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

American Writers Association. In "Turtle Lake" she tells the story of two ice fishermen, Sklemucks and Tapete, who reflect mournfully on the devastation by the *suyapi* (whites) of the timber reserves on their reservation. As they fish on a frozen lake their conversation turns to the old stories of "Stick Indians" that they had heard as children. "Do you think the old folks made up those stories just to scare us kids with?" asks Sklemucks. Suddenly, the ice begins to crack and the two fishermen race for the shore, making it to safety just in time. What had happened? "Asshole here started talking about Stick Indians so loud," explains Tapete, "that he woke them up!"

Traditional myth is also at the center of "Diamond Island: Alcatraz," a short story by Darryl Babe Wilson (A-Juma-We/Atsuge-We). The narrator of the story visits his centenarian grandfather and learns from him the legend of the Mouse Brothers who traveled long ago from the Pit River country of northeastern California to Alcatraz Island (*Allisti Ti-tanin-miji*) where they discovered a healing treasure for all people. The brothers returned with the treasure, but now it is lost. Grandfather's story is mixed with recollections of his own confinement on Alcatraz in the days when it was a military prison for California Indians. He remembers his escape from Alcatraz, riding on his mother's back through the treacherous waters that swirled around the island. The narrator is confounded by what his grandfather tells him, not knowing what to believe. Years later, long after his grandfather's death, he realizes that such stories are an important part of his heritage and identity. "Perhaps a generation approaching will be more aware, more excited with tradition and custom and less satisfied to being off balance somewhere between the world of the 'white man' and the world of the 'Indian,' and will seek this knowledge." In anticipation of that day, Wilson collected several hundred traditional stories of California Indians. Typical was "Akun, Jiki Walu: Grandfather Magician," a story of "long ago when magic was a large part of the everyday life of the native people of 'California.' "

The central importance of spiritual knowledge and power is the message of dozens of Native American short stories. Anita Endrezze (Yaqui) combines traditional myth with her story of Rosa, a half-blood woman seeking a cure for her blind eye and a reaffirmation of her faith. In "The Humming of Stars and Bees and Waves," Endrezze, a professional storyteller and teacher, describes the spiritual challenges that face the modern half-blood. "You have to believe that trees and rocks and birds talk," she explains, "and you have to have faith in glass-walled elevators and voices that are transmitted from space." Seeking to regain her sight, Rosa accepts the call of Spider Woman to come to a sacred cave with offerings of cedar, tobacco, and corn. ("No walkie-talkie. No flashlight.") Once in the cave, she regains her sight, both physical and spiritual. "Her eye is clear. There is no division between the worlds of seeing and believing." In "Marlene's Adventure," Endrezze tells of a comparable crisis that comes when the head of an Indian family collapses and is rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery. Unlike Rosa, Marlene has no healing encounter with Spider Woman. Her life, instead, "hung on a series of meaningless ifs" and "was falling apart."

In a similar vein, Anna Lee Walters (Pawnee/Otoe-Missouria) opens her story "Bicenti" with an all-encompassing statement of spiritual disjunction, "*THINGS WEREN'T RIGHT.*" The setting is a suburban neighborhood near Santa Fe where two Indian women, Maya and Wilma, encounter a series of mysterious phenomena. "What's happening?" Maya asks in disbelief. A man appears at her front door, eerily gyrating in ways that were not humanly possible. "He bobbed up and down, as if there were springs in his legs and feet. He waved his arms imitating a grounded bird, and he contorted his face into grotesque masks that changed and flitted away as quickly as they settled over his features." This encounter with a shape-shifting trickster convinces Maya that she must seek the help of Bicenti, a tribal medicine man whom she convinces to come to her suburban home. Once there, she was sure, he "would bind the tiniest fracture in infinite space and time. Then, he would go silently away, until the next time."

The message of Anita Endrezze and Anna Lee Walters is that spiritual powers are still present and effective for those who believe. The works of Diane Glancy (Cherokee), a professor of creative writing and Native American literature at Macalester College, hold out the same hope. In "Aunt Parnetta's Electric Blisters," Glancy uses a broken refrigerator as a metaphor for spiritual frigidity and for the frustrations of contemporary Indian life. When the refrigerator stops working, Uncle Filo loads his rifle like an old-time warrior and sends a bullet through it. "Had to stand against civilization," he says. Aunt Parnetta sees the failure of the refrigerator as part of a larger pattern: "Everythin' against uz." Hemmed in on all sides, Parnetta seeks the Great Spirit in a dream, hoping for a healing not only of her broken