

CHAPTER FIVE

Not Yet Fifty: Postcolonial Confessions from an Outpost in the San Juan Basin

"The deepest side of being an American is the sense of being like nothing before us in history. . . ." Kazin

"I am I because my little dog knows me." Stein

"Very truly, I tell you, before Abraham was, I am." Jn 8:58

If representation of the self--indeed, the very concept of self--is problematic in contemporary autobiographical theory and postmodern literature, it is no less an issue in the Fourth Gospel. For in that book, too, Jesus' hidden, mistaken, intertextual, trans-historical identity is crucial to the plot. Although the reader is told from the very beginning who Jesus is (Jn 1:1-18), his antagonists never seem to get it right (7:40-42; 8:25-28; 11:41-42; 19:33). Even his own disciples are unable to figure him out until just hours before his death (16:29-30). Working with cultural-anthropological models in biblical criticism, Bruce Malina has noted that in the Mediterranean honor/shame culture of Jesus' day, to ask who you were was to inquire where you were from and who your family was.¹ This is certainly true for the Fourth Gospel. Every question about Jesus' identity is ultimately an issue of who his parents are and where he is from (6:42; 8:14, 19; 16:28; 19:9). In the southwestern United States where I grew up, personhood was constructed along similar lines.²

¹See his discussion of the "dyadic personality" in *The New Testament World*, 51-60, esp. 56. Karl Weintraub puts it this way: In classical antiquity "[i]ndividuals were embedded in the social mass of given blood relations" (*The Value of the Individual*, 2).

²David Brumble goes so far as to compare explicitly the ancient Mediterranean world's view of the person with that of Native Americans (*American Indian Autobiography*, 3-5, 46, 115-116, 122, 136-137; cf. also Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism*, xii-xiii).

The distinctive qualities of the Indian persona are dramatically illustrated by Tony Hillerman in his novel *People of Darkness*. There the Navajo Tribal policeman, Jim Chee, meets a white woman who asks him about himself. After a lengthy answer to her question, the woman is baffled by his response and says, "You're not playing the game. . . . I told you about me. You're just telling me about your family."

The statement surprises Chee, since he "defined himself by his family. How else? And then it occurred to him that white people didn't. They identified themselves by what they did as individuals" (105; see Bakerman, "Cutting Both Ways," 22; Erisman, "Hillerman's Uses of the Southwest," 13; and Pierson, "Mystery Literature and Ethnography," 24-29).

In a strange way, I have discovered much about myself from reading Hillerman's books. For, as Ward Churchill notes, "through [Hillerman's] efforts, an appreciable portion of the American reading public . . . have for the first time found themselves identifying directly with native characters, thereby

Like many others in our academic discipline of New Testament studies, I have come to the guild of biblical scholarship through the roots of American Protestant fundamentalism. But the anti-intellectualism that I was raised with, in the fierce primitivism and sectarianism of the lay-led Plymouth Brethren, was tempered by a childhood spent exploring the eroded cliffs and canyons of the Navajo Indian Reservation in northeastern Arizona. There, as the son of a missionary school teacher and a school cook, I encountered a culture radically different from that of my own family.

Metaphor³

I was seven years old and already enamored with Indians when we moved to Immanuel Mission from the plains of central Kansas in the spring of 1959. When my two older brothers and I played cowboys and Indians with the neighborhood boys in Ramona,⁴ Kansas, we were the only ones who willingly chose to be the underdogs.⁵ Usually after the proper number of cowboys had been selected, the rejects would become our camp stragglers, complaining all afternoon about their horrific fate. But not us. We were wild-eyed warriors, raiding the westward headed wagon trains with their U.S. Cavalry escorts. I have a photograph of my brothers and myself at the ages of six, seven, and eight, standing stiffly in front of our house with store-bought bows, tomahawks, and feather war bonnets, and the fiercest looks we could muster for our camera-crazy aunt.⁶

I can still remember the worst whipping I ever got as a child. It was for a secret war dance my brothers and I once held after sundown. The predetermined spot for the celebration had been carefully scouted earlier in the day, and if no enemies were lurking about, we would assemble after supper at the smoldering backyard trash can, next to our neighbor's tinder dry, stubble strewn field. Two miles south of that field ran the original Santa Fe Trail,⁷ and local farmers would tell of occasionally plowing up Indian

understanding at least some aspects of the modern Indian circumstance in ways which have never before been possible for them" (*Fantasies of the Master Race*, 267).

³Jacques Derrida writes: "Thought stumbles upon metaphor, or metaphor falls to thought at the moment when meaning attempts to emerge from itself in order to be stated, enunciated, brought to the light of language" ("White Mythology," in *Margins of Philosophy*, 233). And Eric Cheyfitz adds: "Metaphor marks the frontier between the domestic and the foreign precisely by blurring that boundary" (*The Poetics of Imperialism*, 94; cf. 106-109).

⁴The farming community of Ramona, whose name probably derived from the mestiza heroine of Helen Hunt Jackson's vastly popular 1884 novel of the same name, had a population of about 100 in the mid-1950s (see further, May, *The Annotated Ramona*, i-xvi; Scheick, *The Half-Blood*, 44-45, 82-85; for a postcolonial definition of "mestiza/o," see Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices*, 14, 18).

⁵Rayna Green discusses the origin of the children's game "cowboys and Indians" in "Poor Lo and Dusky Ramona," 88-89, especially n. 17.

⁶"The photograph acts toward the self like a harshly lit mirror," writes Michael Ignatieff, "like the pitiless historian confronted with the wish fulfillments of nationalistic fable or political lie" (*The Russian Album*, 7; cf. Sontag, *On Photography*, 37-38, 41).

⁷Although I did not realize it at the time, the "Holy Faith" Trail had already played an important role in my family's history. My father's great grandmother's uncles traveled it in 1848; in 1880 my father's great uncle helped lay track for the railroad that was following it; and my father's father was a postal clerk on the Santa Fe railway line in the 1940s and 1950s.

arrowheads or iron scraps from freight wagons abandoned along the trailside. We imagined ourselves

Pretending to be Indians. Ramona, Kansas, 1958. I am in the center.

Ramona, Kansas and the Santa Fe Trail

(Courtesy of the Kansas Department of Transportation)

to be Pawnees on the warpath that evening, plotting to raid a few of those slow-moving, overloaded wagons. With a hot, dry Kansas wind blowing from the east, showers of sparks flew from our fiery brands like a Fourth of July fireworks display. We hopped, whooped, and hollered, waving our glowing wands in intricate airborne patterns. But suddenly a stranger stepped out from the shadow of the dilapidated garage. From the strong, purposeful gait we knew it was our father, returning late from school. In an instant the sacred spell was shattered. Like some primitive pictograph, our bruised and battered buttocks would bear the bitter memory of that evening for days.⁸

But now it was May 1959 and the Kansas prairie with its imaginary Indians was fading quickly into the distance. Pawnee Rock, Fort Larned, and Dodge City were far behind us, and we were simply a tired family of seven making a hot, dusty, eight hundred mile trip to live with real Indians in Arizona. On that endless four-day journey to the other side of the world, one of my two older brothers, Robert or Gregory, usually got to ride in the cab of Orville Robson's old farm truck which carried our household belongings. That left six of us uncomfortably glued to each other and to the sweat-soaked seats of our Ford sedan--my two younger sisters, Brenda and Beth; two of us boys; my father; and my mother, who was seven months pregnant with David, her sixth and last child in a ten-year span.

At about noon on the third day of our journey we crossed the Continental Divide at Wolf Creek Pass, in southern Colorado. We stopped and had lunch at a roadside picnic area near the headwaters of the San Juan River, a short distance beyond the divide. I would spend the next ten years immersed in the sun parched basin that river drained.⁹ It would set the boundaries of my childhood world.

We lived our first fourteen months at Immanuel Mission¹⁰ in a two-room adobe and stone cellar, sharing the single bathroom with Yellowhair, an ancient Navajo who knew no English and was a survivor of the "Long Walk."¹¹ Yellowhair was more than a hundred years old when we first met him, and when he smiled, his face would wrinkle and crease, making him look like the loose skin that covered the joint of my thumb. For twenty years he had been the only baptized Navajo in Morning Meeting.¹²

⁸We were playing with fire in spite of our parent's numerous warnings, and knowing full well that they lived by the biblical adage, "Spare the rod, spoil the child" (see Prov 20:30; 22:15; 23:13-14; cf. Gosse, Father and Son, 43).

⁹Symbolically, my two older brothers and I were buried beneath the cold waters of baptism our first Sunday on the reservation.

¹⁰The name *Immanuel* means "God [is] with us," and comes from Isaiah's prophetic oracle of salvation (Isa 7:14, cf. Mt 1:23). For the mission staff the *us* part (*'amu*) was a crucial, exclusivistic term. God could only be found with us, on that ten acres of fenced desert, and nowhere else within a fifty mile radius.

¹¹This is what the Navajo people called their 1864 journey into exile at Bosque Redondo in central New Mexico (Hillerman, Listening Woman, 126-127).

¹²We used the phrase "Morning Meeting," a term betraying its anti-sacramental, Quaker origins, to refer to our weekly "Breaking of Bread" or communion service (Gosse, Father and Son, 101-102, 142).

Yellowhair's room adjoined the basement bathroom. And occasionally, on his way to empty his slop-bucket in the morning, he would stand and silently watch my mother getting dressed. With a sudden feeling of strange eyes upon her, she would turn and glimpse his shuffling shadow or hear his door scraping shut on the hard-packed dirt floor of his windowless room. Lately I have found myself yearning to find a place where I could meet Yellowhair once again, speak his language, and explore the shriveled memories of his

Immanuel Mission

(Map courtesy of [Arizona Highways](#) magazine)

Immanuel Mission has always been spelled with a capital E on U.S. road maps, although we never spelled it that way. The mission is about twenty miles southwest of the Four Corners monument (the name given to the place where Utah, Colorado, New

Mexico, and Arizona meet), and in 1959 it was forty-five miles from the nearest highway, which stopped at the New Mexico state line.

Under the vision and guidance of Harry Ironside and Carl Armerding, the Holcomb family established the mission in 1922 on the site of an old abandoned trading post. When we moved there it consisted of eight buildings on about ten fenced acres. There was a two-room school, a garage, a shop and storage building, one private residence, a building that housed the diesel generator which supplied our electricity, the "big house" (a three-story dormitory, dining room, and staff residence), a hogan used for overnight Navajo guests, and a new, partially completed dormitory.

On the road to Immanuel Mission in late May, 1959.

My sister Beth is in the foreground. "Shiprock," a one thousand foot high volcanic plug, is in the background.

Exploring a New World

My oldest brother Robert and I investigate the Yazzie family's abandoned chaha'ó, or "pole arbor" as Tony Hillerman would call it (June, 1959).
youth.

In the windstorms of early summer the front room of our apartment would fill with fine-grained sand that seeped through the ground-level windows, and during late summer thunderstorms, chocolate colored water would flood the room. On those days we were allowed to stay in bed a little longer as my father shoveled and swept the room clean. Sometimes a snake or two would find our cool, den-like cellar of adobe and rock, and the shrill shriek of its discoverer--usually one of my sisters--would bring the entire family running.

Within two years we had built our own four-bedroom, cinder-block house with all the conveniences of the modern world. It never flooded and it kept out unwelcome visitors better than the two-room cellar ever did. We had electricity, gas heat, running water, two indoor toilets, and a bright yellow, van-like "carry-all" (bought for fifty dollars at Army Surplus in Phoenix). But outside the mission compound no one had these comforts, and no one seemed to miss them. Most of the Diné¹³ I saw rode horseback or in horse-drawn wagons. They lived in hogans--one-room mud huts with crude oil drum, wood burning stoves in the center. They traveled for miles to fill their barrels with drinking water, and their toilets were any bushes tall enough or ravines deep enough to hide them from the curious eyes of a roving white boy.

Inside our house we read the Bible daily around the dining room table and in Sunday School I memorized verses that spoke of a Holy Spirit poured out on Jews thousands of years ago. But outside our front door I was getting to know people who encountered spirits, witches, and holiness (*hózhó*, harmony)¹⁴--all within a quarter-mile walk of Immanuel Mission's fenced compound.

Inside our house we kept a dog as a pet, and it usually slept at night curled up on our front doorstep.¹⁵ But beyond our front door the name for dog was *lé chaa'i* (shit-

¹³This is what the Navajo people call themselves. It can best be translated as "the people" (Hillerman, *Dance Hall of the Dead*, 20).

¹⁴Hillerman, *The Dark Wind*, 55-58. Although there is no "r" sound in the Navajo language, Hillerman spells the word "*hozto*," on a number of occasions. In a recent interview, however, he acknowledges his earlier misspellings of the word (Breen, "Interview with Tony Hillerman," 51).

¹⁵As David White notes, in many Indo-European traditions "[t]he dog either remains stationary, on the threshold between night and day or between indoors and outdoors; or it constitutes a moving periphery, enclosing the herd that it guards from savage predators (often its cousins, wolves) or human rustlers, or providing a moving horizon between nature and culture as it pursues wild game, running ahead of its master, the hunter, who follows its bark.

eater), and I saw starving, cowering dogs kicked at every opportunity.¹⁶ Occasionally laughing Navajo children would throw live puppies into the mission's garbage dump fires. It was not unusual to find their small blackened bodies the next morning, mixed in among the empty cans and broken bottles.

My most vivid childhood memories are of dogs.¹⁷ They haunt my dreams. Their silvery shadows flit across the moonlit edges of my unconscious. I remember two dogs that we owned in Kansas, although the first, Chloe, lives in my memory only as a name. The second was named Bimbo, and from time to time my brother Greg and I would pretend that we were she. We would crawl around on all fours, bark ferociously, and eat her dry dog food from the bowl on our back porch.

In our first few years on the reservation, our family selected dogs for pets from among the many Navajo strays that made their home in the mission dump. Our first transformed stray was named Blackie. In our home she grew to be sleek, healthy, and alert.¹⁸ But to the Navajos, a well fed, grinning dog meant only one thing: a cunning

"Ultimately, the dog, with its ambiguous roles and cultural values, its constant presence in human experience coupled with its nearness to the feral world, is the alter ego of man himself, a reflection of both human culture and human savagery" (Myths of the Dog-Man, 14-15; cf. Gottlieb, "Dog: Ally or Traitor?" 486-488). The coyote and skinwalker share this "alter ego" role in Navajo culture and mythology. For example, Hillerman writes: "He reminded Chee how Coyote always sat in the doorway of the hogan when the Holy People met in Council, neither quite part of these representatives of cosmic power, nor totally allied with the wilderness of evil outside" (Coyote Waits, 70, cf. 234-236; Listening Woman, 48-50, 81-82, 101-102; Dance Hall of the Dead, 163). In classical Greek culture, the Cynic philosophers played this ambiguous role. Leif Vaage describes the Cynics, whose name was derived from *kyon*, the Greek word for dog, as "stray dogs on the margins of their world, barking and doing whatever at the edge of town" ("Like Dogs Barking," 36).

¹⁶This translation of *lé chaa'i* comes from somewhere in one of Tony Hillerman's novels--the specific book and page I cannot recall. Although the Navajo word for dog was one of the first words I learned on the reservation, it never dawned on me to connect it with *chaa'* (excrement)--another word I learned very quickly--until I read it in the Hillerman novel (cf. Scobie, "Slums, Sanitation and Mortality in the Roman World," 418-420). Strangely, it was this particular translation, now lost to me, that rekindled my interest in my childhood years on the Navajo reservation.

In Homer's Illiad, "scorned women are 'dog flies,' or 'bitches,' or bitch-eyed," (Friedrich, "Sanity and the Myth of Honor," 289). And in ancient Greek culture, women were quite literally the shit-eaters. Von Staden writes: "When confronted with the female body, and especially the female reproductive parts, the Hippocratic healing hand did not hesitate to draw on the excrement of animals [for potions and poultices] . . . , ingredients shunned in Hippocratic treatment of males" ("Women and Dirt," 12; for the role of excrement in Cynic behavior, cf. Sloterdijk, Critique of Cynical Reason, 151; see also Greenblatt, "Filthy Rites," in Learning to Curse, 59-79, esp., 64-65; for the use of human excrement in dehumanization and torture, see Des Pres, "Excremental Assault," 203-220).

¹⁷"Recollection, I have found, is usually about half invention," writes Wallace Stegner (Crossing to Safety, 64). Or in Timothy Adams's words, "memory is the self's autobiography, an unwritten narrative with an unreliable narrator" (Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography, 169). This is because, as Daniel Goleman explains, "[t]he self has in its power all the tools--and temptations--of a totalitarian state. The self acts as a censor, selecting and deleting the flow of imagination" (Vital Lies, Simple Truths, 95). In spite of this difficult state of affairs, Andrée Collard is quick to point out that "without memories there [is] no present" (Rape of the Wild, 92).

¹⁸Collard writes: "Properly reared pets have a great deal in common with the well-adjusted women and people of colour whom the white man has conquered/colonised/enlaved. The dog is considered 'properly reared' when it whimpers and allows itself to be petted. Women are well bred, well adjusted when they efface themselves behind joyless smiles, limp voices and demure mannerisms that make them tractable.

killer. She could only have gotten fat by killing and eating sheep. One day I found Blackie under the mission's old Studebaker, lying in a puddle of blood, turned inside out by a bullet through her side.¹⁹ My eight-year-old eyes watched her life slowly pour out on the hard-packed adobe. She had crawled home to her favorite hiding place, to nurse her four newborn pups one last time.

The second stray our family took in appeared to be part German shepherd. He was larger than Blackie and light-colored,²⁰ and after a few weeks in our home he had changed from a cowering creature into a spirited and loyal friend. But one day his rightful owners came to our door accusing us of theft, and the dog, of killing sheep. They demanded the dog back. Then they took the dog and tied an old piece of briar-like barbed wire around his neck. With the husband pulling him, the wife kicked the dog the entire mile to their house. We children watched in horror as they made their way across the desert sand. The dog never got off his haunches. He cried like a newborn pup but never opened his mouth to bite them.²¹

Two days later the dog returned to us. His tail was wagging and the wire was still wound tightly around his neck. We were overjoyed to see him, but our joy turned to anguish when our parents made us take him back to his original owners. He wouldn't leave us, so we threw stones at him to chase him away. I don't remember what happened to that dog. I can't recall its name.

Inside my childhood missionary home I was a boy who had lived until age seven in rural Kansas. But that was not how the Navajo children outside my front door viewed

Slaves and colonised people are well adjusted when they assimilate white values and behaviour patterns and allow themselves to be petted, i.e. show deference to whites" (Rape of the Wild, 87; see also Churchill, Fantasies of the Master Race, 257-260, 264-269, 276-279); but cf. Davis, "The Moral Status of Dogs, Forests, and Other Persons," 50-59).

The association of dogs with women goes back millennia. White argues: "Perhaps the most striking of all [ethnographic details] is the juxtaposition, in Europe, India, and China, of races of Dog-men with Amazons, or with a Kingdom of Women. . . . In fact, when we look closely at many of the world's traditions of the ancestral union of a male dog with a human woman, we find certain recurrent motifs that point . . . to mythic themes. . . ." (Myths of the Dog-Man, 187-188; cf. 47-70; see also Estés, Women Who Run with the Wolves, 115-129, esp. 123-124). Similar stories also circulated among the conquistadors in the New World (Varner and Varner, Dogs of the Conquest, 125; cf. Greenblatt, Learning to Curse, 21-24).

¹⁹In connecting wombs, wells, and altars together in the biblical tradition, Elaine Scarry argues that "what had been the interior lining [of the womb and well] now becomes the exterior, table-like surface [of the altar]. . . . That the altar's surface is the reversed lining of the body is made more imaginistically immediate in all those places where blood is poured across the altar. . . ." And just as the altar is a turning of the body inside out, so too "belief in the scriptures is literally the act of turning one's own body inside out--[since] imagining, creating, the capacity for symbolic and religious thought begin with the capacity to endow interior physical events with an external, nonphysical referent" (The Body in Pain, 190; cf. Jn 19:32-37).

²⁰White points out that the "Indo-European dogs of the dead generally moved around in pairs. . . . Most often, one of these dogs was black and the other white, symbols of a path that led not only from a past life to a present death, but also from death to a future life" (Myths of the Dog-Man, 39).

²¹Isa 53:7. "Melzack and Scott have shown through animal torture what torturers throughout history have known all along: it is possible to traumatize the sense out of living creatures and bring them to the point at which they submit to any atrocity without a whimper while becoming hopelessly dependent upon their torturers," writes Collard (Rape of the Wild, 63). Primo Levi concurs: "To destroy a man is difficult, almost as difficult as to create one: it has not been easy, nor quick, but you Germans have succeeded. Here we are, docile under your gaze; from our side you have nothing more to fear, no acts of violence, no words of defiance, not even a look of judgment" (Survival in Auschwitz, 135-136).

me. Most of them had been weaned on nightmarish tales of nineteenth century *bilagáana*²² savagery. Consequently, they believed that I was a direct descendant of Kit²³ Carson, the

²²This is the Navajo word for white person (Hillerman, *Skinwalkers*, 11; *Talking God*, 14). It is probably a corruption of the Spanish *Americano*.

²³Christopher Carson's nickname "Kit" is fortuitous for American mythology. General James H. Carleton, the staunch Calvinist under whom Carson served, planned the removal of all Navajos from their native land in part to "teach them the truths of Christianity" (Trafzer, *The Kit Carson Campaign*, 184; cf. 230-231, 237-239; see also Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction*, 243-275). But with the nickname Kit, Christopher Carson loses all symbolic connection with his superior's missionary zeal and that of the other famous "Christ-bearer" in the New World: Christopher Columbus.

St. Christopher has often been portrayed in Christian iconography with the head of a dog; a giant who ate human flesh before his conversion (White, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, 31, 34-36, 47). Not surprisingly, his namesake Christopher Columbus is credited with inventing the word cannibal (White, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, 63; cf. Cheyfitz, *The Poetics of Imperialism*, 43, 61-62; and Arens, *The Man-Eating Myth*, 44-48, 53-54) and with introducing human-eating dogs into the New World on his second voyage in 1493 (Varner and Varner, *Dogs of the Conquest*, 4). Spanish greyhounds were first used in battle on May 5, 1494 in the landing on Jamaica. After their formal use in pitched battle on the Vega Real a year later, they became a standard element in the Spanish subjugation of Native Americans (*ibid.*, 5, 8, 11). Within twenty years, hungry Spanish war dogs were being fed live Indian babies, torn from their mothers' arms (*ibid.*, 13, 82-83). They were first used in tracking escaped African slaves by Christopher Columbus's son, Diego, in January 1522 (*ibid.*, 22, 57-58; a strategy subsequently employed by North American slave owners); and later as instruments of God's ultimate judgment upon Indians' homosexual activity, zoophilia, and lapses into heresy (*ibid.*, 41, 193, see also xvi; cf. Williams, "The Abominable Sin: The Spanish Campaign against Sodomy and its Results in Modern Latin America," in *The Spirit and the Flesh*, 131-151, esp., 134-140). To this day in Mexico, the common nickname for boys named *Jesús* is *chucho*, which in Spanish means a mutt or a mangy stray dog.

Unlike the Christus Victor myth associated with Christopher Columbus, American legend and art transformed "Kit" Carson into a wily young fox who outsmarted numerically superior foes, or into an innocent little kitten, who was forced to fight for his life when cornered by wild, vicious "critters and varmints" (Carter, 'Dear Old Kit', 3-36; cf. Steckmesser, *The Western Hero in History and Legend*, 24-53). Thus, Thelma Guild can write that Carson's "adventures have an epic quality like those of Homeric heroes of the ancient Greeks. . . . Americans do well to remember Kit Carson as one of their heroes, for Fortune has seldom smiled upon a more deserving character" (*Kit Carson: A Pattern for Heroes*, 294-295).

St. Christopher, from a 12th-c. martyrology.

Hist fol 415, fol. 50r. Landsbibliothek Stuttgart, Germany

(Foto Marburg/Art Resource, NY)

Christopher Columbus's and Kit Carson's namesake, the giant dog-faced
"Chananean."

"One woman, . . . not able to make good her escape, determined that the dogs should not tear her to pieces . . . and taking a rope and tying her one-year-old child to her leg, hanged herself from a beam. Yet she was not in time to prevent the dogs from ripping the infant to pieces, even though a friar did arrive and baptize the infant before it died" (Las Casas, A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies, 73-74).

Engraving by Theodore de Bry, plate in Brevisima relacion
(Rare Book and Special Collections Division)
(Library of Congress)

The sixteenth century Dominican priest, Bartolomé de Las Casas, was truly a watchdog of God (*Domini canes*) and a tireless defender of Native American rights (see Gutiérrez, Las Casas: In Search of the Poor of Jesus Christ, 8-12).

**Vasco Núñez de Balboa sets his European dogs on Indians
accused of practicing sodomy**

Engraving by Theodore de Bry, plate 22 in *Americae Pars IV*. Frankfurt, 1595
(Rare Book and Special Collections Division)
(Library of Congress)

white man who had burned their family orchards and cornfields, starved their old women and young children, and forced those who survived into exile in a foreign land.²⁴

It should not have come as a surprise, I suppose, to discover that my Navajo playmates' accusation of my complicity in Kit Carson's scorched-earth warfare was actually much closer to the truth than I once thought.²⁵ Several years ago, while tracing my family history, I found that four Gibson brothers (my father's great grandmother's uncles), volunteered for service in the Mexican-American War and were stationed at Santa Fe in 1848.²⁶ As part of Company G, First Illinois Volunteers, three of them traveled with Kit Carson west from Missouri along the Santa Fe Trail, and near my first home in Ramona, Kansas. At least one of them, Theodore C. Gibson,²⁷ probably participated in raids against the Navajo, riding up into the Chuska Mountains in northeastern New Mexico within sight of where I was raised.²⁸

A generation later, the Swede, Rolf Johnson (my father's mother's uncle), was settling into a sod house with his parents and siblings on the Nebraska prairie,

²⁴Hillerman, *Dance Hall of the Dead*, 75-76.

²⁵But I find solace in Walter Benn Michaels's perspective, who argues that "[v]irtually all the events and actions that we study did not happen to us and were not done by us. In this sense, the history we study is never our own; it is always the history of people who were in some respects like us and in other respects different. When, however, we claim it as ours, we commit ourselves to the ontology of the 'Negro' [or the 'Indian,' or the 'Euroamerican'], to the identity of 'we' and 'they' and the primacy of race" ("Race into Culture," 682; see also Knapp, "Collective Memory and the Actual Past," 136-137, 142-143; and Brumble, *American Indian Autobiography*, 174). Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin, however, strongly criticize Michaels's perspective. They rightly recognize it as a "radically individualist, voluntaristic, and attenuated notion of something that can only with difficulty be called 'identity'" ("Diaspora," 702; cf. McKenna, *Violence and Difference*, 139-140).

²⁶*Soldiers' and Patriots' Biographical Album*, 172-174.

²⁷Why was Theodore C., whose name means "God's gift," the one who remained in Santa Fe under Colonel Edward W. B. Newby's command? Why weren't Theodore's brothers George, William, or John the ones "taking part in the operations against the Indians on the frontier" (Hoffmann, *History of La Salle County, Illinois*, 301)? The name Theodore, like Christopher, is bothersome. I want to erase it.

²⁸Myers, "Illinois Volunteers in New Mexico," 10-21; McNitt, "The Navajo Campaigns," 186-191. Carson's military appointment under General Carleton, which led to the Navajo people's exile at Bosque Redondo, would occur twenty years later.

voraciously devouring every Police Gazette and American frontier dime novel he could find. He kept a careful journal of his own adventures, mimicking the grand writing style of his favorite pulp authors. On a 1877 hunting expedition in western Nebraska, Rolf managed to kill what must have been one of the last free-roaming buffalo in the state.²⁹ A year and a half later he was off exploring the Black Hills of Dakota Territory, from Deadwood to Spearfish. Somewhere in those tangled gulches of gold mines, Chinatowns, whorehouses, and saloons he met the notoriously untamed women, Calamity Jane and Bronco Moll.³⁰

Rolf's search for the mythic American frontier led him eventually to New Mexico Territory where in 1880 he was laying track for the Santa Fe Railroad across the hotly disputed checkerboard strip of the Navajo Reservation.³¹ On November 16 of that year, near Mt. Taylor (one of the four sacred mountains of the Navajo), he wrote in his diary of meeting the splendidly dressed Navajo leader, Cayatanita.³²

A decade later, in 1891, Rolf suggested the name of his younger brother to William F. Cody's business partners, who were planning to add a new attraction to their Wild West show. As a result, George Johnson joined Buffalo Bill's Congress of Rough Riders late that year,³³ subsequently participating in its many staged Indian battles.³⁴ For seven years he toured the United States and England with the troupe, beginning with a performance before Queen Victoria in 1892.³⁵ A few years after he began traveling with

²⁹Journal entries for November 6-9, 1877 ("Journal 1876-1880"). Parts of the first three volumes of Rolf's five volume journal were printed in the Holdrege newspaper, The Daily Citizen, in 1939, and parts of volumes 1-4 were later published as "The Saga of a Wandering Swede" in The Westerners Brand Book 10. However, much of the original journal still remains unpublished.

³⁰Journal entries for July 10(?) and August 12, 1879 ("The Saga of a Wandering Swede," 256-260, 262-264).

³¹Hillerman, Talking God, 21-22, 72-73. Cf. Kluckhohn and Leighton, The Navajo, 11.

³²Journal entry for November 16, 1880 ("Journal 1876-1880"). Mt. Taylor is called "The Turquoise Mountain" in Navajo mythology (Hillerman, Coyote Waits, 231-232). Sadly, the final volume of Rolf's diary, which continued to trace his travels across New Mexico and Arizona, was destroyed by fire around 1920.

³³Sarah Blackstone describes in detail the origin and development of "The Congress of Rough Riders" (Buckskins, Bullets, and Business, 26-27, 54, 65-68, 77-78, 85). The Congress of Rough Riders added the phrase "of the World" to its title just before the Wild West opened alongside the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 (Russell, The Wild West, 8, 40; Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 79-80).

³⁴For the role of Native Americans in Buffalo Bill's Wild West, see Blackstone, Buckskins, Bullets, and Business, 85-88, 130-131; and Deloria, "The Indians," 45-56. Buffalo Bill argued eloquently: "The bullet is a kind of pioneer of civilization. Although its mission is often deadly, it is useful and necessary. Without the bullet, America would not be a great, free, united and powerful country" (from the official 1906 Italian Program of Buffalo Bill's Wild West, as quoted in Clerici, "Native Americans in Columbus's Home Land," 415; cf. Slotkin, "Buffalo Bill's 'Wild West' and the Mythologization of the American Empire," 173-179; and Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 77).

³⁵Passenger List, SS Persian Monarch, New York to London; April 20th, 1892 (George Johnson Collection, Phelps County Museum).

We only have one eyewitness account of George's riding capabilities. In a Chicago newspaper article dated May 22, 1893, the reporter writes, "Buffalo Bill's ampitheatre was packed to the eaves. . . . When it came time for the ponies to buck, they bucked so earnestly that the cowboys themselves became interested. Lee Martin was riding Blue Dog when the crazy bronco reared straight up on his hind legs and fell backward. The wiry cowboy managed to squirm out of the way unhurt, although half the people thought he was killed.

Buffalo Bill's Wild West, George, with help from Rolf's numerous contacts, was working hard to add Navajo Indians to the show's ever expanding program.³⁶ So far as I know, he was not

**American Cowboys Putting on an Act
Ambrose Park, Brooklyn, New York, 1894**

(George Johnson Collection. From the files of Phelps County Museum, Holdredge, Nebraska)
(reproduction by Wayne Carlson)

"A little later George Johnson mounted Badger. The latter stood on his head a few times and then dashed wildly into the little platform raised in the center of the arena, smashing in one side of it. Johnson leaped just before the horse struck the boards and landed safely on top [of] the platform, a feat not down in the bills. Then the crowd cheered for a full minute. Mr. Johnson was asked if it scared him.

"'Not on your life,' he replied. 'But if you give Badger six weeks of bunch grass, this place wouldn't [hold] him'" (George Johnson Collection, Phelps County Museum).

³⁶W. J. Rouse, New York, NY, to George Johnson, location unknown, 20 October 1894(?), and W. J. Rouse, Santa Ana, CA, to George Johnson, Phelps, NE, 5 January, 1895. The Wild West show with its entourage of American Indians was extremely popular in Europe, particularly in Germany, where Karl May was one of its early attendees. May became one of his generation's most popular authors, drawing inspiration for his American Western novels in part from watching the show (Conrad, "Mutual Fascination," 457-459, 469-470; Feest, "Indians and Europe?," 619-620). His most widely sold volumes, Winnetou and Old Shatterhand, have recently been translated into English (Gillespie, "The Wild West Thrives, but Guess Where?," 13-14).

A brief generation later, Adolf Hitler "is said to have recommended [May's novels] to his generals, all seventy-some volumes in his personal library" (Doerry, "Literary Conquista," 440; see also Rosa and May, Buffalo Bill and His Wild West, 146-147; Frayling, Spaghetti Westerns, 105; and Mann, "Cowboy Mentor of the Führer," 218, 222). Karl Doerry writes that "on the whole May shows the Indians as doomed to extinction. But not because they are inherently inferior; they are just not given the time to acquire the culture and education that would allow them, for instance, to see through and resist the nefarious schemes of the villains who are smart enough to exploit the Indians' savage energy for their own plans" ("Literary Conquista," 444; cf. Brumble, American Indian Autobiography, 149-151; Fiorentino, "'Those Red-Brick Faces,'" 403-411; and Clerici, "Native Americans in Columbus's Home Land," 415-423). Not surprisingly, Doerry's assessment of May's books fits remarkably well with Churchill's critique of the Navajo victims portrayed in Hillerman's detective novels (Fantasies of the Master Race, 269-271).

Richard Rubenstein also picks up this tangled thread of Romantic Racialism in America and Europe, arguing: "The link between genocidal settler societies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and twentieth century genocide can be discerned in Adolf Hitler's Lebensraum program. As a young man, Hitler saw the settlement of the New World and the concomitant elimination of North America's Indian population by white European settlers as a model to be followed by Germany on the European continent" ("Modernization and the Politics of Extermination," 8; see also Churchill, Fantasies of the Master Race, 120, 141-143, 177; Thornton, American Indian Holocaust and Survival, 3-90; and von Feilitzsch, "Karl May," 173-174).

Thus, it cannot be mere coincidence that the Nazi historian Edgar von Schmidt-Pauli, writing "history in such a way as to demonstrate the inevitability of the rise of the German race and Adolf Hitler in particular," should elicit and edit the 1929 autobiography of Big Chief White Horse Eagle, an Osage of dubious character, and title it We Indians: The Passing of a Great Race (Brumble, American Indian Autobiography, 152; cf. Conrad, "Mutual Fascination," 459). Nor should one be surprised at Lisa Bartel-Winkler's conclusion regarding May's books. Also known by the pen name Barwin, she wrote pulp novels during the Nazi period "in which the heroism of Indian leaders was explained by their assumed Viking ancestry," and had argued as early as 1918 that through his Indian hero Winnetou, "Karl May delineates. . .

During the summer of 1894, articles about Buffalo Bill's Wild West ran quite regularly in the New York Times. The following are two typical entries: "The scenes enacted by savages, scouts, and cowboys are pictures of what has occurred and will occur just as long as the Indian remains a savage and the great lands on our immense frontier are unsettled. But it should not be forgotten that this period is fast drawing to a close, and these scenes may never again be witnessed" ("The Wonderful Wild West," 2 September 1894, p. 11).

George Johnson is seated second from the right, beside a horse lying on the ground. He has marked himself with a "x" on his shirt.

the German drama. Winnetou is the noble man of his race--he knows about the purity of the blood, the longing, and the hope of his brothers, but they have to founder because they are worn down by discord. . . . This is Indian, this is also German. Who has grasped the meaning of the Indian drama has also grasped the meaning of the German drama" (Feest, "Indians and Europe?," 612). So if Rubenstein and others are correct in elaborating this genealogy of genocide, then the American West as popularized by Buffalo Bill's Wild West show and May's novels may be said to have laid the groundwork for much of Hitler's racial policy. And if Ward Churchill is to be believed, Hillerman's wildly successful detective novels continue to disseminate a similar ideology to the American public--albeit in a more sophisticated manner (Fantasies of the Master Race, 258-259, 276-279).

"The Grand Review." Ambrose Park, Brooklyn, New York, 1894

(George Johnson Collection. From the files of Phelps County Museum, Holdrege, Nebraska)
(reproduction by Wayne Carlson)

"In addition to the amusing and entertaining qualities of the Wild West, there is much of an educative character which is equally valuable to the old and young. . . . As an ethnological study, [it shows] the human race from primitive man, as represented by the Indian, Cossack, and Gaucho, to the perfect representative in the person of the educated and trained soldiers of the four great armies of the world [German, French, British, and American] . . ." ("Wild West Show Attracts," 27 May 1894, p. 9).

George Johnson is at the extreme left of the photograph, in the third row from the front. He has marked his position with a small "x" above his head.

American Cowboys with Annie Oakley: Buffalo Bill's Wild West

(George Johnson Collection. From the files of Phelps County Museum, Holdredge, Nebraska)
(reproduction by Wayne Carlson)

The cowboys of the "Congress of Rough Riders of the World," pose for an informal photograph outside their living quarters on the road, 1896. George Johnson is seated in the front row, at the extreme far right. He has put an "x" in the margin near his picture. Annie Oakley is the woman in the center, on the right. successful in this venture.³⁷

Although we soon learned not to make family pets out of the stray dogs roaming the mission compound, it continued to be inundated by the troublesome pests. Invariably, the problem would be compounded early each spring when the females were in heat. Navajos would come to the mission for water, mail, or medicine, and after they left we would invariably find another four or five puppies foraging for food in the dump. Much to the annoyance of other mission staff, my mother had a habit of naming each stray and feeding them by tossing unwanted leftovers outside our yard, just beyond the mission fence. It wasn't long before she was stretching the boundaries of propriety even further by inviting Navajo women into her home for cookies, coffee, and conversation--a foolish and scandalous activity by most missionary standards.

Sometimes, in the white heat of a summer Sunday,³⁸ the door of the two-room school where we had Morning Meeting would be propped open to circulate the cool Colorado Plateau breeze. Occasionally a stray dog would wander in and slowly approach the communion table--perhaps drawn there by the smell of fresh baked bread and store-bought grape juice. But the alert eyes and quick hands of a senior missionary were

³⁷George left Buffalo Bill's Wild West at the end of the 1898 season, just a few months before "'Custer's Last Fight' was replaced by 'The Battle of San Juan Hill'" in the show (Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 82-83). Shortly after leaving the show, George and his younger brother Robert rode north from Nebraska to work as cowboys at Square Butte, Montana, a ranch owned by Milton E. Milner, one of Cody's major business partners. During the fall roundup, on November 12, 1899, George Johnson's horse stepped in a prairie dog hole and fell on top of him. George was killed instantly. After his brother's death, Robert Johnson, my father's namesake, continued to work on Milner's ranch for eleven more years.

³⁸White notes the association of dogs with the summer and winter solstices, arguing that "in Homer, Sirius was the dog of Orion who, during the dog days [of summer] 'redoubled the fiery heat of the sun, bringing, in the afternoon, suffering to all living creatures'" (*Myths of the Dog-Man*, 38; cf. 14, 40).

always able to maintain the sanctity and order of the hour. Much to the disappointment of us giggling children, no dog ever stayed around long.³⁹

But after the service, if the dog had been patient and could follow its nose, it would find scraps of food under the outdoor picnic tables set up in the shade of tamarisk trees, where the Navajo faithful were fed hot dogs, beans, and Kool-Aid. In my more reflective moments, which sometimes jolt me with a sudden sharp pain, I have thought that perhaps the real communion on those Sundays took place outside, under the damask veil of those tamarisk trees.⁴⁰

When the stray dogs became too plentiful and threatened to run in wild packs, my father and other mission staff would gather the young ones together, along with the old and weak, stuff them into dusty potato sacks, and tie them to the exhaust pipe of our idling car. Before too long they would stop squirming and yelping. Then they would be buried in shallow pits at the far end of the mission garden. Afterward my brothers, sisters, and I could again run freely and play without fear in front of our home.⁴¹

³⁹Mark's gospel puts it this way, "He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs'" (Mk 7:27). According to the Mishnah (Baba Kamma 7:7), "[a] man may not rear a dog [within the land of Israel] unless it is kept bound by a chain" (cf. Stager, "Why Were Hundreds of Dogs Buried at Ashkelon?," 30-42; Smith and Stager, "Ashkelon--Views and Reviews," 13-18; Wapnish and Hesse, "Pampered Pooches or Plain Pariahs?," 72).

⁴⁰David White writes: "The pious fiction of the simple heathen glimpsing, through an act of divine grace, the superiority of the Christian path is one that has served missionary colonialism down to the present day. Only the names of the heathens . . . have changed. The medieval propogandists had much of the raw material of their gospel ready to hand in the accounts of the monstrous races bequeathed to them by the ancients. These were the peoples, in the medieval myths, who were first missionized by the apostles (Bartholomew, Andrew, Thomas, Matthew, etc.), following the Pauline evangelization of the Mediterranean world.

"The legend of the cynocephalic Abominable is a prime instance of this new medieval genre. The monster remains the same--only the hand holding the mighty sword has changed: instead of Alexander and his army, it is God himself who, through the works of his military saints, causes the wild savage to surrender himself" (*Myths of the Dog-Man*, 197).

⁴¹Jane Tompkins, in reflecting upon her visit to the Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody, Wyoming, writes: "Major historical events like genocide and major acts of destruction are not simply produced by impersonal historical processes or economic imperatives or ecological blunders; human intentionality is involved and human knowledge of the self. Therefore, if you're really interested in not having any more genocide or killing of animals, no matter what else you might do--condemning imperialism or shaking your finger at history--if you don't first, or also, come to recognize the violence in yourself and your own anger and your own destructiveness, whatever else you do won't work. It isn't that genocide doesn't matter. Genocide matters and it starts at home" (*West of Everything*, 202-203; cf. White, *Myths of the Dog-Man*, 209; McKenna, *Violence and Difference*, 132, 139-140).

Or as the character Henry Highhawk puts it in one of Hillerman's novels, "Here [in the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History] you see the gods of conquered people displayed like exotic animals in the public zoo. . . . Above your head, lining the halls and corridors of this very building, are thousands of cases and bins and boxes. In them you will find the bones of more than eighteen thousand of your fellow humans. You will find the skeletons of children, of mothers, of grandfathers. They have been dug out of the burials where their mourning relatives placed them, reuniting them with their Great Mother Earth" (*Talking God*, 290-291; cf. 292-294; Vizenor, *The Trickster of Liberty*, 123-125; Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, 160; see also Churchill, *Fantasies of the Master Race*, 234-235, 274; Bruner, "Ethnography as Narrative," 140, 152; and Greenblatt's analysis of Prague's "State Jewish Museum" founded by the Nazis, in *Learning to Curse*, 173-176).

Funerals at our mission were common occurrences, especially in summertime. And although I was never allowed to be in the room while my mother washed and dressed the Navajo corpses, I used to watch as my father helped build the pine coffins. I discovered that coffins could be built in many different sizes, and quite often I would help dig the holes to put them in. The smallest holes were the easiest to dig. But since there were usually also more of them, things had a way of balancing out by summer's end. Burials in winter, on the other hand, were nearly always difficult, regardless of the coffin size. Sometimes we would have to build a bonfire over the grave site to thaw the frozen ground before we could begin to dig.

When my mother died of a heart attack on the eve of Passover in 1984, we decided to bury her body on the reservation in the mission cemetery. As we had done so often in the past, we built a coffin of pine. Then, during a mid-April snowstorm, we dug her grave.

so lovely the grave
feather-dusting of white lies
on muddy red skein

When her funeral was over we slowly trudged home. The family dog, like the beloved disciple, remained behind, keeping vigil beside the fresh mound of half-frozen sod.

Difference⁴²

Today, as my mother's bones slowly erode and mix with the red Arizona soil, I cannot help but remember that we were aliens in that foreign land. Outside our childhood home, white-skinned people were dirty, smelly, and stupid. To most of the Navajo children we played with, our heads were strangely shaped, protruding out from the backsides our necks like grossly overgrown tumors;⁴³ likewise our genitals were curiosity

It is not without a certain degree of irony that the new National Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C., stands a block off the Mall just out of sight of the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History (Boyarin, "Europe's Indian, America's Jew," 207).

⁴²Derrida writes: "To hear oneself is the most normal and the most impossible experience. One might conclude from this, first, that the source is always other, and that whatever hears itself, not itself hearing itself, always comes from elsewhere, from outside and afar" ("Qual Quelle: Valery's Sources," in *Margins of Philosophy*, 297; cf. "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, 14-16).

⁴³Up until the 1960s, most Navajo children spent the first few months of life bound to cradleboards. The backs of their soft-boned skulls naturally became flattened by their heads' constant pressure against the cradleboard frames. By contrast, our heads were shaped like footballs.

pieces, a topic of frequent speculative conversations.⁴⁴ We transmitted ghost-sicknesses,⁴⁵ and a strange, cow-like odor followed us wherever we went.⁴⁶

One event in particular has imprinted itself in my memory as typifying my brothers' and my radical differentness. On a hot summer day when I was ten years old, Greg and I decided to build a raft and float it in the small irrigation reservoir a mile east of the mission. After about an hour of leisurely swimming and lolling in the sunshine we were startled by a sudden shower of baseball-sized stones splashing all around us. Looking up, we saw three Navajo men standing on the shore near our clothes and shoes, gesturing wildly and yelling. We quickly swam out into deeper water and clung to the side of the raft, trying to use it as a shield against the volleys. I was not a strong swimmer at the time, and was quickly losing my strength to dodge the stones. I began to panic. I told Greg that we had to head to the shore. Breathlessly treading water, we worked out a desperate plan. Greg would swim toward the men and try to get our clothes and shoes while I would use the raft to carry me to the shore opposite them. Greg would explain to them what we were doing, apologize for being on their land--if that was the problem--and bring my clothes to me.

I quickly landed the raft and watched Greg swim toward the men. But as he neared the shore, my blood ran cold. While I had been rafting to land, a fourth Navajo, brandish-ing a shotgun, had joined the other three awaiting Greg's arrival. As soon as he stepped out of the water they grabbed him, shoved him to the ground, and stuck the gun in his face. Terrified, I set out for home as fast as my bare feet could carry me. Clad only in a swimming suit, the desert sand blistered my feet and the hot afternoon air seared my lungs. I arrived home shaking with fear and exhaustion, blurted out the story to my parents, and collapsed on the living room couch. My father ran to the car and raced up the road to investigate the incident.

Fifteen minutes later he was back with my brother sitting beside him in the front seat, very much alive. Greg held up my abandoned clothes and grinned from ear to ear. As it turned out, the Navajos were afraid that our pallid skin would somehow wash off in the coffee-colored water, spreading deadly diseases to their sheep which drank from the reservoir. Needless to say, Greg and I never swam there again.⁴⁷ And thankfully--as far as I know anyway--no sheep died as a result of our trespass and impurity.

A few years later I joined my older brothers in Atascadero, California for my freshman year of high school, where the three of us boarded with our uncle's family. For the first time since we had moved to the Navajo reservation in 1959 I was completely

⁴⁴Since Navajo boys were not circumcised, a white boy's exposed penis in the dormitory bathroom always drew a crowd of laughing, pointing, curious bystanders. Needless to say, we quickly learned that it was best to go home when we needed to relieve ourselves.

Daniel Boyarin and Jonathan Boyarin observe how "bodies are marked as different and often as negatively different to the dominant cultural system, thus producing a dissonance or gap between one's practices and affects" ("Diaspora," 704).

⁴⁵We were carriers of ghost-sicknesses probably because we liked to play around abandoned hogans. We learned later that these hogans were inhabited by the "ch'iidii" (ghosts) of the people who had died there, and that was why they had been abandoned (cf. Hillerman, *The Ghostway*, 13, 40-43).

⁴⁶The rank smell came from eating beef and drinking cow's milk.

⁴⁷However, we discovered a few years later that the gardens adjacent to the reservoir were great places to look for ancient Indian pottery which often would be exposed after the soil had been plowed.

surrounded by people who were white-skinned like myself. Initially I thought nothing of that, until one day at lunch time. I happened to be eating with a group of my friends when the high school's four or five Hispanic students walked by. Without any exchange of words or looks I instantly felt my friends' temperatures rising. Suddenly I could taste their sticky-sweet whiteness. It oozed from their pores and ran in little rivulets down the steps that we were sitting on, toward the Mexican kids who were hurrying past us. In that revelatory moment which I will treasure for a lifetime, I discovered that white epidermis could indeed infect and destroy other living things.

Because Navajo is a tonal language, many linguists consider it to be one of the most difficult human dialects to master.⁴⁸ During the Second World War, for example, Ralph Begay and other Navajo men in our valley served in the Pacific theater and were asked to use their native language as a code for sending top secret military messages. The Japanese never did break that "code," nor did we. None of us white children at the mission were ever capable of speaking Navajo as well as a native three-year-old.⁴⁹

At the ages of eight, nine, and ten, we three boys were also as ignorant of our sexuality as a toddler might be. Good Christian families didn't talk about certain bodily functions, body places, or touch themselves "there." So I knew the proper Navajo words for male and female sex organs long before I heard their corresponding English terms, and I learned about sexual intercourse by watching the ever present, shameless dogs humping awkwardly across the mission compound. But it was the Navajo children who connected that bewildering animal behavior with humans. They would grin and poke me in the ribs, saying, "Your mudder an' fodder go like dis ever' night." Of course I vehemently contested their jocular asides, much to their more worldly-wise amusement. I was learning by fits and starts that brown skin denoted intelligence, along with beauty, cleanliness, and everything that was good in the world.⁵⁰

Not coincidentally, when I grew up I fell in love with a darker-skinned woman. On Barbara's first visit to the mission, her waist-length, raven-black hair immediately hypnotized the young Navajo girls. They followed her wherever she walked, crowded around her, and ran their fingers through it, whispering, "*Nízhóní, nízhóní*" ("beautiful, beautiful").⁵¹ I noted their spontaneous reactions with deep interest and knew that I had found the woman I would marry.⁵²

But like the *Diné* whom my Western European ancestors named Navajo and Indian, my wife's Asian-American surname Wong is not her family's original last name. That name was Lee. The name Wong came from the American citizenship records which her paternal grandfather, Mee Yim, illegally bought in 1913 to circumvent the restrictive quotas placed upon Asians trying to enter California. Today on the walls of our home,

⁴⁸Hillerman, *Dance Hall of the Dead*, 139.

⁴⁹Not only could I not speak Navajo, I only barely could speak recognizable English, having developed a severe overbite and, with it, a lisp. Strangely, I never knew a Navajo child who lisped or stuttered.

⁵⁰This was true, at least insofar as brown skin signified a Navajo worldview. From my perspective at the time, the similarly colored Hopis, Zunis, Utes, and Hispanics had none of the Navajos' more natural beauty or intelligence (cf. for example, Joe Leaphorn's discomfort with Zunis, in Hillerman, *Dance Hall of the Dead*, 7, 9-10).

⁵¹Like Changing Woman of Navajo mythology, she "walked in beauty" (Hillerman, *The Blessing Way*, 40-42; *Coyote Waits*, 119-120; cf. *Sacred Clowns*, 51).

⁵²We were married May 22, 1982.

next to the pictures of our children, hang my wife's family photographs. One photograph in particular includes the family's "paper grandmother" prominently seated in the center of the frame. Out of the family's fear of deportation, this unrelated Wong woman was posed in Lee family portraits for years.⁵³

Somewhat similarly, my wife's maternal great grandfather, You Dong, changed his surname to the Spanish sounding Don to enable him to buy property in Tucson, Arizona in 1906. Thanks to that missing *g*, my mother-in-law was able to slip into nursing school in San Francisco two generations later. Thinking that Marjorie Don was a Caucasian name, the admission committee accepted her, even though they had already met their quota of minorities.

Outfitted with his newly acquired name, You Don[g] built an adobe grocery store and house on Meyers Street near Fourth Street.⁵⁴ He bought a pair of six-shooters to protect his worldly goods and then, as insurance, had his children baptized in the First Baptist Church of Tucson. He had prepared carefully for life in America. With a working knowledge of the Papago and Yaqui languages and with the pistols holstered at his waist, he developed a profitable business among the Indians of southern Arizona. When the revolutionary Dr. Sun Yat-Sen came to Tucson in the early 1900s he visited in the Don home; and in 1919, You's eldest son, Hoy Chu, became the first Chinese boy to graduate from Tucson High School.⁵⁵

Hoy Chu went on to college at the University of California in Berkeley and, upon graduating, married my wife's grandmother, May Chun (Maude Laverne) Lai. Since daughters were an economic liability for most Chinese families, May Chun Lai had been abandoned by her parents at the age of four, left on the doorstep of the Episcopal Oriental Home in San Francisco. As part of the orphanage choir, she sang before President Theodore Roosevelt at the White House in 1908, and went on to become the first Chinese woman to graduate from an American conservatory of music.⁵⁶ Although she was an American citizen, born in the United States, by law she lost her citizenship when she

⁵³See below. "Memory heals the scars of time. Photography documents the wounds," writes Michael Ignatieff (*The Russian Album*, 7; cf. Sontag, *On Photography*, 164-165).

⁵⁴The building, still standing in 1990 when I visited it in Tucson, is presently occupied by the Elks Club.

⁵⁵Lee, "The Chinese in Tucson, Arizona," 9.

⁵⁶She graduated from the College of the Pacific in San Jose, California in 1921 (*San Jose Evening News*, Friday, June 17, 1921).

The Lee Family, ca. 1930

The Wong "paper grandmother" is the older woman seated with her hands clasped on her lap. My wife's father, Walter Gin Wong, is the boy standing at the far right. Mr. Wong Si Wei, the "paper grandmother's" husband, owned a mortuary near Portsmouth Square, in San Francisco's Chinatown.

married Hoy Chu, who had been born in China.⁵⁷ Her battle to regain her American citizenship was fought in the federal courts of Arizona,⁵⁸ and when she finally won her case, she became one of the first Chinese women to cast a vote in a presidential election.

Although I grew up being different and would later marry into difference, being different didn't always separate me from the Navajo people. My two older brothers and I learned to climb mesas and buttes with the help of Tom and Harry Yazzie, our nearest

⁵⁷The United States Immigration Act of 1924 stated: "Any American who married a Chinese woman lost his citizenship; any Chinese man who married an American woman caused her to lose her citizenship" (Kingston, *China Men*, 154). The last of the Chinese exclusionary laws were repealed in 1965.

⁵⁸From an undated Arizona newspaper clipping in my possession.

Navajo neighbors to the north. With them beside us we played tag on paper-thin ledges, chiseled hand and toe holds in sandstone cliffs and, like the Titans of Greek mythology, hurled gigantic boulders off breathtaking precipices, teetering on the edge to watch them ricochet like thunder on their way to the distant earth beneath our feet. Then, as some sort of concluding act of cosmic fecundity or canine marking, we would unzip our pants and reverently piss hundred-foot arcs of amber rain down upon the arid, alkaline adobe below.

Amazingly, we had only one serious accident in all our years of climbing, and that came much later, after a new missionary couple and their adopted Navajo son moved to the mission. Sam Minkler and I were in the same grade and quickly became best friends. Late one summer afternoon we decided to take a visitor up to the mesa for a climb. Our family had only one rule about climbing: Never climb in the dark. And so as the sun began to set, I headed home alone, having failed to convince Sam and the visitor to follow me. As the two boys began their descent by moonlight, the visitor fell and was seriously injured. For the next two hours Sam stood on the mesa, a quarter of a mile from the mission, and screamed for help. Finally, after reassuring the visiting boy's parents of their Indian son's instinctual native wisdom, Sam's parents went out looking for the two eighth grade boys. It was another four hours before we knew that the visitor had broken three ribs, punctured a lung, and broken an arm.

But in those early years, with Tom and Harry beside us, we never had such problems. We were the first whites to know what every Navajo knew; that the presence of wild creatures and monsters could be felt less than a quarter-mile from the mission compound. We saw them all and smelled their scorching breath: ferocious looking, emerald colored lizards that would stand on their rear legs and fearlessly charge at humans; seventeen-inch, fossilized dinosaur footprints in an ancient seabed of sandstone; and a cougar, hardly a stone's throw away, crouching for an instant in the eroded crotch of our favorite mesa-hideout. And when we were occasionally confined to the mission compound for some significant breach of parental boundaries, we could always hunt golden-plumed birds in the tamarisk trees, shooting them with our sling shots or bows and selling the sacrificial victims' Croesus-like feathers for a dime apiece to Billy Bluff, understudy of Big Whiskers,⁵⁹ a local medicine man.

The Yazzie boys also taught us to ride their horses bareback, clutching tangled manes in white-knuckled fists. And in return, we let them ride our battered bicycles. From them we learned to swim in quicksand, wiggling nude across its treacherous, quivering surface like a sidewinder rattlesnake on a rippled sand dune. And the barren sand dunes were magical zones where zero-degree gravity prevailed. From their constantly shifting, wind-shaped crests we could soar twenty feet through thin air before disappearing into clouds of lunar fluff. Finally, after hours of play, we would wander homeward; five exhausted, dust-encrusted adams, to eat lunches of fry bread and mutton stew in the cool shade of Yazzies' *chaha'ó*,⁶⁰ while Judge, their stolen greyhound, hungrily

⁵⁹This, of course, was his nickname, not his secret war name (see Hillerman, *People of Darkness*, 106-107). My father's Navajo nickname was "Teacher." Our maintenance man, Donald Perrault, was given the nickname "Little Round Man."

⁶⁰The word means "shade." Hillerman calls the summer dwelling either a "pole arbor" (*Listening Woman*, 136), or a "brush shelter" (*The Blessing Way*, 92).

watched us. In the evenings, Tom and Harry would come for picnics of tuna fish sandwiches and potato chips outside our two-room basement apartment. Together we would read comic books and play card games until the shimmering swath of the summer night's Milky Way could point them northward to their kerosene lamp lit hogan silhouetted against the back of the sleeping mesa.

Looking back I know now that I learned to write naturally:⁶¹ watching the patterns bending tufts of wind-blown grass made in drifting snow; fingering thousand year-old petroglyphs etched high on isolated canyon walls; tracing the silvery plumes of jet planes as they sped across the turquoise sky on their way to distant lands.

I fine tuned my thinking by piecing together the three-dimensional puzzles of shattered Anasazi pottery;⁶² by walking barefoot in the light of full-orbed desert moons. Their spidery webs were woven into my inner ear. They taught me balance. Harmony. *Hózhó*. Everything was about harmony: the intertwining of a people with a sinuous, symmetrical cosmos. A Navajo rug of earthen-made dyes, framed against a vermilion sky.

As I write these words in a bleak, northern Indiana December, I feel that I am haunted by the differentness of that place: the smell of cedar smoke wafting from an isolated hogan on Sheepskin Mesa; an old woman--Was it Toothless Man's Widow? I don't know--knee-deep in snow and up to her elbows in the bloody entrails of a half butchered donkey, her dogs excitedly barking and gnawing the still steaming-warm hide.

Nestled in another soft, canyon-like crevice of my brain is the more familiar form of Lee Benally. Crippled by polio and smelling of horses, leather, and sweat, he hangs on, a weathered, twisted trunk of a man, seated cross-legged in his horse-drawn wagon. His willowy, imbecilic nephew stands by to answer his every need. When Lee died, I think that his wagon must have been buried with him. It was the last I ever saw in the valley. Today, I imagine his shriveled legs as gnarly roots, forever anchored to smooth-worn floorboards.

Then there were my classmates in the little two-room mission school: lovely Anna Horse, who limped like Twisted Foot,⁶³ the stray with the bullet-shattered leg who always knew where to hide when the gun-toting dog killers came around; giggly Virginia Benally, who as a young girl lost an eye in a woodcutting accident; William Scott, a partially crippled polio victim and my soulmate for many years; and Gladys Luna, who survived a childhood battle with tuberculosis only to contract scleroderma as a teenager, a mysterious disease that stretched the skin and sinews of her body ever more tightly over her bones until she could do nothing but lie in a Gallup hospital bed, a crumpled mass of open, weeping wounds.

⁶¹Or as Christopher Norris writes, "once [language] passes beyond the stage of a primitive cry, [it] is 'always already' inhabited by writing, or by all those signs of an 'articulate' structure. . . ." (*Deconstruction*, 36; cf. Derrida, "The Supplement of Origin," in *Speech and Phenomena*, 103).

⁶²Hillerman, *A Thief of Time*, 14, 23, 67-68, 150-151. The word "Anasazi" (ancient ones) is the name that the Navajos, as predatory late arrivals to the Southwest, gave to the people who previously inhabited the numerous pueblo culture sites. These sites, from the thirteenth century and earlier, dot the high plateau landscape of the Four Corners region (Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions*, 6-7).

⁶³I named this dog after the lame, Comanche boy hero of a book my father read to us when I was in the fourth grade. In the story, the boy managed to steal a horse from the Spanish Conquistadores, thus becoming the first Indian to learn to ride the fearsome animals.

When Anna was in the fifth grade, doctors miraculously rebuilt her hip. And years later Virginia got a natural looking glass eye when she went to work for the Bureau of Indian Affairs in Washington, D.C. William, through extended therapy and special shoes, eventually developed a nearly normal gait. And Gladys, mercifully, died a year earlier than the doctors expected. They were all Mephibosheths in their own ways, dead dog offspring of Jonathan, touched by the dappled grace of a different David.⁶⁴

My father was my teacher for four of my eight years of grammar school. He was an avid reader and had a natural curiosity about the new world to which he had brought his family. Often in the fall or spring, when we had science class, he would take us on hikes around the area with the Navajo children as his guides. We would collect insects, rocks, and plants, take them back to school, then catalogue and display them as if we were explorers from some distant planet. Scientific names would be written beside Navajo names, with a brief explanation of the object's use in Navajo culture.

It was the beginning of my father's Navajo language, history, and culture course, and he was perhaps the first to teach such a class on the reservation. Using books and the Navajo children themselves as resources, he fed back to them what he was taking from them, now filtered through the critical observer's pale blue eyes.⁶⁵ The blind were gaining sight, the dumb were speaking, and the lame were beginning to walk.

Whenever I return to the mission--and the times become fewer and farther between as I grow older--I still find myself reverting to pidgin English, the language I unconsciously spoke as a young boy in order to be accepted by the Navajos. Then Navajo words, unused for decades, come rushing back to me in a flashflood. Like a dog searching for a buried bone, I sniff the sage scented air with its hints of juniper and pungent mountain piñon,⁶⁶ and find myself retracing steps to old familiar places: to the Red Hill--to look for that one last shard that would complete my fractured self and my first reconstructed Anasazi pot; or to Fort Rock, where we carved our names with pocket knives in shadowed sandstone, and where passionate young lovers traced the outlines of newly discovered terrain far from the prying eyes of mission staff.

Thousands of miles, a score of years, a family, and a career now crowd out my past, separating me from that world. So now I must put distance as well as differentness into writing. Of course, Jacques Derrida tells us that difference is already "there" in language, both as writing and as speech.⁶⁷ But that *différance* is too much; it is a threat to

⁶⁴Cf. 2 Sam 9:1-13.

⁶⁵Sheehan discusses in detail the origins of such programs within the education policies of Euroamerican missionaries (*Seeds of Extinction*, 119-147; see also Bowden, *American Indians and Christian Missions*, esp., 164-201; and Vizenor, "Ruins of Representation: Shadow Survivance and the Literature of Dominance," 27-28).

⁶⁶Hillerman, *Skinwalkers*, 244-245.

⁶⁷"[L]anguage as such is already constituted by the very distances and differences it seeks to overcome," says Barbara Johnson in her introduction to Derrida's *Dissemination* (ix; see also Derrida's essay "Differance," in *Speech and Phenomena*, 129-160).

I must confess that I really haven't read much of Derrida, although I probably should since I seem to find traces of his thought echoing in my cross-cultural experience. Christopher Norris (*Derrida, Deconstruction, What's Wrong with Postmodernism*) and other disseminators like him are a lot easier for me to follow. What I read of Derrida, I tend to read in the margins and in the prefaces of his work, relegating myself to the role of a listening ear in others' erudite conversations.

the well-ordered universes of most biblical scholars. And so my academic discipline demands critical distance; a means to step outside the difference, the *différance*, to put a stop to the supplementarity of language and to try to contain it. Distance is the rhetoric of our professional discourse;⁶⁸ distance trains it and feeds upon it, then vomits it up. I know all about distance. I grew up with that too.

Distance⁶⁹

Unless you've been in the Southwest, you can't imagine the distances people regularly travel to do their business. We drove ninety miles one way to "town," just to shop for groceries. Later on, my brothers and I daily made a hundred-and-ten-mile circle to Shiprock, New Mexico to go to high school. It was a miracle that we survived all those miles on the road. We encountered horses, cattle, sheep, and dogs all crossing the highway on the open range of the reservation. We hit one horse, drove off an embankment to miss another, and were rear-ended once by an inattentive tourist while stopping to let a herd of sheep cross in front of us. I have no idea of how many dogs and other small animals we killed in our travels.

We saw many bad accidents in those years, but one in particular stands out in my mind. We were on our way to the trading post to get the mission mail when we saw it. A pickup truck had hit a horse. Pinned underneath the vehicle, the horse was still alive and struggling to get up. The driver's wife was in the cab of the truck, clinging to the door in a shocked stupor while the truck rocked back and forth. The driver took a shotgun out of a rack in the cab and shot the horse in the head. I'll never forget the look in that animal's eyes as it fought to get out from beneath the truck.

Signs everywhere warned drivers about the wandering animals, but "Open Range" meant nothing to tourists from New Jersey or Pennsylvania on summer vacations to the Grand Canyon or Mesa Verde. The state finally had to put up fences along all the major travel routes.

Halfway between Shiprock and Farmington, the town where we did our shopping, stood the Turquoise Bar. It was one hundred feet off the reservation line. Built in a circular shape, a gross parody of a hogan, it beckoned to the Navajos with promises of warmth, safety, and friendship. There, family and home could be bought for a buck.⁷⁰ But

⁶⁸Norris, *Deconstruction*, 22-24. See also Stephen Moore's discussion regarding the rhetorical nature of biblical criticism (*Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 66-67), and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza's perspective ("The Ethics of Interpretation," 10-13). For a more positive view of distance in scholarly discourse, see Mary Gerhart's comments on academic genres in *Genre Choices, Gender Questions* (12-15, 151-152); Stephen Greenblatt's appropriation of the term for the "New Historicists," in *Learning to Curse* (168-170); and Sandra Schneiders's summary of Paul Ricoeur's concept of *distanciation* in *The Revelatory Text* (142-144, 169-172).

⁶⁹"Distance," writes Wallace Stegner, "space, affects people as surely as it has bred keen eyesight into pronghorn antelope. And what makes that western space and distance? The same condition that enforces mobility on all adapted creatures, and tolerates only small or temporary concentrations of human or other life. Aridity" (Stegner, *Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs*, 75; cf. Erisman, "Hillerman's Uses of the Southwest," 11-12).

⁷⁰For the role of alcohol in U.S. Indian relations, see Sheehan, *Seeds of Extinction*, 232-242. According to Hillerman, the Navajo word for whiskey, *tódilhil*, means "water of darkness" (*Coyote Waits*, 122). With a typical Navajo play on the word, it can also be manipulated to mean "sucking in darkness" (ibid). While the

the few hundred yards of highway on either side of the bar were the most dangerous in all of New Mexico. The state finally had to put up warning signs. "Watch for Pedestrians" they said. But there were no pedestrians--just another kind of open range. Half-sleeping Navajos littered the roadside ditches and highway dividers around the bar, especially on weekends. We hit one once, reeling drunkenly across the road, mesmerized by the headlights of our onrushing vehicle.⁷¹ With a thud he smashed into the side of the car. My father pulled over to the shoulder of the road. We jumped out and looked for him for half an hour. But like a frightened dog licking its wounds, he had lurched off into the night. We never found him.

In a land of such vast distances you would think that most aspects of American culture never reached us. As late as 1969 there were still only two or three radio stations that we could pick up in the daytime and, along with one snowy, undependable television signal, these were our only daily contacts with the outside world. But we knew what the Cold War was and who the bad guys of the world were. Since the mission was not far from a major missile test flight site in Utah, we occasionally saw misguided U.S. military wizardry exploding high over the uninhabited Southwest. Meanwhile, down below on the desert floor, government geologists and oil company drillers annually crisscrossed our valley looking for high-grade uranium and natural gas reserves that would break U.S. dependence on Middle Eastern crude and insure supremacy in the arms race. Their prospecting roads and drilling sites periodically tore the skin from the earth while she was in heat, exposing her pulsating fertility to the leering eyes of sweaty-faced hardhats and white-smocked technicians. When they left after a few months, as they always did, we would rush to explore her scattered entrails and uncovered orifices with our own open-mouthed silence.⁷²

Navajo word can mean the former, probably a better translation is "water that makes one dizzy."

⁷¹Hillerman describes a similar experience in *Coyote Waits*. There, Jim Chee is investigating a murder when "[t]hree miles east of the intersection, the high beams of his headlights reflected from the back of a man walking down the asphalt. Chee braked and stared. The man was walking erratically down the center of the westbound lane. . . . He seemed totally oblivious of Chee's headlights, now just a few yards behind him. Without a backward glance, with no effort to move to the side of the road, he walked steadily onward, swinging something in his right hand, zigzagging a little, but with the steady, unhurried pace of a man who has walked great distances, who will walk great distances more" (15-16; see also *Talking God*, 186; *Sacred Clowns*, 198-199, 269-270).

⁷²Churchill notes how Hillerman "has managed to write *nine consecutive novels* providing ostensibly detailed descriptions of the habitat of Navajoland, and the people who reside in it, without ever once mentioning the vast proliferation of uranium tailings piles abandoned by U.S. corporations--with full government complicity--on the reservation since 1952" (*Fantasies of the Master Race*, 272). Churchill goes on to argue that "'politically sensitive' issues [such as this] are strictly off-limits within the framework of the author's literary project" (273). Although the latter critique may be generally true, Churchill fails to note that the plot of at least one of Hillerman's early novels, *People of Darkness*, revolves around oil drilling and uranium mining near Mt. Taylor (a sacred mountain to the Navajo), and a deadly talisman carved out of its radioactive stone. Furthermore, his most recent book, *Sacred Clowns*, focuses upon a large corporation's concerted efforts to turn an abandoned strip mine on the reservation into a toxic waste dump (*ibid.*, 4, 6, 8, 67-78).

And speaking of these two books, it seems to me that Churchill overlooks a much more crucial motif which runs through most of Hillerman's novels: that Indian rituals and symbols, when touched by Euroamerican colonizers, are inevitably destructive and allied with death. Moreover, the ideology underlying this motif is never made entirely clear to the reader. Is it that all Indian lifeways--whether

In 1969, just a few weeks away from high school graduation, I made my customary stop for mail at Teec Nos Pos Trading Post one bright May afternoon. As I sorted the mission mail I saw a letter from the U.S. Army addressed to my father.

My oldest brother, Rob, had volunteered for military service after high school and a year later had volunteered for duty in Vietnam. He had come back to the States in February, visited the family for a few weeks, married one of my best high school friends,⁷³ then gone up to Fort Lewis, Washington for his final year in the army. But three days earlier my English teacher had told me that over the weekend he had seen Rob in Flagstaff, Arizona. I knew that something was not right, since he had recently used up his leave. Now, without opening the letter, I knew what my brother had done. He had deserted.

A week later my other brother, Greg, came swaggering into my high school graduation ceremony with a story to tell. High on drugs and full of braggadocio, he announced to the family that he had just gotten back from driving Rob and Becky to Canada. They were safe and well and living in Toronto.

Our good Christian missionary family was on the verge of falling apart, and my soul was one of the major pieces of debris left to fight over. I, as the third child, had always been overly eager to please; and Rob, Greg, and I had always done everything together. At six years old, when Robbie gave his heart to Jesus, Greg did the same thing a few weeks later. At the tender age of four, I followed suit shortly thereafter. When Robbie decided he wanted to be baptized, Greg and I said we did too. And when Rob and Greg became interested in girls and fell in love for the first time, so did I--always with their girlfriends.⁷⁴ Now I was caught between my two older brothers with whom I had shared every life passage, my parents who had lost their hold on their two eldest children and didn't want to lose their third, and my two younger sisters who idolized me.

Over the previous six months, whenever Greg would come to visit from college, he would bring home with him a suitcase full of dirty clothes and hallucinogenic drugs. He was always generous. Anything I wanted, I could try. His favorites were mescaline and peyote, the latter being a drug the Native American Church used to induce apocalyptic visions.⁷⁵ But I was afraid to use any of them.⁷⁶ Instead, being the good

ceremonial masks or sandpaintings, skinwalkers, an Anasazi flute player, a sacred clown, or a talisman--are potentially life-threatening to Euroamericans? Or that all Indian lifeways, when subjected to the meddling hands of Euroamericans, are turned inside out and become destructive to Indians (cf. Bahr's and Fenger's discussion of the victimist mode of writing Indian history in "Indians and Missions," 315-319; and Bruner, "Ethnography as Narrative," 140, 143-144, 152)?

⁷³They were married at the San Juan County courthouse in Aztec, New Mexico, with Greg and me as witnesses. Afterwards we celebrated with dinner at the Kentucky Fried Chicken Drive-In in Farmington.

⁷⁴I was ever the voyeur, sneaking around after dark to watch Robbie and Sarah Tsosie standing toe to toe, kissing passionately behind the school. They had learned the value of hiding but had not yet discovered the virtue of lying.

⁷⁵Peyote is the buttonlike top of a small, spineless cactus which grows in the southwestern United States and northern Mexico. It has been used in Native American religious ceremonies for centuries (Hillerman, *Dance Hall of the Dead*, 4, 60; *People of Darkness*, 173). The drug mescaline is derived from it.

⁷⁶From about the age of five to seven I suffered from terrifying nightmares and had to be given sweet-tasting sedatives in order to sleep at night. The memories of those inarticulatable, terror-filled experiences made me hesitant in adolescence to try any drug that might conjure up those nameless demons. Having been born on December 22, only a few hours after the winter solstice, perhaps I was haunted by the Eastern

missionary kid that I was, I would take them to school and pass them out to my friends after gym class. Two hundred and fifty miles from the closest college campus and twenty-five miles from a post office, our household was hopelessly caught up in the generational war of the late 1960s. There would be casualties and an uneasy twelve-year cease-fire before peace was fully restored to our family.

On our way home from my high school graduation, my father stopped at the trading post and called the Military Police to tell them where his son was. And when we got home, my parents made it clear to Greg that he was no longer welcome in the house where he had grown up. In that one memorable week of May I felt I had lost my two brothers and possibly my parents as well. Our high school graduation song that year was from The Man of La Mancha: "To Dream the Impossible Dream." I couldn't sing it. I had never had time to learn the words.

Later that summer, Greg had a dramatic conversion experience. And true to form, his return to the fold reaffirmed my own faltering faith. So with a restored trust in God and a family on the mend, Greg and I went off together for a year of Bible school. The following year I enrolled at Wheaton College in Illinois,⁷⁷ far away from my family and the Navajo reservation. My plan to attend Wheaton was the first completely independent decision that I had ever made, and for the first time in my life I found myself totally on my own, with no older brothers to rely on. But even there, in suburban Chicago, the reservation dogged me.

First Michael McKenzie came to Wheaton. Along with his brother Marvin, who followed him the next year, they were the elite of the Navajo tribe and model American Indians. They were "good apples": red on the outside and white on the inside. As sons of the only Navajo physician, their parents had taught them nothing about their native culture. David Dennison came the same year Marvin did. Although he was half Navajo and half Mohawk-Seneca, the son of our most respected lay preacher, he was Navajo through and through. His younger sister was the first girl I ever kissed, in spite of my lies to the contrary.

I had encouraged Michael, Marvin, and David to come to Wheaton, where I was in my senior year. They had been part of a high school Bible study group that I led during summers and Christmas vacations, and I had nurtured them in the Christian faith. I made

European folk traditions of St. Thomas, who, on that particular night, takes the form of a dog and devours little children (White, Myths of the Dog-Man, 40). But whatever their origin, my dreams became less threatening and more revelatory once I left home. Three of these I remember distinctly (1969, 1974, 1984), and each focused on a problem in the interpretation of writing. In the first dream I was writing Greek as though I actually knew the language--a full year before I even considered studying it. In the second dream I was analyzing a poem that I had written in high school, one that I had never quite understood. (This dream turned into a demonic nightmare.) In the third dream I was working on my dissertation, dispassionately exegeting the Greek text of John's gospel (cf. Berg, "Suppressing the Language of (Wo)man," 15-24).

⁷⁷Originally founded by Wesleyan abolitionists in the early 1850s as Illinois Institute, the school was reorganized as Wheaton College in 1860. Today, it is probably best known for being the alma mater of the world famous evangelist Billy Graham. But for me, a no less significant fact is that John Wesley Powell, the great ethnologist, natural scientist, and methodical explorer of the vast Colorado Plateau, began his college education at the Institute (Stegner, Beyond the Hundredth Meridian, 15). Among his many cartographic credits is the discovery and first accurate charting of the mouth of the San Juan River (ibid., 89-90).

sure that I was their "big brother" during their freshman orientation, and I introduced them to all my friends. But they were freaks at Wheaton.

"What is it like being an Indian?" and "Can you speak some Navajo for us?" rang in their ears at every turn.

George and Rolf Johnson would have been proud of me. On the eightieth anniversary of Buffalo Bill's appearance at the memorable Columbian Exposition of 1893, their great-great-grandnephew had finally made Navajo Indians part of a Wild West show in a wealthy suburb of Chicago.⁷⁸

One of my most poignant memories from my final semester at Wheaton is of Michael McKenzie walking across the college campus in the dead of winter, a stack of books under his arm. Every title he was carrying had something to do with Navajos, and I knew he wasn't taking any anthropology courses. Michael went to Wheaton College and discovered his cultural roots in the ethnological monographs added to the library collection to help prospective missionaries with their evangelization of foreign peoples.

But David was different. He had a nose for finding live Navajos. He sniffed them out on the corner of Madison and Monroe, Chicago's skid row, stinking of stale cigarettes, cheap wine, and urine. Soon he was spending his weekends there, walking the streets, and talking to them in their native language.

Did I destroy those friends of mine or did I liberate them? The question troubles me. I don't know its answer. My inherited Protestant sense of guilt keeps telling me that I abandoned them, that I left them to self-destruct in the flatlands of Illinois. I do know that none of them finished college at Wheaton. The last I heard, David was a silversmith in Bluff, Utah, making jewelry the old-fashioned way, in sand cast, squash-blossom patterns. Michael married a traditional Navajo girl, much to his parents' displeasure, and was living in an isolated canyon on the reservation. Marvin, I think, eventually graduated from college somewhere in New Mexico.

Distance. In order to be a good biblical scholar I must put distance between my past and my present;⁷⁹ between those nebulous names, nearly impossible to bring into focus, and the closer, more familiar names of my own family and children; between the mission on the reservation and my office at the university.

Our family has always had problems handling distance. Out of the six children, only Rob and I have never returned to the reservation or its environs to live for an extended period of time. And because of problems with the U.S. Army, for many years Rob couldn't have returned even if he had wanted. So I am the one left. The one who throws left-handed but writes right-handed; the one with a ruptured left Achilles tendon. I'm the one with the prenatal hemorrhage on the left occipital horn of his brain which left him with no right-side peripheral vision; the one who left it all behind. I've earned my right to speak authoritatively, with the tools of nuanced objectivity. So now listen to my voice as its tone changes, as the distance becomes greater. Here, I promise you, there will be no passion, no memory, no lying. Neutral tone is what counts.⁸⁰ Like a northern Indiana December sky.

⁷⁸Vizenor, "Manifest Manners," 223-224.

⁷⁹Andrée Collard writes: "Interfering with memories in any way is dangerous to one's integrity. Doing it with scientific precision has devastating implications for women: without memories there are no dreams, no imagination, no future, and above all, no present" (*Rape of the Wild*, 92).

Tools⁸¹

Because of the two different environments in which I was immersed as a child, I grew up with a natural curiosity about contrasting ways of perceiving the world. Existential questions regarding the inherent correctness of those perceptions and their mutual claims of certitude arose which otherwise might never have surfaced. Eventually, this same inquisitiveness led me to challenge the authoritarian, anti-intellectualism of my Plymouth Brethren upbringing, replacing it with a mindful curiosity and a natural pluralism.⁸²

Perhaps because of the doubleminded bind in which I grew up, this slow-forming New Testament scholar had no interest in studying John's gospel. The Fourth Gospel's message seemed too obvious, too transparent (Jn 3:7, 16-18). Everything divided up nicely into two camps: the seeing and the blind (9:39-40), the truth-holding believers and the unbelieving liars (8:44, 54-55). There seemed to be no room for openness, intellectual curiosity, or ambiguity in John's narrative world. Moreover, the Johannine Jesus was the type of character who pounded the truth into people's heads whether or not they wanted to hear his message--most, of course, did not.

But then in graduate school, while I was taking seminars in literary theory, I began to use the text of John to teach beginning Greek. Suddenly I began to read the gospel with a new set of lenses.⁸³ I began to see that although the gospel had a clear message to impart (20:31), *how* the reader was transported to that end could be as important as the text's final words. And the *how* which I was beginning to find in John's gospel was one which undermined, tricked, and played games with the reader's naive grasp of the story.⁸⁴

In my more objective moments of reflecting on my critical approach to the Fourth Gospel, I will argue that I have been drawn to reader-response criticism primarily because it has offered me a way to read the Bible closely and cohesively, yet critically and differently. And secondarily (a reflective perspective which I do not want to share openly in the academic arena), it has allowed me to do what I most like to do--read imaginatively and dramatically. Assuming that no text (or worldview) has the whole truth, reader-response criticism has given me a set of critical tools with which to ask questions about

⁸⁰As Theodore Roszak puts it, the scientist "does not wish to see with the lively, wayward eye [I] of the artist, which allows itself to be seduced by what is charming, dramatic or awesome--and to remain there, entranced. It seeks a neutral eye [I] . . . in effect the eyes of the dead wherein reality is reflected without emotional distortion" (as quoted in Collard, Rape of the Wild, 66).

⁸¹Probably my earliest and still most treasured tools are the various sorts of writing instruments that I possess (sticks, pocket knives, pencils, pens, typewriters, and computers), which, as Elaine Scarry notes, are alterations or redesigns of the hand, for they "endow the hand with a voice that has more permanence than the speaking voice, and reliev[e] communication of the requirement that speaker and listener be physically present in the same space" (The Body in Pain, 254).

⁸²My official break with the Plymouth Brethren occurred in 1978 when I began regularly attending St. John's Presbyterian Church in Culver City, California.

⁸³Mieke Bal discusses narratology both as a microscopic lens and as a distorting lens (Death and Dissymmetry, 240).

⁸⁴Cf. Wayne Meeks, "The Man from Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism," 168-169.

the gospel's imaginative, dramatic story and how it intends to affect its audience.⁸⁵ Narrative poetics and pragmatics are the operative words here.

As I noted in the first chapter, reader-response criticism has always been concerned with analyzing the effects of literature. It is interested in the persuasive goals of texts: how texts work readers and how readers work texts. And in reader-response criticism's more formalist expressions, careful, "close readings" of texts are common practice. But in these two foci I also hear resonances from my past.⁸⁶

I grew up in a home where John Nelson Darby's torturous, literalistic readings of biblical texts (those that gave birth to dispensationalism and theories of a pre-tribulational rapture) were the ideal model of exegesis and translation.⁸⁷ But in our house these were coupled to a devotionally focused ethos. "What does this verse mean to you? What is God trying to tell you today?" were the classic questions asked around our dinner table.⁸⁸ We may have given lip service to Darbyite, "literal readings" of the Bible, but a self-taught, Spirit-centered devotion was what really mattered.⁸⁹

A number of years ago I discovered that this unconventional, Spirit-centered devotion runs thick in my veins, back to the 1650s when my maternal grandmother's ancestors, the Bowerman and Harper families, were expelled from Plymouth Colony for joining the Society of Friends.⁹⁰ A little over a hundred years later my Bowerman forebears were on the move again, this time for remaining neutral during the American Revolution. They were accused of being Tories and harboring pro-British sympathizers. Their lands in Dutchess County, New York were confiscated and the family was forced to flee to Ontario, Canada.⁹¹ The Bowermans remained within the Quaker tradition, following the inner guidance of the Spirit, until the 1890s when they became Plymouth Brethren.

⁸⁵In a particularly insightful discussion, Scarry points out how the weapon and the tool "seem at moments indistinguishable" (*The Body in Pain*, 173). The tool, however, is finally "the concrete record of the connection between the worker and the object of his or her work; it is the path from the object back to its sentient source; it is the path that if eclipsed from attention allows the object to be severed from its source" (*ibid.*, 176; cf. Collard's discussion of "living tools," in *Rape of the Wild*, 58-71; and Slicer's feminist assessment of animal research, in "Your Daughter or Your Dog?," 108-124).

⁸⁶Frein, "Fundamentalism and Narrative Approaches to the Gospels," 13-14.

⁸⁷Gosse, *Father and Son*, 229-231.

⁸⁸Edmund Gosse's nineteenth century description of Plymouth Brethren hermeneutics still fit when I was a child, a hundred years after he wrote: "[M]y parents read injunctions to the Corinthian converts without any suspicion that what was apposite in dealing with half-breed Achaian colonists of the first century might not exactly apply to respectable English men and women of the nineteenth" (*Father and Son*, 57-58; see also 76-77).

⁸⁹For example, see my grandfather Leonard Sheldrake's books, *Our Lord Jesus Christ "A Plant of Renown"; Tabernacle Types and Shadows*; and my great-grandfather George Gray's *One Mediator: A Fourfold Revelation*.

⁹⁰I am a thrice-born son of Plymouth. I was raised within the Plymouth Brethren denomination, I have ancestral roots in the family of William Brewster and the seventeenth century, New England colony of Plymouth, and I was born on December 22, the same day the Mayflower unloaded its cargo at Plymouth Rock (Krupat, *Native American Autobiography and the Synecdochic Self*, 184).

⁹¹Bowerman, "'Bowerman' Family of Ontario Canada (1633 to 1916 inclusive)," 5-6.

But these are not my only dissident, "Tory" roots. Another line in my mother's ancestry is Dutch Reformed, a line diluted by English blood in 1743 when the scheming John Dies married a wealthy, God-fearing woman named Jane Goelet.⁹² John Dies was bound by a different spirit from that of my Quakers ancestors. Like Rip Van Winkle, his addiction to the little brown jug was legendary in the Catskill Mountains of the Hudson Valley.⁹³ But John was also a hard worker. He was an important military supplier of Crown Point during the French and Indian War, and a surveyor and land speculator who, with the help of his father-in-law, bought up patents from the Seneca and Mohawk Indians. One record has him trying to buy the islands just above Niagara Falls for the British Crown--no doubt after getting the Indians dead drunk on the firewater from his ever present jug.⁹⁴

On my father's side, however, the more rational and well-ordered Puritan blood ran thicker--at least in the Prudden and Coe families. Like many of the nineteenth century founders of the Plymouth Brethren, John Prudden, son of Oxford-trained Reverend Peter Prudden, was professionally educated in theology and the Bible. He was a 1668 graduate of Harvard and took his first church in Jamaica, Long Island.⁹⁵ The Prudden family soon married into the Coe family, also of hearty Puritan stock, and a large branch of the Coes eventually moved to western Pennsylvania by way of Morristown, New Jersey.⁹⁶ Near Fort Pitt, Matthew Lamb, the young husband of Jane Coe, volunteered for military service under George Rodgers Clark. A few weeks later, on August 24, 1781, near the confluence of the Great Miami and Ohio Rivers, he was killed

⁹²Randolph, with additions by Hastings, "Jacob Boelen, Goldsmith of New York and his Family Circle," 283-285.

Another New York Dutch ancestral line of mine is that of the Stryker family, which married into the Canadian Bowerman line in the mid-nineteenth century. The New World immigrant, Jacobus Gerritson Strjcker, married Ytie Hubrechts and settled in New Amsterdam in the 1640s. His portraits, some of which are displayed in the National Gallery in Washington D.C., are reminiscent of Rembrandt's style, and are among the earliest produced in colonial America.

The five most recent generations of my mother's family have each had their artists, my brother Greg and his middle son, Jonathan, being the latest in that line. Perhaps it is only coincidence, but it is worth noting that a woman with the same surname as Jacobus's wife married Rembrandt's son (Stryker, The Stryker Family in America, 13). Curiously, dogs play an iconographic role in many of Rembrandt's biblical scenes (Bal, Reading Rembrandt, 185-200; e.g., "The Good Samaritan," 1633, below).

⁹³Due to his drinking bouts, the mansion which John built in Catskill, New York was derisively known as "Dies Folly" and "The Stone Jug" (Mattice, They Walked These Hills Before Me, 114). The Dies house was especially known for its ornate ceramic tile fireplaces. Among their many imported, hand painted biblical scenes, one was particularly memorable. It was of the resurrected Lazarus, striding out of his tomb with an upraised Dutch flag clutched in his hands (Beers, History of Greene County, New York, 88).

Like Rip Van Winkle, John Dies also wandered off from home in the 1760s, never to return. No one knows where or when he died (cf. Fetterley's discussion of Rip Van Winkle, in The Resisting Reader, 1-12).

⁹⁴Johnson, The Papers of Sir William Johnson, Vols. I:674-675; III:326-329, 396-398, 642-643; XIII:240-241; see also, Howland, "Navy Island and the First Successors to the Griffon," 23-24; and Minutes of the Commissioners for Detecting and Defeating Conspiracies in the State of New York: The Albany Sessions 1778-1781, Vol. II:522-523.

⁹⁵Sibley, Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University in Cambridge Mass. 1659-1677, Vol. 2:258-263. See also, Pruden Carman, Thomas C. Carman and Phebe Pruden Carman, 39-47; and Prudden, Rev. Peter Prudden and his Descendants in America.

⁹⁶Bartlett, Robert Coe, Puritan: His Ancestors and Descendants 1340-1910, 80-83, 90-92, 104-105.

by Joseph Brant (Theyandoga), Simon Girty, and their Mohawk warriors, nearly putting an end to the staunch, Puritan

The Good Samaritan, 1633

Rembrandt Harmensz van Rijn

Dutch 1606-1669

etching with burin 257 x 208 mm

Gift of Mr and Mrs Jack F. Feddersen

(The Snite Museum of Art, University of Notre Dame)

The inclusion of three additional males in the picture (bringing the total to six), and the presence of the woman in the background drawing water from a well all work to

evoke an additional New Testament Samaritan story: the Samaritan woman of John 4:4-42 (cf. esp. 4:7, 18. For the iconographic role of dogs in Rembrandt's biblical scenes, see Bal, Reading Rembrandt, 185-200).

foundations of my family.⁹⁷ Today, I find myself wondering whether my friend David Dennison, half Mohawk-Seneca and half Navajo, was a descendant of a member of that war party. Perhaps my forefather, the devious drunkard John Dies, was involved in the woozy-eyed parleys over David's ancestral lands.

So it is not coincidental that my family, all genetically engineered Protestants rooted in the competing ideals of a youthful America, should emphasize the persuasive element of Scripture over everything else. And it is only natural that there should be little or no critical reflection on that element, and no sense of the differentness of Scripture. In our Plymouth Brethren home, scriptural meaning was always simple and crystal clear. Interpretive conflicts did not arise from honest intellectual questions but from willful acts of rebellion.⁹⁸ In view of my family history, then, reader-response criticism functions as a chain linking my ancestral past to my present. Like a chromosome chain, it is wound tightly around the persuasive effects of narrative and my own personal history, yet it provides the critical tension (distance and attention) needed to assess those effects.⁹⁹

When I secured my first professional position in 1985 at a small university adjacent to the St. Johns district of Portland, Oregon, one of my goals as a teacher was to defamiliarize the Bible so that it could be reappropriated afresh by individuals and communities of faith. I firmly believed that in order for growth and learning to begin, one had to be able to see Scripture simply as different from one's own experience of the world --without necessarily being better or worse. Furthermore, I thought that difference, distance, and defamiliarization (sharpened and polished through my years of academic research), were crucial to the critical and hermeneutical task of the biblical scholar. Thus, for example, I sought to show my students how sensitivity to the Johannine manipulation of narrative order (a special emphasis in much of more formalist reader-response criticism), sometimes seemed to subvert the narrator's own explicit agenda.¹⁰⁰ Among other things, this type of reading was intended to undermine students' naive assumptions that they were reading straightforward, historical accounts of events from the life of Jesus. My hope was that, as a consequence, students would more critically evaluate their own unexamined ideological, theological, and historical assumptions regarding canonical texts and the life of faith.¹⁰¹

But again, the ability to "see things differently" is not something that came to me purely through reader-response criticism, nor was it necessarily something I "discovered" in the text of John. Contrary to my earlier assumptions, I do not believe that I developed this ability merely through appropriating the critical, distance-creating tools of scientific, objective research and the rhetorical techniques of academic discourse. As I have begun to think more recently in terms of how my own social context, geographic location, and

⁹⁷Funk, The Revolutionary War Era in Indiana, 23-31; see also Calloway, "Simon Girty," 48.

⁹⁸For example, see Gosse, Father and Son, 233-240.

⁹⁹Myers' description of the "genogram" is helpful here (Who Will Roll Away the Stone?, 102-108).

¹⁰⁰For example, see my exegetical work in chapters 1-3.

¹⁰¹Cf. Moore, Literary Criticism and the Gospels, 171-178; Johnson, "Teaching Deconstructively," 140-148; Crain, "The Implications of Deconstruction in Teaching Servanthood," 88-95.

personal experience interpret the biblical text, I have come to believe that difference, distance, and defamiliarization have been part of my psychological makeup from the age of seven, when my family moved to the Navajo Indian Reservation. Indeed, as Jacques Derrida would argue, difference, distance, and defamiliarization characterize language itself.

Place¹⁰²

From the classic Western films of John Ford, to the wilderness of John the Baptist and Jesus in The Greatest Story Ever Told, and the "Forbidden Zone" out of which an alien human savior comes in Planet of the Apes, the otherworldly landscapes of northern Arizona have served Hollywood's budget-conscious directors well.¹⁰³ But to the university-trained geologist, the country is a vast stratigraphic laboratory of sedimentary rock, volcanic plugs, and intrusive, igneous dikes. Over eons, erosion has cut deeply into the Southwest's mile-high Colorado, Kaibab, and Paria plateaus allowing the modern-day scientist to read the earth's history like an open book. Similarly to Johannine aporias, the mesas, canyons, buttes, and escarpments of the great plateaus break up the cohesive unity of the Rocky Mountain shield and expose in those erosive processes its own myth of origins.¹⁰⁴ For the naive explorer, however, this erosion induced, fantastic world can also be a deathtrap; a bewildering wilderness of waterless false leads and deadends.

From the clear, arid air of the Carrizo Mountains or the tabletop of Sheepskin Mesa, the topography of our valley seemed full of easily identifiable signs and naturally plotted trails.¹⁰⁵ But it could quickly confuse and surprise the uninitiated hiker who had to wrestle with its unseen cliffs, hundred-foot-deep canyons, and meandering washes. To give only one very mundane example: two miles south of the mission the three hundred and fifty foot high butte, *Tsé sa'á*,¹⁰⁶ squatted half naked and in full view from our living room window. Visitors from the Midwest who were hoping for a fifteen minute, evening stroll to the butte would often laugh incredulously at our suggestions that they plan for an hour hike, and begin by walking east in order to get on the south side of an invisible, twenty-foot-deep, thirty-foot-wide wash a hundred yards beyond the mission fence. To them, the land between our house and *Tsé sa'á* was an unbroken, half-mile plain of

¹⁰²"If you don't know where you are, says Wendell Berry, you don't know *who* you are" (as quoted in Stegner, Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs, 199; cf. Krupat's attempt to account for "place" in his explication of an ethnically grounded literary criticism, Ethnocriticism, 115-116; Alcoff, "The Problem of Speaking for Others," 25; and Myers, Who Will Roll Away the Stone?, xix-xx, 47-48, 125, 137-138, 324-329, 369-379, 416-418).

¹⁰³Slotkin, Gunfighter Nation, 305, 518.

¹⁰⁴Alan Culpepper, using geologists' and archaeologists' language, reminds his readers that "Johannine scholars have generally approached the text looking for tension, inconsistencies, or 'aporias' which suggest that separate strains or layers of material are present in the text. The next step is usually to place the 'layers' in some sequence by noting the way they are embedded in the gospel and the probable direction of theological development" (Anatomy of the Fourth Gospel, 3).

¹⁰⁵"Aridity, more than anything else, gives the western landscape its character. It is aridity that gives the air its special dry clarity; . . . aridity that erodes the earth in cliffs and badlands. . . ." (Stegner, Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs, 46).

¹⁰⁶The Navajo word translates as "the rock that sits." On the U.S. Geological Survey map below, it is spelled *Tseh Any*.

saltbush, greasewood, and cacti. They knew nothing of the wash with its clear-flowing stream, night-chirping frogs, and feathery-green tamarisk trees. It was impossible to see its banks from our living room window, even for those of us who knew its precise location. Only the actual experience of walking across the desert could confirm its problematical

Walker Butte, Arizona Quadrangle¹⁰⁷

(U.S. Geological Survey)

existence.¹⁰⁸ Unless one knew exactly where to cross the wash, one could wander up and down its edges for a quarter of a mile before finding a suitable fording place.

Furthermore, once a person descended into the wash, there was no guarantee that he or she could quickly find a route up the opposite embankment. Inattentive hikers could enter the stream

bed a hundred yards southeast of our house and not walk out until it finally broadened into a grassy swale near the sheep dip and branding corral, a mile northwest and completely out of sight of the mission.

I think I read the Gospel of John in the same way I explored those lower reaches of the San Juan Basin: with the natural sense that a hiker's experience of plodding through that tortuous terrain was much different from the stationary perspective of the sentinel seated atop a butte or mesa. Only as a reader begins to move temporally through a specific narrative region is he or she able to feel the lay of the land and negotiate its texture with all its detours, surprises, traps, and gaps. For me, then, geology gave birth to theology; geography and topography metamorphosed into narratology.¹⁰⁹

When I was a student at Shiprock High School on the banks of the San Juan River in northern New Mexico, the word *john* was pejorative reservation slang derisively used by Anglos and "town Navajos" for any Navajo who had not made the transition from traditional Indian culture to the dominant Caucasian culture and its values. Like a chapter from my childhood (like the red-letter text of John in my missionary parents' home or the two-dimensional topographical map on our schoolroom wall), John seems to me to be a gospel that outwardly has a simple message, clearly stated and transparent. But

¹⁰⁷"When everything else has gone from my brain--the President's name, the state capitals, the neighborhoods where I lived, and then my own name and what it was on earth I sought, and then at length the faces of my friends, and finally the faces of my family--when all this has dissolved, what will be left, I believe, is topography: the dreaming memory of land as it lay this way and that" (Dillard, *An American Childhood*, 3).

¹⁰⁸In words that fit the contemporary literary critic of the Bible as well as the westward-headed traveler, Stegner writes, "[a]s we have gone about modifying the western landscape, it has been at work modifying us. . . . Perceptions trained in another climate and another landscape have had to be modified. That means we have had to learn to quit depending on perceptual habit. Our first and hardest adaptation was to learn all over again how to see. Our second was to learn to like the new forms and colors and light and scale when we had learned to see them. Our third was to develop new techniques, a new palette, to communicate them. And our fourth, unfortunately out of our control, was to train an audience that would respond to what we wrote or painted" (*Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs*, 52).

¹⁰⁹"I think of two landscapes--" writes Barry Lopez, "one outside the self, the other within. The external landscape is the one we see--not only the line and color of the land and its shading at different times of the day, but also its plants and animals in season, its weather, its geology, the record of its climate and evolution. . . . The second landscape I think of is an interior one, a kind of projection within a person of a part of the exterior landscape. . . . The interior landscape responds to the character and subtlety of an exterior landscape; the shape of the individual mind is affected by land as it is by genes. . . ." Then, using the Navajo people's "indigenous philosophy" of beauty as a model, Lopez argues: "Each individual, further, undertakes to order his interior landscape [or story] according to the exterior landscape. To succeed in this means to achieve a balanced state of mental health" ("Landscape and Narrative," in *Crossing Open Ground*, 64-68; cf. Engel, "Landscape and Place in Tony Hillerman's *Mysteries*," 112; and Erisman, "Hillerman's *Uses of the Southwest*," 10-12).

underneath that message there is another--which, like the John world outside my childhood front door, or the three-dimensional desert floor--often seems to subvert and controvert the previously established norm. As I approach my fifth decade of life, I am beginning to think that I have long been the unsuspecting victim of two Johns, two geographies, and two existential ironies.

Having long since left my fundamentalist roots and the Navajo Reservation, I am now discovering that that context with its values still remains with me, affecting the way I read and influencing my own persuasive, scholarly agenda.¹¹⁰ But whether I am wrestling with geography or theology, Saint John or San Juan, I will always treasure my initial probings into that gospel. Like the red desert sand of my reservation childhood, the book is my blood. So I am now beginning to believe that the critics of formalist reader-response criticism have an important point to make. Perhaps all our readings of Scripture are autobiographical and circular. Perhaps an objectively obtainable, "textually defined," formalist "encoded reader" is impossible to isolate in the Bible. Perhaps that reader must finally be recognized for what it really is: an invention of modernism, essentialism, and the scientific mind.¹¹¹

But then another possibility stirs my thinking. My curiosity regarding the relationship between autobiography and exegesis was initially aroused by a criticism that Mary Ann Tolbert raised,¹¹² and that criticism led me to pose her question to myself. "Let's assume that she is right," I said. Suppose that the encoded reader I had previously "discovered" in the Johannine text was merely myself, discretely hiding behind the

¹¹⁰As the ancient Hebrew proverb puts it, "Like a dog that returns to its vomit is a fool who reverts to his folly" (Prov 26:11). Or to put it more positively, "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray" (Prov 22:6).

¹¹¹Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 173-174.

¹¹²Echoing Stephen Moore's general observations about biblical reader-response criticism (*Literary Criticism and the Gospels*, 106-107), Mary Ann Tolbert writes: "What Staley's generalized reader masks . . . is the critic himself: Staley's reader reads the way Staley does" ("A Response from a Literary Perspective," 206; cf. Porter, "Why Hasn't Reader-Response Criticism Caught on in New Testament Studies?," 281-282). Similarly, Danna Fewell and David Gunn say that Meir Sternberg's "poetics of foolproof composition [e.g., *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative*], depends not only on the notion of an omnipotent narrator but also on the notion of an ideal, competent reader, presumably the reader epitomized by Sternberg himself" ("Tipping the Balance," 194; cf. Sternberg's rejoinder, "Biblical Poetics and Sexual Politics," 466-467; and Carlton, "Rereading *Middlemarch*, Rereading Myself," 240-241).

Interestingly, Jacques Derrida also exposes the problematics of a writer's masks. In discussing Friedrich Nietzsche's peculiar habit of using pseudonyms in his autobiographical *Ecce Homo*, Derrida writes that Nietzsche "advances behind a plurality of masks or names that, like any mask and even any theory of the simulacrum, can propose and produce themselves only by returning a constant yield of protection, a surplus value in which one may still recognize the ruse of life. However, the ruse starts incurring losses as soon as the surplus value does not return again to the living, but to and in the name of names, the community of masks" (*The Ear of the Other*, 7; cf. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, 39-40; Kazin, "Autobiography as Narrative," 214).

Not surprisingly, masks have an important function in Navajo religion, although outsiders are rarely allowed to view them or the ceremonies in which they are used (*Talking God*, 49-51, 131-133, 189-193, 290). And as Derrida notes, removing them can be life-risking (*The Ear of the Other*, 16-17). One never knows precisely what will be uncovered in that process. In the novel *Talking God*, for example, the only time a mask is taken off in public is when the Navajo detective Chee rips one from a mannequin at the Smithsonian Museum. What lies behind it, attached to it, is a plastic bomb about to detonate (314-315, 322-323).

objectivistic mask of formalist reader-response criticism. What, then, might I discover if I were consciously to lift that mask and investigate my life in the way that I had previously investigated the gospel of John? It was that question which spawned the final three chapters of this book.

Of course, what I have found in investigating my life is that I can just as easily find the gospel of John in my life as I can find my life in the gospel of John.¹¹³ John's gospel has been a place for me to abide. It has been my abode; an adobe-framed hiding place. But St. John has also hounded me, dogging my footsteps as I crisscrossed the western United States. Wallace Stegner writes that "if every American is several people, and one of them is or would like to be a placed person, another is the opposite, the displaced person, cousin not of Thoreau but to Daniel Boone, dreamer not of Walden Ponds but of far horizons, traveler not in Concord but in wild unsettled places, explorer not inward but outward."¹¹⁴ The gospel of John has been all these things to me, both my sense of place and my displacement; my mask and my unmasking; equally the source of unfulfilled dreams and the unsettling impetus to exploration.

I have uncovered St. John every time that I have peered into my past. In my childhood years on the Navajo reservation it flowed with the muddied waters of the San Juan River of northern New Mexico and southern Utah. It lay deep beneath the snowcapped San Juan Mountains of southern Colorado.¹¹⁵ San Juan grit nourished me like Navajo fry bread. The air that scraped its peaks was a sweet-tasting, heady wine.

In early adulthood St. John appeared again, this time in the form of a Presbyterian congregation in southern California. It nurtured me when I was making the difficult decision to leave the Plymouth Brethren. When I crossed the divide into married life, St. John was beside me once more. Now it was the Presbyterian church in Berkeley where Barbara and I pledged our love for each other, across the street from where we conceived our first child.¹¹⁶ Most recently, St. John has been the troubled neighborhood in north Portland, Oregon, near the university where I was denied tenure.

I know no St. John sans Juan--or, for that matter, sans Jean. For my wife and I both were carried in the wombs and suckled at the breasts of women named Jean.¹¹⁷

¹¹³Cf. Jn 17:23. Or as James Olney puts it: "Man creates, in fact, by the very act of seeking, that order that he would have" (Metaphors of Self, 4).

¹¹⁴Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs, 199.

¹¹⁵Wallace Stegner quotes approvingly George Stewart's incredibly romantic vision, how "once from eastern ocean to western ocean, the land stretched away without names. Nameless headwaters split the surf; nameless lakes reflected nameless mountains; and nameless rivers flowed through nameless valleys into nameless bays" (from Names on the Land, as quoted in Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs, 166). While Stegner is correct to go on to note that "Catholic invaders planted innumerable Old World saints in the New World" (ibid., 168), the mountains, rivers, lakes, and valleys were by no means nameless prior to the arrival of Europeans. Around our mission, for example, every topographical feature had a name--each butte, mesa, mountain, spring, valley, and canyon. There was "Whirling Mountain," "Bad Canyon," "Dancing Rocks," "The Rock that Sits," "Sweetwater," "No Water Mesa," "Cottonwood Trees in a Circle," and hundreds more descriptive, nearly untranslatable Navajo names. Every one of them predated Spanish or English place names (cf. Cheyfitz, The Poetics of Imperialism, 137-138; Kelly and Francis, "Places Important to Navajo People," 151-169).

¹¹⁶Our son, Benjamin Walter, was born June 7, 1985, in Berkeley, California. Our daughter, Allison Jean, was born October 15, 1988 in Portland, Oregon.

Full Circles, Straight Lines

I have discovered nothing from reading myself as a reader. Nothing except that I can as easily hide and lie about myself as I can about the gospel of John. And if the critics of reader-response criticism tell me my Johannine "reader" is a fiction, critics of autobiography tell me that the "self" I have read reading the gospel of John is no less a fiction.¹¹⁸ The "I" of this chapter is nothing more than print and paper conceived from the unholy trinity of Tony Hillerman's popular, quasi-anthropological detective novels, my own piecemeal memory, and sacred Scripture. But then, the same can be said of Jesus' self-disclosing "I Am" in John's gospel. It is not his own either. It is merely the text of Exodus 2:14 pinned precariously to his lips by some nameless author. All our reconstructed personae are intertextual and linguistic fictions, whether the referent (or "deferent") is "Jesus," "Jeffrey," or the "Johannine encoded reader."¹¹⁹

So I return to the place where I began, beside the westward headed Santa Fe Trail.¹²⁰ But now I find myself doing the same thing with the challenging question about "the critic himself" as I had done previously with reader-response criticism's questions about encoded readers. To put matters quite simply, once again I have found what I wanted to find: a plausible way of construing data (now defined as text-plus-memory) so as to render critical insight theoretically possible. As a Johannine scholar I have been cursed with having a vivid imagination. As an autobiographer I have been anathematized by a fragmentary memory. Ironically, both imagination and memory are blessings for the author of fiction--whether author of academic fictions or autobiographical fictions.

Perhaps it is time to don a new mask in biblical exegesis; time to move to a different stage. Perhaps what we need today is an openly expressive, human creation; an artistic invention; some form of discourse that will allow the reflected subjectivity of the person to speak as freely as the critically distanced exegete.¹²¹ With this in mind, the next

¹¹⁷My mother's name was Mary Elizabeth Jean, and my mother-in-law's name is Marjorie Jean. Both of my sisters' middle names are also derivations of the name John: Brenda Joan, and Beth Janette.

¹¹⁸To put it a different way, "the problem of autobiography lies in the threat of ideology which dogs all narrative in its compulsion toward wholes" (Gunn, *Autobiography*, 119). Or again: "'Chaos,' Henry Adams said in his *Education*, 'is the law of nature, order is the dream of man.' Both fiction and autobiography attempt to impose order on the only life the writer knows, his own" (Stegner, *Where the Blue Sings to the Lemonade Springs*, 219).

¹¹⁹As Wallace Stegner writes, "we [writers] are all practiced shape-shifters and ventriloquists; we can assume forms and speak in voices not our own. We have to have in some degree, . . . the capacity to make ourselves at home in other skins" (*Where the Bluebird Sings to the Lemonade Springs*, 217). In Navajo culture, those who have this capacity are the changelings, the coyote-faced skinwalkers (Hillerman, *The Blessing Way*, 38, 67, 121-122; *Skinwalkers*, 46). And in contemporary literary theory, the cynocephalic "boundary crossers," those who insist on "betweenness," and the "shifting processes of 'transculturalization'" are the ethnocritics (Krupat, *Ethnocriticism*, 3-45, esp. 28, 37; cf. Vizenor, "Trickster Discourse," 206-207; and Vizenor, *The Trickster of Liberty*, ix-xviii).

¹²⁰The conjunction of circular and linear metaphors here is intentional (cf. Krupat, *Ethnocriticism*, 38-43). As T. S. Eliot wrote somewhere: "The end of all our exploring / Will be to arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time."

¹²¹For example, see Patrocínio Schweickart's discussion of the interpreter's subjectivity ("Reading Ourselves," 528-539, 541; cf. Tompkins, "Me and My Shadow," 36-37; and Freedman, "Border Crossing as a Method and Motif in Contemporary American Writing, or How Freud Helped Me Case the Joint," 14-15).

chapter returns to the gospel of John under an old dramatic guise (the medieval passion play),¹²² but with contemporary content (a fictional conversation juxtaposing the three different perspectives that have guided my interpretive adventures). In utilizing the dramatic genre of the passion play, I intend to move toward the formation of a reader-critic (myself) who is increasingly aware of how autobiographical matters (my reconstructed past, personal values, and present social context), formalist reader criticism, and cultural studies all affect his readings of the Fourth Gospel.

Difference--or à la Jacques Derrida, *différance*--cannot be escaped in any reading strategy. (*Vivè la différence!*) But in my final exegetical explorations, the reader will find distance being strangely twisted; the tools of exegetical practice, telescoped into a personal present; and place obtruding incongruously into the biblical text. In this process, the scientific model of binocular, microscopic readings which I adhered to in my exegesis of John 5 and 9, 11, and 18 will give way to a dramatic, subjective colliding of kaleidoscopic readings.

¹²²The model of Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque is à propos here (*Rabelais and His World*, xviii-xxii, 10-15).