His characters, through tricksterism, explain that the real native American identity is different from the simulated identity inscribed to them in American history. In *Manifest Manners* Vizenor states that "the Indian was an occidental invention that became a bankable simulation; the word has no referent in tribal language or cultures" (ii). By presenting beings who do not conform to the gendered norms of culture as the models for his protagonists, Vizenor deconstructs all the privileged norms that are

associated with identity. The modern trickster figures of Vizenor grow out of a political system that oppresses and excludes native American culture. His novels are "The postindian conversations" which are "the new stories of survivance over dominance" (4).

Vizenor's fictional tribal communities define their lives in terms of native American oral narratives. His novels contain a world view which is at odds with European vision of life with its linear thinking of time and reality. Just like in the oral tradition, new stories continually come into being and old stories are altered to incorporate new circumstances in Vizenor's fiction. He recounts through his tales what has been lost to the natives of America, what remains and how they can survive in a hostile consumerist society. An examination of Vizenor's novels reveals the fact that it is often the wild voice of the imaginative trickster that has sustained the native Americans to outlast the process of assimilation by the whites. Vizenor's mythical characters live out their lives and engage in trickeries in the modern world. Like *naanabozho*, Vizenor's tricksters possess the power to live and to renew their lives as well as the lives of others. The voice of the other in Vizenor's novels legitimizes that which has been delegitimized by the western culture. In Vizenor, "the burdensome histories of conquest and colonization are lifted and replaced by stories which change the emphasis from a victimizing tragedy to a survivalist comedy" (Hardin 35).

Vizenor's fiction has mythical, linguistic, epistemological and socio-political contexts and fields of discourse. The bedrock of his narratives is "a series of Indian stories, traditional and legendary [. . .] which will date away back when this country was one great reservation with no Indian agents but win-ne-boo-zho", the trickster. (Beaulieu 22 Oct.). His novels are characterized by a historical vision, a sense of social responsibility and a belief in the efficacy of the word. This is a literature with a purpose where marginalized experiences are brought to the centre to teach mankind the cognition of one's own reality. The transformational matrix of his characters and their stories exemplify post modern concerns. Vizenor's fiction is an example of what Arnold Krupat calls 'indigenous literature.' Vizenor has managed successfully "to merge forms internal to his cultural formation with forms external to it, but pressing upon, even seeking to delegitimize it" (Krupat, *New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism* 214).

The novels of Vizenor are a warning to capitalist societies which are blinded by western civilization. They bring about a reversal of priorities by providing a set of powerful trickster strategies. Vizenor shares Derrida's conviction that writing is a free play of elements that cause displacement of meaning. He shares affinity with Husserl in his perception of reality. What Christopher Norris has said about Husserl is applicable to Vizenor. Like Husserl, Vizenor too believes that "the

only valid foundation for knowledge was an attitude that accepted nothing in trust, rigorously suspending or 'bracketing' all ideas and assumptions that might be products of delusion" (Norris 42). Vizenor's ideas collide with most of the assumptions and conventions associated with normality in every day life.

Vizenor's fiction is basically ritualistic in structure, theme and approach. His novels are ritual novels in the sense that rituals guide and heal the characters. There is a circular unified field of interaction where meaning is defined in terms of ritual rules. By framing a world with traditional and modern myths, Vizenor has successfully created an identification between mythic beings and modern mixedbloods. As socio-cultural phenomena, they partake of the same dynamics as other institutional forms of society. Personal, private rituals and collective communal rituals are performed in the complex communities that inhabit Vizenor's fictional space. There are also rituals of shamanism as in *Bearheart* where the trickster Proude Cedarfair performs rites as a shaman and acts as a mediator between mythic beings and the pilgrims. The rituals in Vizenor's fiction remain integrated with the goals and values of *anishinabe* oral tradition. Vizenor's tricksters cure the sick (the heirs in *The Heirs of Columbus*), take spiritual flights and find lost articles (the retrieval of the lost computer by Tulip Browne in *The Trickster of Liberty*) and discover the secrets of future events

(Proude Cedarfair in *Darkness in Saint Louise Bearheart*) like the traditional *anishinabe* shamans. In his novels when human culture remains hostile to human beings, the protagonists redeem humanity through stories and rituals.

In Vizenor's fiction language is presented as part of human existence. His novels endorse Heidegger's argument that "language . . . is not a mere instrument of communication, a secondary device for expressing 'ideas', it is the very dimension in which human life moves, that which brings the world to be in the first place. Only where there is language, is there 'world' in the distinctly human sense" (Eagleton 55). His novels expound the trickster's connection with language especially his power to create or deceive by the word. Vizenor explores the possibility of finding in language a new medium that reveals the reality beyond words. Through words Vizenor attempts to disentangle thought from the conventions and rules which have been established by objective systems. What David Lodge has noted about Bakhtin's concept of language is relevant in the Vizenorian context. In his novels, language is not as it is in Saussure, a two-sided sign comprising signifier and signified, but "a two-sided act." "The words we use come to us already imprinted with the meanings, intentions and accents of previous users, and any utterance we make is directed towards some real or hypothetical other" (Lodge 21). An analysis of Vizenor's novels

reveals that Vizenor's intellectual use of words revitalizes ancient story telling tradition.

Vizenor's fiction is a warning to a consumerist society blinded by western civilization. His novels do not convey the alienation and existential angst, instead they portray the trickster's engagement of the world with all its ambivalances. Vizenor has chosen "the complexities and contradictions of existential engagement over the aesthetic text" (Vizenor, *"I Defy Analysis"* 46).

Some of the characters in his novels resemble contemporary public figures. But Vizenor emphatically points out in one of his interviews that if some of his fictional characters suggest in some metaphorical way the identities of people in public affairs, he should not be held accountable for that. He states, "If their lives unfortunately resemble fictional characters, it certainly is beyond me" (*"I Defy Analysis"* 47). His characters do not avoid challenges, instead they confront the challenges of the modern world through the transformational energy of the traditional trickster. Vizenor's fiction is a word war against the 'Wordies.' They exclude, entrap and deconstruct the everyday reality and are founded upon the motifs from the tribal literary heritage. In his fiction there is a transvaluation of all definitions related to identity, academic discourses and authenticity of human experience. The comic discourses of his tribal tricksters permanently

displace all cultural and social categories. Vizenor's subversive narratives display a tolerance for all sorts of contradictions and ambivalences. The trickster for Vizenor represents the contradictions in life. The incidents in his novels prove that contradiction frees cognition and opens up imagination. Throughout his fiction, Vizenor has celebrated the role of the mixedblood trickster who transcends the structure of the past and escapes from the rigidities of social classifications. These tricksters evoke images of disguise and ambiguity through masking and transsexual transformations traditionally used by the tricksters to survive.

Vizenor's fiction is an endeavour to give voice and visibility to the marginalized native Americans in the context of white hegemony. The 'postindian' is presented in Vizenor's fiction as "the absence of the invention, and the end of representation in literature" (*Manifest Manners* ii). Vizenor's postindians figure as the resisting voice of the colonized. They assume multiple identities in order to create pathways to survival and engage in acts of resistance such as those found within trickster narratives. Vizenor conceives of himself as a teacher of survival, a 'word-maker' in what he calls the contemporary "word-wars."

Vizenor's novels exemplify his own theory that social sciences eliminate the polyvocal and wild voice of the native American traditional trickster and aim at the 'monologue' of truth. He accuses

anthropologists of inventing culture and activating terminal creeds at the expense of native American identity and reality. Vizenor writes, "anthropologists and historians invent tribal cultures" and thus effect "a material and linguistic colonization of tribal families" (*Chippewa* 27). One of his characters, Ginseng Browne, in *The Trickster of Liberty* declares in the court that Walter Hoffman, who reported on the *Anishinaabe Midewiwin Society*, "invented Indians. He was scared He's your authority not ours, we practice with ease what he envied and tried to own" (147).

Vizenor's novels are placed in the context of the hyper realities of neocolonial consumer society. His characters, through diverse methods challenge the process of reduction of reality and the fabrication of reality to 'the absolute fake.' His word-wars are against the 'hyper real' definition of Indianness. Vizenor, though occasionally disquieting, makes the readers aware of the instability of the terminal creeds. His novels point out that "social science theories constrain tribal landscapes to institutional values, representationalism and the politics of academic determinism" ("Trickster Discourse" 278). They protest those ideologies that reduce tribal literature to collections of consumable cultural artifacts.

Vizenor's notion of hyper reality is founded upon Baudrillard's notion of 'simulacra' which is simulation of simulations. In *The Heirs of*

Columbus space is simulated, simulations win court battle, television is a "democratic simulation" (130), political evidence and consumer notices are simulations, and finally "the real is the simulation"(86). It is only during a simulation that the judge in *The Heirs* had "memories of being so close to the real world"(86).

Vizenor's fiction bears out his concept that postmodernism liberates imagination and that the trickster is postmodern. Vizenor states in one of his interviews that in his novels "linear time is abolished, the myth of time being present. Dreams are a source of reality as much as any other experience, and that is postmodern. Stories are never told in the same way. Each telling is a different story, a different condition, a different instance of encounter, and that is postmodern" ("Gerald Vizenor: The Trickster Heir of Columbus" 103). Vizenor agrees with Andrew Wiget and Arnold Krupat that native American tales presuppose no norm for interpretation, and display no need for interpretive uniformity.

Vizenor's novels have strong ethnic foundations. Like Scott Momaday, Vizenor expresses in his novels the healing relations within the universe. They speak not only about an ethnicity that is passed on from generation to generation but also about an ethnic dimension that is dynamic and that resists all repressions. His fiction is an

ethnocritical discourse that contains all the elements required for such a discourse proposed by Arnold Krupat. Krupat observes that

Ethnocriticism [. . .] is concerned with differences rather than oppositions, and so seeks to replace oppositional with dialogical models
Ethnocritical discourse regards border and boundary crossings with their openness to and recognition of the inevitability of interactive relations, as perhaps the best means to some broadly descriptive account of the way things 'really' work in the material and historical world. Ethnocriticism thus wishes to develop and refine dialogic models whose claims to accuracy, systematicity, and knowledge would reside in their capacity to take in more context. (*Ethnocriticism* 26)

Vizenor's fiction satisfies all the above mentioned criteria for an ethnocritical discourse. His fiction represents a literature that is dynamic in its struggle to define its identity and that initiates for readers "a dialectical or two-sided journey examining the realities of both sides of cultural differences so that they may mutually question each other, and thereby generates a realistic image of human

possibilities and a self confidence for the explorer grounded in comparative understanding rather than ethnocentrism" (Fischer 217).

Vizenor's updated trickster tales delight both native and non-native readers. However, for the non-native audience, he explains, "I would like to imagine tribal experience for the non-indian whose frame of reference is very different from ours" (Vizenor, *Song* 165). Vizenor possesses what Paula Gunn Allen says is, a 'dual perception of the world' because of his participation in opposing culture traditions. In Vizenor "each perceptive is meaningful and in their joining psychic unity rather than fragmentation occurs" (*Sacred Hoop* 161).

The ideological world in Vizenor's fiction is not divorced from the political realities of the contemporary native American experience. It examines ritual meaning in social, political and cultural confrontations.

Vizenor is "a formidable warrior in the word wars" and an "acute commentator on the hypocrisies of modern society" (Ruoff, "Woodland Word Warrior" 13). His writings disclose the artificiality of human existence, the destruction of resources and the notion of invented Indian. In all his works there is the "sense of balance between the despair of genocide, murder, suicide, and natural destruction, and the hope of trickster humor, tribal stories, memory, dreams and change" (Blaeser, "Interior Dancers, Transformation of Vizenor's Poetic Vision" 11).

Readers occupy a prominent position in Vizenor's literary vision. The writer, according to Vizenor, "cedes the landscape to the reader and then dies" (*Trickster of Liberty* xi). One of the reasons for the fragmented signature in Vizenor is his emphasis on oral tradition which is intertextual by nature. As Vincent Leitch points out, intertextuality is "a text's dependence on and infiltration by prior concepts, figures, codes, unconscious practices, conventions and texts" (287).

Through Bagese, in *Dead Voices* Vizenor tells the readers that stories matter. The reading of each story of Vizenor leaves the impression in the minds of the readers that "nothing in my life has been the same since" (*Dead Voices* 16). There is an assertion in his fiction that only in the sanctuary of stories can the real be seen. Vizenor's novels enable the readers to participate in imaginative acts of transformation and recreation and assist them to acquire the ultimate realization that "the real came from stories" (*Dead Voices* 119). He makes it clear through his writings that manifest manners are "unreal sensations" that have become "the real without a referent to an actual tribal remembrance" (*Manifest Manners* 8). Like Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco, Vizenor too is convinced that American society in its search for the real can only fabricate "absolute fakes in the ruins of representation" (*Manifest Manners* 9). Vizenor's novels, founded upon the stable structure of myths, are trickster hermeneutics that interpret,

"the simulation in the literature of survivance" (*Manifest Manners* 15). What Vizenor has said about Trickster stories in *Manifest Manners* is applicable to his novels in general. They "arise in silence and are the holotropes of imagination." They have "manifold turns of scenes, the brush of natural reason and characters that liberate the mind" (*Manifest Manners* 15). The novels have therapeutic effect since they possess the healing power of oral stories. They cure simulations and the absence of the real through chance and wonder that is implied in trickster tales.

Vizenor shares Lyotard's conviction that "the meta narratives of the past have collapsed, creating a new theoretical situation in which the concept can no longer pretend to control or grasp its objects" (Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* 21). His fiction is a discontinuous indeterminism where finality is no longer located at the conclusion.

A study of Vizenor's novels reveals the fact that Vizenor has employed the phenomenon of the postmodern carnival in his novels. Vizenor's tricksters exhibit a carnivalesque irreverence towards all kinds of authoritarian, oppressive and monologic ideologies. There are carnivalesque situations in novels like *Bearheart* where dominant norms are transgressed and a fundamentally different situation is introduced. Vizenor revels in deconstruction, reversal and inversion

and carries out the Bakhtinian carnivalesque 'logic of the turn about' and 'the inside-out.' His novels, in general, are carnivalesque in nature with festivities and rituals and have a deep rooted relation to the primordial order and the primordial thinking of man. All hierarchical structures are suspended in order to draw patterns of change and renewal. The crisis in life is met with ritual laughter that embodies death and rebirth, negation and affirmation. Vizenor parodies the rules of codes, conventions and hierarchies to point out the meaninglessness of established systems. Vizenor's texts are carnivalesque in that they break down the usual academic boundaries and transgress the limits of academic discourse. There is no closure of significance in these novels. His fiction is an open text with a plurality of signification. Vizenor partakes of Levi Strauss's view of the trickster as "reflecting a more logically sophisticated level of culture that can create a mediating character in response to the perception of contradictions in a belief system" (Levi-Strauss, "The Development of the Trickster in Children's Narrative" 30).

Vizenor's tricksters enjoy power and freedom. He has modified the trickster tradition according to contemporary needs. His fiction reaffirms the validity of native American culture. He concentrates on the trickster's rhetorical powers and ability to survive. His trickster protagonist is "an inexhaustible creator of situations and episode"

(Ramsey 27) like the typical trickster figures Coyote and Hare of North American Indian cultures.

Vizenor's novels capture his personal anguish of survival and the potential power of liminal existence. He envisions himself as a trickster - like mediator and asserts in his works that the trickster voice, if properly channeled, can work out a mighty positive transformation. In all his writings manifest manners and manifest destiny give way to a genuine system of values founded upon the taxonomy of trickster simulacra. His novels are trickster tales that confirm Silko's opinion that "you don't have anything / if you don't have the stories" (Silko, *Storyteller* 2). Vizenor celebrates the native American epistemological reality and tells the stories of the survivors who struggle to define their identities and fates in a world of hyper realities. Vizenor has mythically refracted this reality for aesthetic purpose. He includes myth in his novels because of his awareness that a particular aspect of reality can only be understood in connection with the particular means of representing it. His novels provide the readers with a new and original impression of reality. The cognition of reality is achieved in his novels through utterances that play a vital role in the consciousness and comprehension of reality. He does not finalize reality. He conceptualizes reality through the process embedded in myths.

There is a fixed formula for Vizenor's narration. It is based on the stories of creation and those of the tricksters. As the tales in the trickster mythology move back and forth, Vizenor's cultural conversations move between text and interpretation and bring about meaning and psychic unity. Vizenor foregrounds myths, memories and oral history. He links the past and the present, the oral and the written, always keeping in mind the fundamental meaning of the creation myth. In his novels he presents an authentic, complex and multistructured world.

Vizenor's strength lies in his artistic capacity to see everything in coexistence and interaction. He detects dialogical relationships in all manifestations of human life. All his novels possess what Bakhtin calls "heteroglossia." Vizenor's mode of visualization, his special artistic vision of space and time, his presentation of multiple worlds and plurality of valid voices render to his fiction a 'polyphonic' dimension. "Unlike the singular savage in colonial narratives, the native Trickster dons the armor of multiplicity - its apparition like qualities allow a fluid characterization of tribal cultures that escape and evade the truthful pretensions of a racialized discourse" (Mitchel 103). The originality of Vizenor's creative process lies in the selection and combination of words and plot situations.

Vizenor's tricksters are occupied primarily with the task of assisting society to gain consciousness of itself and an awareness of the inadequacies and ambiguities of the world and their lives. In Vizenor's fiction it is not only the reality of the protagonist, but even that of the external world and the every day life surrounding him that are drawn into the process of self awareness. Vizenor's fiction denies the experience of an integrated and stable reality. His novels act as a challenge to literary and intellectual orthodoxy. They are moulded in the reality of the open-ended present in contact with current issues and living contemporaries.

Vizenor is an original and innovative writer. As a methodical writer, he carefully writes footnotes and documents the historical sources of his works. He is often confronted with the problems of translation. To achieve a written approximation of traditional orality, Vizenor writes a postmodern fiction. In his novels, he has cited the works of contemporary authors and the writings of various scholars in the fields of traditional song and story. In an interview with Laura Coltelli, Vizenor specifically states his historical sources - "I do work into everything I write so called historical events, and I say so called because some of the historical events would be obtained from either Indian writers or from Indian storytellers and other events are from non-Indian historians, so that they would be either in the worst

example, colonial and probably the best example would be the methodological histories" ("Gerald Vizenor" 156). A study of his novels reveals the impact of the theories postulated by Barthes, Bakhtin, Baudrillard, Derrida, Eco, Foucault, Jung and Iser. Derrida's concept of 'trace' is for Vizenor 'a new means of survival.' "The postindian turn in literatures, the later indication of new narratives are an invitation to the closure of dominance in the ruins. The invitation uncovers traces of tribal survivance, trickster hermeneutics and the remanence of intransitive shadows. The traces are shadows, shadows, shadows, the natural search of shadows, memories, and visions in heard stories" (*Manifest Manners* 63). His voice is singular among many other voices in native American literature. He alone argues through his novels that the destiny of the American Indian is in language and that American Indian literature will survive only through the merits of language. His novels exhort the native Americans to dissociate themselves from the cliches of invented 'Indian' and escape from 'terminal creeds.' His novels are oral and communal in origin. Most of his novels like *Bearheart*, *Heirs* and *Trickster* begin with the trickster community as a whole. What makes Vizenor a great writer is that instead of inscribing reality as is usually done in written stories, he creates reality with his powerful imagination and magic use of words. His novels have a deep impact on all types of readers. Those who partake of the cultural practices and beliefs described in the text and those who do not share the intimacy

with the culture described in his texts are equally given the possibility to recover from fragmentation and to achieve a wholeness of self and community. The cultural conversations in his fiction imply the existence of the other. His novels negate the individuality fostered by a European vision of life and affirm the otherness as expounded in native American oral narratives. There is the subversion of and disdain for authority in his fiction. His fictional space is occupied by multivocal discourses encompassing past and current tradition and values told by a range of American Indian voices.

Arnold Krupat while describing the potential of Vizenor's work as ethnocriticism comments, "I would once more cite the extremely fascinating conjunction of Vizenor's commitment to post modern 'trickster' fluidities with their ostensibly comic, infinite openness, and his commitment to what I have called premodern tribal identities with their strong sense of natural rights and responsibility" (Krupat, *Ethnocriticism* 191).

Vizenor can be compared to Isaac Bashevis Singer, the greatest representative of Yiddish literature because of Vizenor's devotion to his tribe. Like Singer, who wrote in Yiddish and adhered to the Jewish tradition, Vizenor has yielded completely to the *anishinabe* tribal community and to the claims of human imagination. He has devoted himself to writing about a community that was brutally destroyed by

the white capitalist society for the sheer crime of having been born as native Americans.

Like the literatures of the indigenous people of North America, Vizenor's writings discuss rituals, folklore, mythology, the relationship between self and community, and the evils of colonial invasion and bicultural ambivalence. The ceremonies in the novels heal; words disclose race relations and ethnic identity, and function as a process of creation, transformation and restoration. Fiction and fact merge in his works. The tender care with which Vizenor treats the native Americans is evident from the expression 'tribal people' used by Vizenor to refer to the native Americans. Vizenor requests his readers "not to pretend, but to see and hear the real stories behind the words, the voices of the animals in me, not the definition of the words alone" (*Dead Voices* 7). Though rooted in a particular tradition, Vizenor's novels transcend barriers of culture and language and carry universal significance.

Vizenor's novels like *The Trickster of Liberty* and *The Heirs of Columbus* state the fact that language constructs identity and identity is performance. In *Manifest Manners* there is an emphasis on the idea of performance and the orality of his texts. Vizenor comments, "Listen, oral stories are best performance of simulations because the reference is in performance" (16). Vizenor begins his *Bearheart* with the word 'listen'

and thereby foregrounds the listening and telling aspects of the native American story telling tradition.

Novels like *Dead Voices* convey Vizenor's realization that oral texts could be handed down to the readers only through the written form. He argues, "The published stories over those we hear are not more terrible than the earth over our bodies, cold water over a hot red stone... The stories of the bear survived the hunters, and the bear in the mirror, endures the published stories. Bagese, these published stories are the same as the Wanaki pictures and the stories that you placed in your apartment to remember the earth" (*Dead Voices* 44).

Vizenor's texts are what Krupat calls "Oral texts" (*Recovering the Word* 124). There are also visual remembrances in his novels. Stories come from Wanaki pictures (*Dead Voices*), birchbark scrolls (*Griever*) and the bones of Christopher Columbus and Pocahontas (*Heirs*).

A reading of Vizenor's novels reveals that rituals are conducted and trickster power is celebrated even in urban landscapes. He comments,

If a culture is to live, it changes, it always changes. If a people live, they imagine themselves always and in a new sense. And here we are in the city, and people are still trying to figure out

what was the past. Well, there isn't any past, we're it, and I am, and I'm on the intersection, and I'm going to tell stories about it. Stories (are) comic acts of Survival. ("Gerald Vizenor" 164)

Thus as an enemy of manifest manners and manifest destiny, Gerald Vizenor, the great prophet of postindian survivance, remains in the intersections of the interior landscapes eternally telling stories to recapture the voices that are dead. The native Americans survive. They survive through the grace of his powerful imagination.

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