novel opens as the narrator visits an abandoned homestead on the Blackfeet reservation of Montana and confesses his own lost identity and alienation: "I was as distant from myself as a hawk from the moon." Only as the narrator moves into the world of his ancestors does he discover a coherent, centered sense of personal and cultural identity. A more pessimistic vision darkens Welch's second novel, *The Death of Jim Loney* (1979), a book reminiscent of the works of McNickle, Mathews, and other earlier Native writers. The protagonist, Jim Loney, is a half-blood whose isolation and despair move him slowly toward self-destruction. Loney tries in vain to appropriate the identity of his Indian ancestors, "to create a past, a background, an ancestry—something to tell him who he was," but he fails at every turn and is left feeling empty and confused.

In *Fools Crow* (1986), a historical novel set in the 1870s, Welch returns to the traditional world that was only glimpsed in *Winter in the Blood*. Here Welch convincingly reconstructs the traditional world of the Blackfeet, making it accessible to himself and his contemporaries. European Americans (*Napikwans*) are the ones who are "marginalized" in this account, a threatening presence just over the horizon. The novel ends with the reassuring (and metaphorical) springtime return of the buffalo herds to the northern plains: "The blackhorns had returned and, all around, it was as it should be." *The Indian Lawyer* (1990), Welch's fourth novel, is set in the contemporary world and tells the story of yet another deracinated protagonist who struggles to find his place between two worlds. Sylvester Yellow Calf is a successful lawyer who fails to achieve his goal of being elected to Congress and turns his back as well on a critical element of traditional Blackfeet culture. His grandmother offers him her grandfather's ancient medicine bundle but he refuses to take it. Yellow Calf looks in the mirror and tries to imagine himself as his warrior ancestors once were, but all he sees is "a man whose only war, skirmish, actually, was with himself." A war of a different sort is the subject of Welch's first book of nonfiction, *Killing Custer: The Battle of the Little Bighorn and the Fate of the Plains Indians* (1994), a retelling of a familiar tale that gives full credence to Indian oral accounts and challenges the reliability of white sources.

The contemporary Native American novelist most closely akin to N. Scott Momaday is Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna Pueblo). She, too, is a mixed-blood writer whose central concern is the establishment of an authentic identity. "I suppose at the core of my writing is the attempt to identify what it is to be a half-breed or mixed blooded person," she once observed, "what it is to grow up neither white nor fully traditional Indian." Her novel *Ceremony* (1977) parallels in many ways Momaday's masterpiece, *House Made of Dawn*. Both novels describe the homecoming of a mixed-blood World War II veteran, a protagonist seeking to reestablish his Indian identity. Like Momaday's Abel, Silko's Tayo returns home in a state of confusion and fragmentation. His mind is a jumble of conflicting voices and memories, "tangled up like colored threads from old Grandma's wicker sewing basket." What he needs is a healing ceremony, a rediscovery of the stories and a reemersion in the traditions of his people. "You don't have anything," Silko writes, "if you don't have the stories." Aided by a mixed-blood medicine man, his grandmother, and other sympathetic helpers, Tayo spends seven years (as did Abel) reestablishing his identity and place in the Pueblo world. By the novel's end, Tayo has achieved wholeness and health, realizing that "nothing was lost; all was retained between the sky and the earth and within himself." At last he is invited by the elders to enter the kiva, the spiritual center of Pueblo life.

Leslie Marmon Silko's celebration of the role of the mixed-blood is echoed in the works of the nation's most prolific Native American writer, Gerald Vizenor (Chippewa). Born in Minneapolis of mixed-blood parents in 1934, Vizenor has published more than twenty-five books as well as dozens of essays, poems, and stories. After graduating from the University of Minnesota, he taught and studied at various colleges before becoming a professor of Native American literature at the University of California, Berkeley. Like Silko, Vizenor is fascinated with defining a twentieth-century role for people of mixed Indian and white heritage. He identifies the mixed-blood with the trickster of Indian oral tradition, that "shape shifter" who appears in countless forms in the stories of various tribes. Trickster may be human or take on the guise of Coyote, Hare, or Raven. He is at once footloose and irresponsible, lustful and callous, yet also sympathetic and even lovable. In Vizenor's writings, the mixed-blood/trickster figure is the one who mediates between worlds, challenging static definitions of culture and reminding everyone that change and adaptation are essential qualities for personal or communal identity. Echoing the sentiments of Native artists Fritz Scholder and T. C. Cannon, Vizenor rejects the

"terminal creeds" of a fixed identity that leave Indians "stuck in coins and words like artifacts." His mixed-blood/trickster figures demand a constant "reinvention" of what it means to be an Indian.

Vizenor's *Darkness in Saint Louis Bearheart* (1978) is a novel-within-a-novel, a surrealistic tale in which two of the main characters are identifiable tricksters. Proude Cedarfair is an irreverent mixed-blood shaman, whereas Benito Saint Plumero (also known as Big Foot) is a joker and a menace. The novel begins during the American Indian Movement's occupation and ransacking of the Bureau of Indian Affairs headquarters in Washington, D.C. A minor bureaucrat named Saint Louis Bearheart passes on to a young activist a manuscript of his novel, *Cedarfair Circus: Grave Reports from the Cultural Word Wars.* Bearheart's novel tells of the pilgrimage of Proude Cedarfair and other refugees from the fictional Cedar Circus reservation. They are fleeing the plundering of their reservation by unscrupulous tribal officials ("bigbellies") and avaricious corporations bent on exploiting the Circus cedar. The pilgrims travel westward through the wasteland that America has become, heading for the vision window in New Mexico's Chaco Canyon where they can glide into the "fourth world" as bears at the winter solstice. Along the way they are confronted with the essential question, "What does Indian mean?" And they receive the answer, "Indians are an invention." Vizenor's message is clear and unmistakable: Just as the survival of Indian cultures in the past depended upon their ability to adapt and change to new circumstances, the psychic survival of individuals today (mixed-bloods in particular) depends upon their willingness to engage in new acts of creative self-imagining.

Vizenor's subsequent works—especially *Griever: An American Monkey King in China* (1987), *The Trickster of Liberty* (1988), and *Manifest Manners: Postindian Warriors of Survivance* (1994)—continue to insist upon the necessity of invention and imagination as the true path to liberation. *Griever* chronicles the experiences of a mixed-blood Native American teacher in China, where the spirit of the Indian trickster is merged with that of Monkey, the immortal trickster of Chinese mythology. Neither white nor Indian (or is he both?), the composite mixed-blood trickster in the guise of Griever de Hocus challenges fixed cultural identities and opens wide the possibilities of new creations. In *The Trickster of Liberty,* Vizenor carries his campaign against "terminal creeds" even further. Here he takes on white scholars and other "friends of the Indian" who would relegate Native Americans to the world of collectible artifacts and colorful ancient times. He also spurns contemporary Indian activists who attempt to fulfill white fantasies of resurrected mythic warriors. Vizenor's hilarious but devastating portrait of Coke de Fountain, an "urban pantribal radical," is a thinly veiled parody of the American Indian Movement's Dennis Banks. De Fountain is a paroled felon whose "tribal career unfolded in prison, where he studied tribal philosophies and blossomed when he was paroled in braids and a bone choker." Vizenor continues the attack in *Manifest Manners,* charging that the media lionize radical Indian activists while ignoring the ongoing struggle of tribal leaders. He offers the term "postindian" as an antidote to the stereotypes and misconceptions spawned by half a millennium of Indian-white contact. In *Manifest Manners,* as in all his writings, Vizenor fights "those values he despises, but he fights them obliquely and with wit rather than directly with confrontation." As Alan Velie, author of *Four American Indian Literary Masters* (1982), observed, "Vizenor's weapon is satire and humor; he plays the clown while launching his attacks."

The greatest commercial success in the 1980s and 1990s was enjoyed by the Native American novelist Louise Erdrich (Chippewa). Born in Minnesota of mixed-blood parents, Erdrich published a quartet of highly acclaimed novels exploring the marginal zone of American society where (in the words of Louis Owens) "fullbloods, mixedbloods, and non-Indians meet and merge." Erdrich's first installment, *Love Medicine* (1984), outsold any previous novel by a Native American author and received a host of critical awards, including the *Los Angeles Times* award for best novel of the year. It tells the complex story of three generations of Chippewa families in which some members gain a coherent sense of self, while others remain displaced and deracinated. In the tradition of McNickle, Momaday, Welch, and Silko, Erdrich begins the story with a homecoming. June Kashpaw, a middle-aged Chippewa woman, is heading home from an oil boomtown to her reservation but is caught in a blizzard and freezes to death. Later, as if in an artful mirror, Nector, the patriarch of the Kashpaw family, spoofs the Indian identity he was assigned as an extra in a Hollywood movie: "'Clutch your chest. Fall off that horse,' they directed. That was it. Death was the extent of Indian acting in the movie theater." Far more satisfying was the authentic

identity of Albertine, taught by her mother the stories and ways of her ancestors. "I raised her an Indian," says Albertine's mother, "and that's what she is."

*The Beet Queen* (1986), Erdrich's second novel, is peopled with lost souls adrift in a small town near the Minnesota–North Dakota border during the years 1932 to 1972. Identities are confused among the leading characters, Indian and white, and a sense of community seems to have vanished. Gradually, a renewed feeling of collective identity coalesces around the mixed-blood character Dot, fated to be crowned someday the Beet Queen. Erdrich's third novel, *Tracks* (1988), is set in the early twentieth century and describes the beginnings of the disintegration that will plague the characters of *Love Medicine* and *The Beet Queen*. Yet even here the people are connected in a fragile web of relationships that gives them a sense of identity. The stories told by the elders confirm a pattern that is not evident in the rush of daily events. "There is a story to it the way there is a story to all, never visible while it is happening. Only after, when an old man sits dreaming and talking in his chair, the design springs clear." *The Bingo Palace* (1994), Erdrich's final novel of the quartet, begins once again with the familiar scene of a homecoming. Lipsha Morrissey returns from the city in search of an authentic life, is smitten by a beautiful dancer at a powwow, and becomes entangled in his uncle's scheme to build a gambling palace on the shore of a sacred lake. After a series of mystical encounters, Lipsha learns the "bingo life" is an attraction that "has no staying power, no weight, no heart."

The central theme in the works of Louise Erdrich, as in those of her many colleagues in the Native American literary renaissance, is the anguished and heroic attempt by individuals and whole communities to hold on to what is left of their fragmented identities. "There's a quest for one's own background in a lot of this work," Erdrich once commented. "You look back and say, 'Who am I from?' You must question. . . . All of our searches involve trying to discover where we are from."

## SHORT STORIES

Native American writers in the late twentieth century were as prolific in their production of short stories as they were of novels. Less well known to the general reading public than the major novels, Indian short stories were equally as rich and expressive of the themes found



in the longer works. As Craig Lesley, editor of *Talking Leaves: Contemporary Native American Short Stories* (1991), observed, the enduring values in Indian short fiction include "respect for the land and tribal elders, a sense of history and tradition, awareness of the powers inherent in storytelling, and a closeness to the spiritual world." Native writer Clifford E. Trafzer (Wyandot), editor of *Earth Song, Sky Spirit: Short Stories of the Contemporary Native American Experience* (1992), concurred. Twentieth-century Indian writers, he explained, "understand clearly that they are part of today's world but that their tribal traditions, languages, ceremonies, and stories create a relationship to this land that is unmatched by others." The search for an authentic Indian identity took many forms in the short stories—traditional myths are reworked in contemporary settings, spiritual powers are invoked in moments of crisis, contemporary problems are confronted and overcome, old ways are preserved in the midst of conflicting pressures, and the mythical image of the Indian is dismissed with good humor and disdain.

The reworking of traditional myths was central to the work of Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo/Lakota), a writer and scholar whose anthology of short stories, *Spider Woman's Granddaughters* (1989), was awarded the American Book Award. Her story "Deer Woman" is about two young men, Ray and his pal Jackie, who get more than they bargain for when they pick up a couple of strikingly beautiful young women at a "stomp dance" on a sultry summer's day in Oklahoma. The two women turn out to be incarnations of Deer Woman, a spirit who leads the bewildered men to the mountain home of Thunder. The experience makes sense only when Ray remembers the stories that his great-uncle used to tell: "He said that Deer Woman would come to dances sometimes, and if you weren't careful she'd put her spell on you and take you inside the mountain to meet her uncle. He said her uncle was really Thunder, one of the old gods or supernaturals, whatever the traditionals call them." In "Spirit Woman," from *The Woman Who Owned the Shadows* (1983), Allen narrates a mystical encounter between a contemporary Indian woman named Ephanie and the spirit of Old Woman. The spirit tells Ephanie of the creation of the universe and charges her with keeping the story alive: "Pass it on, little one. Pass it on."

A similar intersection of ancient myth and contemporary reality forms the basis of Gloria Bird's "Turtle Lake." Bird, a widely published Spokane poet, was a founding member of the Northwest Native