'Narrative and Identity

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CHAPTER 6

"The people will come to you"

Blackfeet narrative as a resource for contemporary living

Donal Carbaugh

Living in a new community can present puzzles like those we encounter when walking a new path. While moving along it, we can see perhaps familiar plants and trees such as a dogwood bush and a white pine. With the familiar in view, we can move about the place, finding our way by attending to what we already know, being comforted by the new place's familiar features. Also, when traveling a new path, we inevitably confront something different, perhaps it is even a prominent fixture we contact repeatedly. Try as we might to understand this novelty, we are not quite able to recognize nor apprehend what it is nor its place in the local scheme of things. If we pursue our drive to understand, we might eventually learn about that situated and distinctive fixture: "I see, that's sweet grass! And that, rabbit willow!" Each, we eventually realize, plays an important, formative role in this new place, helping make this place what it is. Coming to know this enhances our senses of this communal place. Moreover, the fixture can transfix, and expand our ideas of what communal places are, and can possibly be.

As with the objects of new communities and places, so with their stories and people. So much so, in fact, we might doubt we've heard things correctly. A story may shock us: How could someone actually "sit on a cloud" and watch "the mountains"? How could THAT possibly be? Over time, we may come to doubt less what we've heard. Just as we learn to recognize sweet grass and rabbit willow and their contribution to places, so too we can better understand life's heavenly mysteries by attending carefully to other people's particular tales. Each, we may find, plays its role in making people who they are — in making places what they are. Learning how this is so may extend our senses of stories,

of places, of personal and cultural identities, of what each is, and of who we, together, might possibly be.

Periodically, since 1978, I have been taught by, discussed and lived with an "Indian" people in northern hlontana of the United States.' This essay focuses on a small set of oral texts which members of this contemporary Native American community produced while in my company. While the texts, at first, were difficult for me to comprehend, they were also deep with significance to those who spoke them. The texts, some of which are full-fledged stories, were being constructed by speakers as a means of expressing important claims to me about themselves, their lives, and their ways of living in place. Two such statements are the following.

In the summer of 1996, when living on the Blackfeet Reservation, I was riding with Two Bears on a dirt road in his large Dodge van.[2] We were driving deep into — what one sign announced was — Blackfeet Country. We were high upon the great northern plains of Montana with the Rocky Mountains towering in the background — "the backbone of the world" as the Blackfeet sometimes referred to it. Our discussion turned to the sources of wisdom, inspiration, and power in our lives. Two Bears was mentioning to me, as his elders had mentioned to him, an important way of gaining insight in his life: "If you don't understand something, or have some troubles, you can get some tobacco and go to a quiet place. If you wait for awhile, it will come to you." We sat in silence for awhile as the van bounced along the dusty road. In a few minutes, Two Bears decided to say more about this: "Usually our people go to a high place like Chief Mountain, or Sweet Grass Hills, or just up in the mountains. Usually the first thing you do is go to a sweat lodge. Then, as you fast, you might burn some sweet grass, blow an eagle whistle, pray. And the way I do it is I sit down and focus on something like a tree in the distance. Then you can watch for the spirits between you and that tree. When the spirits do come, they can raise cane, especially the first two nights. We are a superstitious people and your imagination can get carried away and chase you back. But if you make it through two nights, you're usually okay, By the fourth night, if the spirits show up, they teach you things like four new songs that no one has heard before, And you learn those songs. Then you can come down and maybe have some broth and share your vision and songs. This is a real source of healing and power."

A few years earlier, in the summer of 1989, Rising Wolf and I were discussing the stresses and strains of everyday living. He used "the flypaper" metaphor to explain this process: "The way I interpret it [everyday spiritual living] to other Native American people, is like the strip of flypaper hangin' from the wall,

the ceiling, and when it gets so filled with flies. That's the way — in the spiritual world, that's the way we look. Every time we step into the store, we step into a building, we step into anything. (...) It's total confusion that will stick to you. That energy will poke you every once in a while, and you do the oddest things. You forget — the spaciest thing, the easiest thing, you space it out. When you start gettin' into that, it's such total confusion, then you're probablylookin' like that flypaper that's full of flies." What does one do after getting covered with all of those flies? One goes to a special place and listens: "Like one time I woke up in the middle of sweet grass. It was so beautiful! Well, I sat there and I realized it was sweet grass and I just (pause) started grabbin' it by handfuls and I thought, well, I'll wait. Let me see what else is here. And I just started checkin' around. And the spirits did show up. I just laid on that sweet grass and hung onto it and just started prayin' and tell them to 'take pity on me. Nowadays,' I say, 'I'm a little confused, so you gotta watch my mind. It might wonder off and think about something else. But my heart's with you.' And I hang on and hope nothing but the good happens, because there has to be a balance." Rising Wolf wanted me to know that this particular process with "the spirits" can purify one's spiritual self, keeping it clean from the corruption of everyday affairs. As a result, he said, you get "stronger ... in understanding what's around you."

If the oral texts that I have reproduced here are somewhat difficult to comprehend, on first hearing them, it is not because those who made them are misguided or confused. Nor is it because, as one author some time ago unfortunately would have it, the Blackfeet have "the mind and feelings of a child and the stature of a man". The problem here is one of communication and culture, a barrier to expressing meanings that are deep in existential significance and value. The problem arises from the evident fact that many Blackfeet people inhabit and create a cultural world of objects and events that is largely unfamiliar to most of us. What kind of world is this? Or, more specifically, what kind of cultural context must be presumed by these Blackfeet for the above statements to be acceptable as sensible claims about the world?[3]

Even more specifically, what do we need to know to interpret Two Bears' claim that "troubles" may lead one to a "quiet" or "high place"? And further, while there, that "you can watch for spirits" and "they can raise cane" but also that "they teach you things" with these teachings being "a source of healing and power"? And how can we understand Rising Wolf's claim that we attract "flies" of "confusion" as we conduct our daily affairs? How is it that he "woke up in the middle of sweet grass", "began checkin' around" and "the spirits did show up"? What should we make of his linking this event to his "hope [that] nothing

but the good happens" and his efforts to maintain the right "balance"? Are expressions and events like these being structured in metaphorical terms, or are they somehow, given Blackfeet premises of existence and value, to be taken literally? In cases like these, what are the distinctive meanings associated with these cultural forms of expression? What cultural logic pervades these and similar sayings, and makes them make sense?

I respond to these and other questions by exploring how some Blackfeet speak about, and address, life's challenges through creating discourse about particular practices in places. My discussion focuses on features of these oral texts, one narrative in particular, my purpose being to discover in these texts and that narrative something of how Blackfeet construct their world and live within it. When some Blackfeet discuss life's difficulties — or, as happens more often, when they tell stories about meeting and overcoming life's obstacles — they create active moral and cultural texts that integrate physical objects, social events, spiritual presence, and natural place. These rather routine sayings negotiate issues and understandings that are deeply intelligible to them, thus making credible claims about who they are (and are not), what they do, where they live, and how they relate to the world, spirits, and people around them. In short, through particular words and phrasings, integral features of a people's view of the world are being shaped to meet life's current circumstances. Through these words and phrasings, personal circumstances are being interpreted and linked to a meaningful cultural universe.

This universe of meanings provides the cultural world, and worlds in which the texts presented earlier acquire their deeper sense and significance. Thus, if we want to understand some of the claims active in those statements, we must explore parts of that context. If we make these parts explicit, that is, if we can relate these texts and that narrative to other events and scenes of Blackfeet life, then we can more readily comprehend some of the basic premises of belief and existence that are active in those texts. Cultural premises like thcse comprise an informal yet robust Blackfeet model about, and for being, acting, feeling, and living in place, the model itself being both a process and product of cultural expression. The oral statements under consideration here, then, integrate through a Blackfeet model a spiritual and natural world in order to address specific contingencies of everyday life. While this dynamic play between cultural context and everyday contingencies may be near universal, the particular means for expressing this, and the cultural meanings associated with them are uniquely Blackfeet. Through their workings, we shall see, if I am at all successful, how the contemporary world is being lived in a potent, and traditional, Blackfeet way.

If it appears, then, at the onset, that the focal texts and narrative arelacking in depth or complexity, we will find eventually that both are active to a considerable degree. And should the objective of hearing cultural life in brief snippets of talk appear too narrow, we will find that more general issues are involved. Among these is the reluctance of some scholars to grapple with cultural worlds and intercultural dynamics in communicative forms, including narrative form.[4] Also understudied is the integration of spiritual and natural concerns in communication and cultural studies, as well as human uses of traditional, memorial texts in order to meet the complex exigencies of everyday living.[5]

The discussion that follows will focus on one particular narrative text. I have chosen this text because it brings together in one oral performance the various Blackfeet features and premises that have been introduced above by Two Bears and Rising Wolf, and that are active in my larger corpus. In other words, this one narrative is a felicitous and forceful performance, striking familiar features and forms, all of which are dense with cultural significance. As befits treatments of narratives, and following a strong tradition within narrative studies, I explore in turn the narrative as a performance event, as a text produced by a speaker upon a particular occasion. This introduces several concerns contextual, cultural, and intercultural to the analysis. Then I examine some of the ritualized events being discussed or alluded to in the narrative, events active in Blackfeet traditions and contemporary lives. Finally, I treat the narrative as a deeply complex cultural form which itself uses mythic and dramatic features to honor the relevance of a sacred past to life in a troublesome present.

The narrative as performance event

In the summer of 1989 I was teaching a course in Communication and Culture at the University of Montana. I had seized the opportunity partly to enjoy the Rocky Mountain west with my family in the town where I had met my wife, and partly to further my understanding of Blackfeet communication and culture. Upon learning of my interest in Blackfeet matters, a student in my class suggested I meet Mr. Rising Wolf, a full-blooded Blackfeet who was raised in traditional ways. I thought meeting him was an excellent idea so my student, herself an Indian, agreed to arrange for a meeting between us.

During our discussions, Rising Wolf told me much about Blackfeet life mainly by contrasting its "traditional culture" with "the more contemporary way". According to him, the more contemporary world had to do with making

a living, earning money, and being on time with a clock-scheduled existence; the more traditional had to do with natural cycles, the land, and living with "the spirits in nature". Tuning into nature's rhythms, cycles, and spirits, he claimed, was an integral part of one's life as an Indian. He spoke in depth about these matters, in a language I now hear as deep with meanings. Conveying the density in the matters can be difficult, however. Especially when the way of living is less familiar to one's interlocutor, or non-Indians generally. At one point, talking about non-Indians he had worked cooperatively with, and feeling as if he knew something of their world and they little to nothing of his, he paused and said: "White people don't understand the Native American". And further, part of what they don't understand, he said, is the way spiritual life is an intimate part of everyday life and everyday things, not just "something to be set aside for Sunday mornings in the name of Religion". Making this point, Rising Wolf emphasized the spiritual dimension of all life, and the importance of being attuned to the spiritual dimensions of all objects, people, and events. To elaborate the point, he made these remarks:

Rising Wolf's Story: "The people will come to you"[6]

1) The land that you walk on is your church

2) In the spiritual ceremonies, they bring you there
3) All of the sudden, you're not in the modern day life
4) You look at yourself and maybe (3 second gay in tape)

5) This one ceremony
6) it had been about six years
7) and I was traveling and I wanted to go home
8) and these old men asked me
9) "What would you like to do?
10) Would you like to pray, or anything?"
11) I said
12) "I'd like to see my home, my home land
13) It's been a long time"

14) And all I did was I leaned over and then I sat up
15) and when I sat up I was in the clouds
16) and everybody around me was gone

17) These two people who were pretty tall skinny people
18) they were spiritual
19) they were Indians
20) they were just tall Indians
21) but it was in a spiritual world
22) they grabbed me by each arm
23) and we must have took — this was back east — but
24) we must have took about five or six steps
25) just like we walked right over to the edge of this rug
26) right to the edge and looked down

27) And down below I could see Browning
28) I could see the mountains
29) I could see East Glacier
30) i could see Babb
31) I could see all these different landmarks, up there
32) And 1 sat down and just looked
33) Just like you were sitting on one of these clouds outside
34) and just looked and watched everything
35) You could see little cars cruising down the streets, y'know
36) You could see my grandma's house
37) and looked at the mountains
38) until I felt comfortable
39) and that was good
40) and thought I shouldn't take too much time
41) 'cause I didn't realiy know exactly how I got there
42) or how or where I was at
43) except I knew
44) I decided, y'know
45) I was on a cloud

46) Anyway, they came up, they brought me back
47) and the next thing I sat up and I was in the tepee there, y'know

48) And in the same way when travelling
49) when the spiritual people take you
50) You can go to different places
51) And in your dreams you can travel really a lot
52) You can go to a lot of different places
53) and see a lot of different people

54) And then at the same time, go to the ceremony, and have this
55) If you didn't understand something in the dream
56) you go to the elderly
57) And they'll put on the ceremony
58) And they'll have those people in that dream come to you
59) if it was real
60) If not, then they would say it was your imagination
61) But if it was real
62) then the people will come to you
63) and they'll talk to that old man as an interpreter
64) and they'll answer your questions

Upon hearing this story for the first time, I confess to being bewildered. I naively asked Rising Wolf, "So, your experience in the cloud was real?" He replied, "Uh-huh". Not being sure what this implied, I tried to clarify its exact meaning, "It's not an illusion or something in your mind, but literally, you were there". "Yes". "You literally saw what you described to me?" "Yes. Yes. And you could smell and feel". He went on, patiently, generously, in great depth, to help me understand the reality of it all.

The narrative itself

Rising Wolf's narrative meets the classic, six formal properties of narrative proposed by Labov (1972,1982) and summarized by Riessman (1993, pp. 18–19) and Langellier (1989). It includes an abstract (lines 48–53, and similarly lines 54-64), an orientation (lines 3, 5–16), complicating action (e.g., homesickness, complex movements between places where spirits are more and less active), evaluation of action (lines 58–64), resolution (lines 38–39), and coda [line 47). In the following analyses, I will integrate these but will emphasize the Blackfeet substance of the story with special attention to its premises about communication, and its attendant shifts in scenes, events, and acts (see Burke 1945).

Following the remarks made by Rising Wolf [on lines 7, 48, and 51), the narrative can be heard as a complex travel tale in four motifs. The narrative traces movements along a spatial dimension from East to West, along a cultural dimension from a "white man's" to a Blackfeet orientation, along a temporal dimension from newer "modern day" to more "traditional" features of existence, and along a spiritual dimension from its muting to its amplification.'

These movements can be heard as organized into three main parts. Using Rising Wolf's language, part one (lines 1–45) could be titled "they bring you there", on a voyage, from the East where "white man's" modern day life amplifies material possessions, to the West where traditional Blackfeet life amplifies spiritual living. Part two (lines 46-47) could be titled "they brought me back" in which the traveler returns to the original scene as mysteriously as he left it. The third part (lines 48-64) summarizes the point of the narrative and its movements, in Rising Wolf's words, "when the spiritual people take you... they'll answer your questions". If these are the main parts, how are they put together? And what does all of this say about Blackfeet narratives and identity?

Port *one:* "They *bring you there"*

In line 1, Rising Wolf establishes a cultural scene in which "land" is something sacred. As he says, it is "your church". As Percy Bullchild (1985, p.268), a Blackfeet elder puts it: "Nature as a whole was all sacred to our Natives. Our way was all reverence for the universe." Rising Wolf's equation of "land" and "church" is a way of establishing the basic belieithat spirits and nature are not separate, independent worlds, but dimensions of one, interconnected world, a sacred place worthy of our deepest respect, and — like clergy or altars — to be consulted for wisdom and strengths[8]

One way Rising Wolf can observe the spirit-nature link is through "spiritual ceremonies" which he mentions on line 2. When involved in these ceremonies, like vision quests, sweat lodge rituals, and the like, Rising Wolf is involved in a special kind of communication in which "they bring you there", into a real spiritual world where one can gain special insights. Rising Wolf gives us an important preview here of how "the powers of mystery" — as Percy Bullchild (1985, p.337) puts it — work through spiritual ceremonies. In these events, spiritual powers can work over participants in mysterious and expedient ways. Thus, "all of the sudden" Rising Wolf finds he is "not in the modern day life" anymore. He is taken somewhere else. As he says later, "I didn't really know exactly how I got there" (line 41). He has been moved quickly and powerfully in an unknowing way to another place, or onto another plane of existence. This Blackfeet ceremonial communication thus sets a scene in which spiritual agency can dramatically transform and transfer agents through its powers of mystery. Just how does this happen?

Rising Wolf informs us how "this one ceremony" worked (on lines 5–16). He had been traveling away from home for "about six years". As sometimes

happens on long journeys, he was feeling troubled, out-of-sorts, and homesick. He "wanted to go home". At this point of the story, Rising Wolf introduces two characters, the "old men" who inquire about his wishes (lines 9–10), and conduct proper ceremonial activities on his behalf. With the aid of "these old men", Rising Wolf suddenly and mysteriously finds himself "in the clouds and everybody around [him] was gone".

Being "in the clouds" marks a complex shift in scene. "In the clouds", we eventually discover, is a spiritual place, a traditional place from which Rising Wolf's capacities for living can be enhanced, where traditional sources of wisdom can be tapped to meet the difficulties in his current life. In the process, the "old men" characters — through a kind of figure-ground shift between a material and spiritual motif — become (on lines 17–26) "two people", "pretty tall skinny people", "spiritual... Indians" who help Rising Wolf within "a spiritual world". They escort him "right to the edge", to a good place, which provides a better perspective from which to gain insight concerning his current woes (lines 25–26). The scene in the story has thus shifted from the "modern day life" mentioned earlier (on line 3) to a more traditional one, from a material present with "these old men" ton more spiritual presence "in the clouds", from a Whiteman's place "back east" to a Blackfeet "home" in the West.

The reference to "pretty tall skinny people" was quite puzzling to me upon first hearing it (as on lines 17, 20). In a recent discussion of American Indian oral traditions, in a chapter titled "creatures of their own size", Vine Deloria (1995, pp. 156–157; also see 191–192) comments upon a character in some stories called, "the tall ones". Many white commentators have, according to Deloria, misinterpreted this phrase as "giants" thus invoking related images of fairy tales, trolls, and tirades. In its proper Indian sense, Deloria claims the phrase can refer literally and variously to a taller tribe of Indians that once inhabited North America, to a period in history when Indians were indeed tall, or perhaps by implication to tall and strong ancestors who can serve as spiritual guides. "Tall skinny people" may, then, here refer to ancestors of considerable physical and spiritual stature that are traditional sources of aid.

With the help of the "old men" and "tall Indians", Rising Wolf has been transported "right to the edge and looked down", a place that helps him come to terms with his homesickness. It is significant at this point of the story, after receiving help into a spiritual place, Rising Wolf is on his own. If "old men" can help you gain access to a spiritual world, what you do and learn while there is up to you. In this ceremony, while perched on the cloud, Rising Wolf exalts, "I could see" and what he saw were familiar "landmarks", including "Drowning",

the cultural center of the Blackfeet Reservation, and two other towns on the reservation, East Glacier and Babb. He could see his "grandma's house" and "cars cruising down the streets". Above all, he "could see the mountains". He sat looking down upon his homeland, rc-connected to its sacred places, important people, able to see and feel at home again. All of this "felt comfortable and that was good".

Rising Wolf's being now elevated, and exercising proper modesty, he does not demand too much of a "good" thing, and does not want to "take too much time" on the cloud. He reminds his listener of the powerful mystery of the spirit world saying, "I didn't really know exactly how I got there". To a traditional Blackfeet listener, one is reminded here of the various ways spirits can work. As Two Bears mentioned earlier, "when the spirits do come, they can raise cane", or "they can teach you things". "A spirit can be so rough or so timid, whichever way it wants to treat you before it bestows his power on you", as Percy Bullchild (1985, p. 337) puts it. Because of the mystery and uncertainty involved, one moves, or is moved in and out of the spiritual world with caution and reverence. Perhaps one has little if any say in the matter, but if one does, like Rising Wolf; one exercises a proper vigilance in the matter.

Part two: "They came up, they brought me back"

If arrival in the spiritual world is rather sudden and mysterious, as Rising Wolf suggests (lines 14–16),so too is its departure. He tells us, "they brought me back and the next thing I sat up and I was in the teepee there" (lines 46–47). To whom, or to what does "they" refer, here? Who brought Rising Wolf back? And what might this suggest about the movement between spaces, cultures, times, and spirits?

By this point in the story, the use of "they" is quite dense with meaning. In one sense, "they" is referring to the "old men", to the physical side of spiritual being. In this sense, these are the people, typically elders, who respond to requests for aid, stage appropriate ceremonies, and serve as wise, active participants in those ceremonies. In another sense, "they" refers to "tall, spiritual Indians", to the spiritual side of physical being. These people help guide spiritual existence, and channel actions and consciousness in productive ways that help the seeker. As a spiritual aid or channel, "they" can help you gain entry into and exit from a spiritual world. "They", thus refers to a complex character who is at once an embodied spirit and a spiritual body. As this character acts through the body and spirit, so the seeker renews the integral connections

between the material and spiritual, land and church, as each sustains the other, so both exist together.

There is another, related sense to "they" which is not so immediately active in line 46, at least with reference to a particular character, but is a condition for the meaningfulness of that line, and Rising Wolf's story itself. In this sense, "they" is referring — as it is being used for example on line 2 — not just to a character, but to "spiritual ceremonies" as cultural events, themselves. In this sense, the ceremonies provide a significant communicative form through which troubles are addressed, personal capacities bolstered, spiritual existence enhanced. In such events, supplicants contact greater truths and traditional sources of wisdom and power, exactly those that are at risk in Rising Wolf's contemporary world. Moving into ceremonial events, if done properly, one can restore a proper "balance", as he put it earlier, in one's spiritual and physical being, Since these events work in powerful and mysterious ways, care and modesty is to be exercised. One should be thankful that the spiritual world has renewed one's sense of living again, and take one's leave before overstaying one's welcome. Also due to the potency of the event, its status as "real" is to be safeguarded by those best in the position to know. And thus we return again to the "old men", yes, "the elders". It is "they" who help again.

Part *three: "When the spiritual people take you, they'll answer **your*** questions"

Rising Wolf summarizes his tale and its resolution (lines 48–53). Through "spiritual ceremonies", like the one he just described, "spiritual people" can take you "to a lot of different places and see a lot of different people". He wants his listener to know that the same event and process can apply to various personal circumstances, to various troubles, carrying any individual to see whatever "places" and "people" might be of help.

He also wants his listener to know that these events are certifiably real. And if you doubt that, "the elderly" can "put on the ceremony", having "those [spiritual] people" come and help you ascertain "if it was real". In this sense, fake, false, and "imagined" experiences can be separated from the real ones. Two Bears has emphasized the point repeatedly, privately and publicly, when discussing Blackfeet beliefs and values, "our people are realists". Rising Wolf has emphasized the reality of his recounted experience already. Through his linguistic images, he has portrayed an emphatically actual experience as when he "sat up... in the clouds", was "grabbed... by each arm" by spiritual Indians,

and as he carefully detailed the scene he observed while "in the clouds". Held in the grip of those experiences, Rising Wolf says, he "felt comfortable and that was good". And he is assured that if he has any doubts about them, and if need be, he can ask the "old man" to become "an interpreter", "the people will come", and once again, "they'll answer your questions". And so he leads us in a deep circular fashion back (to line 2 and beyond) again, "in the spiritual ceremonies, they bring you there".

The narrative and the events being narrated: A story about ritualized communication

The "spiritual ceremonies" to which Rising Wolf refers (in line 2), and recounts, are specific communicative events of more and less elaborate types. The more elaborate may involve sweat lodge ceremonies and vision quests. The less elaborate may involve "smudging" and "just listening", both relatively informal meditative acts.

The general purpose of the ceremonies is purification and renewal, purification being the discarding of everyday pestilence, renewal being the revival of proper spiritual living. Purification and renewal serve to align the material and spiritual dimensions of life, at times addressing the troubles in one's life, helping one cope with life's circumstances, and making one stronger in the process.

When a person feels the need of guidance or help, a ceremony can be initiated, often with the help of elders, although this is not necessary. As these ceremonies are discussed and narrated in traditional Blackfeet lore (e.g., Bullchild 1985; Grinnell 1962), they are of a generic, ritualized form (see Carbaugh 1983; Philipsen 1987). Participants may begin by traveling, sometimes alone, to a special place. Once there, they are replenished through food and/or drink and may be purified in the sweat lodge. Interested parties may then seek spiritual guidance, vision, and wisdom from the spiritual world. This might involve several acts including fasting, smoking a pipe, burning incense, praying, singing holy songs, or simple contemplative reflection. These acts may be done briefly, or might extend over a period of up to four days. Seekers then may replenish and purify themselves, again. Finally, participants return home (see Harrod 1992, pp. 22–37).

Rising Wolf of course knows deeply of these ceremonies and this kind of ritualized sequence. He refers directly to them (on lines 2, 54, and 57), and describes in detail one particular example. Within the cultural context of this

ritualized form, we can understand better the general form of activity involved here. We can understand further how the ceremonies celebrate sacred beliefs of spirits and mysteries in nature's places, and the values of modesty, tradition, and piety in everyday life.

Mythic features and form: Memory in narrative

> I would like to go back to the time before time. In this mythological time we have this different character story we call myth. And the myth is sometimes from the very powerful visionary experience, very definitely from the extraordinary experience, and the myth helps it form the spirit, helps it form the spirit of the courage necessary to go on. And also the myth helps to build respect between the human world and the natural world
> (Jack Gladstone, Blackfeet singer and storyteller).

Mythic forms often do for communities what dreams do for an individual. They provide a "great symbolic narrative" in which life's circumstances can be articulated and made sensible (see Philipsen 1987). Utilizing a rnythos, then, can place life into a form that works not only for oneself, but also for one's compatriots, family and neighbors. Rising Wolf's narrative provides a fascinating juncture of Blackfeet mythic form and features. We will see the way the plot unfolds, the main acts that are getting done, the resolution of the drama, and the vantage point from which much of the narration is done all can be understood as features of a great Blackfeet mythos. The specific mythic resources that are at work here in Rising Wolf's story derive from ancient tales of Old Man, Scarface, and The Tail-Feathers Woman or The Fixed Star.

Myths of Napi or Old Man nnd Scarface: Travel tales, dreaming, and getting help

For Blackfeet people who are familiar with their oral literature, stories of Napi, or Old Man, provide prominent mythic resources for rendering life's experiences. "Napi stories have been passed down from generation to generation in the Blackfeet Nation up until today. Each family has their own interpretation of the various Napi stories, but in the final analysis each story has a common moral in the ending. One story night teach a lesson or prove a point; whereas, another story may tell of how a certain part of nature came to be" (Rides at the Door, 1979, p. 7).

Napi stories are best told in sequence. The first Napi story recorded in one collection is called "Dreams". In its entirety, it goes like this (recorded by Darnell Davis Rides at the Door, 1979, p.9):

> Long ago the Blackfeet people lived by Napi teachings. Napi showed the people many, many things. Napi also gave the Indians the will to live by creating animals, plants and all living creatures for their use. He gave the people a proper way to live, but he also showed them the wrong ways.
>
> One gift that Napi gave the Blackfeet was the power of dreams. He taught the people how to use their dreams in a good way. Men would go to the mountains to find their dreams. They would sleep on buffalo skull pillows and dream. When they returned to camp, they would follow the advice they saw in their dreams.
>
> The Indians respected their dreams and were not afraid. They knew dreams would help all the people.
>
> Napi taught the people all things in those days. Today we tell the stories of Napi, as we heard them from our elders.

Rising Wolf's personal story of his "one ceremony" involves key elements of this, the first Napi myth, This mythic tale valorizes the act of "dreaming" as a culturally potent act, as a way of forming a link between the natural and human world, and of getting the courage to go on — as Jack Gladstone says. It is an active way of being in a place, a way of gathering wisdom, a way of connecting with the spiritual features of a place. A state of dreaming and sleeping can thus empower one with new insight and energy. This act falls within the traditional plot that one can "go away", perhaps to "the mountains", to "dream" or seek visions, and this "will help you". Motives for dreaming are simply that one wants "help", and can pray, dreaming being a culturally sanctioned way of answering one's prayers. The point is made that answers are not of one's own making, but are sometimes mysteriously offered when sought, from any number of places or creatures, and help give one the courage to go on.

The most elaborate development of this plot line in Blackfeet oral literature is the Scarface myth. In it, a young, disfigured man must travel to meet Creator Sun, so to become healed and thus suitable as a beautiful young woman's husband (see e.g., Bullchild 1985, pp.325–390; Schultz & Donaldson 1930, pp.71–76; Wissler & Duvall 1995, pp.61–66). His travels take him across great mountains, including several sites for vision quests, where Scarface learns how best to confront the considerable challenges of his trip. Eventually, the young man reaches a huge body of water he first imagines he cannot cross. He nearly gives up. Eventually, though, he is helped by huge swans who take him to the

world of Creator Sun who erases his disfiguring scar. A new man, he returns home to marry his virtuous and patient bride. If Napi's tale sends people to spirits and places to find spiritual wisdom, then Scarface's tale reminds them that traveling can generate new personal capacities and insights, among them a creation of new life upon one's return home.

The story Rising Wolf creates for his listener, then, is artfully crafted with these specific mythic features and form. The main action in the story, "in the spiritual world", is culturally potent because, as he says, "in your dreams you can travel reallya lot" (line 51). The main plot moves from his wanting to travel home, to his time "in the clouds", a spiritual return home, this being a great source of comfort and goodness to him. By narrating his personal experiences through these mythic features, Rising Wolf has told us a personal tale. He has done so, however, through a mythic form that activates not just individual acts of volition but cultural acts of spiritual guidance, and not just personal plans but cultural plots that present and solve problems in traditional Blackfeet ways. As a result, Rising Wolf's life is lived and told not just according to his own personal dictates and circumstances, but moreover as following the moral guidance of that grand mythic master, Napi, and his wise words to the very "first people", when in need, "get spirit power".

The Tail-Feathers Woman or The Fixed Star Myth: A proper vantoge point from which to tell

Traveling and longing for home is of course a deeply ingrained plot in many people's oral and written literatures. In fact, in some Blackfeet tales, if we didn't know better, we might suspect, as an early compiler of traditional lodge tales wrote, some "might have been taken bodily from the Odyssey" (Grinnell 1962, pp. xvii). The legend of Scarface mentioned earlier is one such tale, giving a deep form to traveling, spiritual risk, and the moral teachings of a voyage from and return to one's home-land and place. The myth of The Tail-Feathers Woman is another."

When Tail Feathers Woman was a young woman, one night, she looked up at the stars, and upon seeing Morning Star said, "I'd like him to be my husband." Some time later, sure enough, Morning Star appeared to Tail Feathers Woman and took her as his bride. As the son of Creator Sun and Night Light, Morning Star took Tail-Feathers Woman to his home, the land of the Above Ones. Being warmly welcomed, Tail-Feathers Woman became an active member of Morning Star's family and village. While out digging turnips for the village

one day, the young woman noticed a huge, perfect-shaped turnip. This was the turnip Night Light had mentioned to her, and forbidden her to dig. Each day the young woman went to dig turnips, she would see this turnip and uncertain why it was forbidden, would be tempted by it. This happened again and again, temptation increasing every day. Finally, one day, the young woman could resist temptation no more, yielded, and dug up the huge, perfect turnip. Rolling the turnip aside

> the woman looked into the hole in which it had grown; there was no bottom to it; she could see through it; could see, far below, the earth from which she had come; its plains and mountains and lakes and streams, yes, and the lodges of her people, in a big bottom of a river. She sat down at the edge of the hole, looked down through it a long time, looked down at the camp of her people and became very sad (Schultz & Donaldson 1930, pp.79–80).

Knowing she would be unhappy if she did not return to her people, Creator Sun convinced Morning Star that Tail Feathers Woman must now be sent back home, or forever be sad. Relenting, Morning Star and his wife returned to her home, with Creator Sun's blessings, and with his instructions to honor him so she and her people would have long life and happiness.

This myth is relevant to Rising Wolf's personal story in several ways. The basic theme is a travel tale of movement between the Above and Earthly worlds. The initial motive for the movement is romantic longing, the latter one, homesickness. But further, there is the important parallelism between Rising Wolf's narration and this myth. Like Tail Feathers Woman, he was traveling and wanted to go home (line 7), found himself in the clouds looking down (lines 14–16, 26, 32–33, 45), saw specific features of his homeland (lines 27–31, 34–37), and was comforted by what he saw (lines 38–39). Further, what he saw was identical to what Tail Feathers Woman saw, the features of the earth, the mountains, and lodges of family members.

Perhaps most striking however as a parallel structure is the point-of-view being offered for part of the narration, from up in the cloud looking down. Indeed, the description of this in the myth, reproduced above, nearly replicates that offered by Rising Wolf. Insight is gained, as one is perched on a cloud, looking down upon one's homeland and people. The possible insights — of comfort and intercultural drama — that this viewing offers is also similar. In both, one's longings for home are temporarily met, but also one is faced with the unrelenting recognition of being caught forever in between worlds.

The narrative as social drama: Between worlds, cultural resistance, and preservation[10]

If the mythic features and form active in Rising Wolf's narrative provide links to the past through traditional actions and morals, then the dramatic features provide historical links to contemporary events and worlds. No where is this more evident than when he mentions that the ceremonies "bring you there", so "you're not in the modern day life". We find out, eventually, that "there" is "in the clouds", and "in a spiritual world". By implication, "here" is in one specific sense "in the teepee there", and generally, "back east".

The cultural meanings in the symbolic categories that Rising Wolf uses are considerably rich. As we have seen, with the help of "old men" and "old man", he makes a literal movement from non-spiritual to spiritual dimensions of existence. Threads woven into his travel tale are symbolic motifs, moving him spatially from "back east" to his western "homeland)'.The imagery here is also deep and rich, from the European establishment and aristocratic setticments of the eastern seaboard to the Native and natural wonderland of the western reservation. A temporal motif also suggests ways of living the "modern day life" with "traditional" resources, Wedding the spiritual, spatial, and temporal motifs, creates a rather veiled, but deeply forceful contrast between "the Whiteman's world" and "the Blackfeet world", between the corruption of the present, and an idyllic past. Shifting, then, from the symbolic cntcgories of a "modern day life" to "a spiritual world" thus conveys dense cultural meanings spiritually, spatially, and temporally. Through these terms is marked movements between, and an uneasy co-existence of, spiritual and non-spiritual existence, a reservation and a non-reservation homeland, traditional and contemporary styles of living.

The historical sense of this contact with "the Whiteman", when told by a Blackfeet, typically ushers forth in the form of a tragedy." These tales often contrast a "pre-contact" utopia with a "post-contact" corruption, with the latter violation reverberating into crises of this day. As one example, consider the following paragraph, penned by Percy Bullchild (1985, p. 390). It is the final paragraph of his long and detailed collection of Blackfeet oral literature.

> The Native of the land had no expenses to pay. We didn't have to buy food; we didn't buy clothing, nor all the things that go with daily living. We didn't know anything of rent, we had our portable homes, our tipis. We traveled slow because we had to walk to wherever we were going, only our faithful dogs to carry some of our burdens, but all things were fine until our white friends

> brought to us their ways of destruction, their disease, their rotten food which wc aren't quite used to yet, their killings, their thievery, robbery, and their cunning. This put an end to our once beautiful serene life, and today we are struggling to survive that onslaught of the whiteman, as they have ncvcr given up fully trying to conquer the continents. The Native can only pray to our Creator Sun for deliverance from this wicked onslaught and robbery of our lands and now the waters.

When Rising Wolf contrasts "the modern day life" with another more spiritual and "traditional", as he does on line 3, he brings this difficult-to-tell plot close to the surface. His narrative rather elliptically invokes the tragic, historical tale of some past events when "whiteman" violated the "Blackfeet", with resulting crises ensuing to this day. As Percy Rullchild reminds us, the tale is a historical one, yes, but the dynamics of that history continue into the issues of today, especially concerning "lands" and "waters", bringing to mind current corporate requests for mining rights, petroleum wells, and various treaty violations. Such proposals violate Rising Wolf's, Two Bear's and the Blackfeet "church".

The historical features of the narrative also introduce something more. How to move between cultural worlds provides a moral tale for contemporary living, and a dramatic tale about living in two different cultural worlds, resisting the temptations of the Whiteman's while preserving the wisdom of the Blackfeet. The deeper drama involved — of contemporary resistance and preservation — consists in addressing several semantic inversions that are active in this discourse. For example, what is deemed spiritually "real" in traditional Blackfeet lore (e.g., being in the clouds) is often deemed unreal in "Whiteman's" lore. What is spiritually alive in traditional Blackfeet beliefs (e.g., the land, rocks, and mountains) is typically viewed as dead matter to Whiteman. While the natural and spiritual world is presumably interconnected to many Blackfeet, these are separated by Whiteman. A main form of education and inspiration to traditional Blackfeet (i.e., watching and listening to spirits in nature's places) is not a typical form of education to Whiteman. Each cultural premise and form of communication of traditional Blackfeet life has been inverted and negated or deflected by typical "Whiteman's ways". Weaving these dramatic inversions into the narrative, Rising Wolf is reminding the Blackfeet not to confuse "modern day living" with the traditional Blackfeet ways over which "the elders" are guardians. Through his narrative, and through the cultural acts and events it valorizes and celebrates, Blackfeet can garner courage and wisdom, affirm the legitimacy — and deep morality — of being a Blackfeet, and of living that way in this contemporary world.

By way of concluding: Narratives as cultural discourses

I have tried to show here how a narrative text has been crafted through a Blackfeet cultural discourse. In one sense, then, I have treated that text, and other texts, as a communication practice which itself invokes kinds of cultural events such as ceremonies, and particular meanings such as symbolic categories and semantic inversions, all of which presume and create a particular Blackfeet discourse. In this sense, cultural discourse is active in the communication practices that are circulated among a people, a set of texts in contexts, each being a situated performance related to ongoing cultural events and conversations, each rendered meaningful through culturally salient terms, motifs and motives. In the process, attention is drawn to a local discursive arena, its ways of shaping and telling stories, its history of action and acting. This is the work of a local, cultural discourse.

In another sense, the view of this particular, cultural discourse derives from a more abstract cultural discourse theory.[12] In other words, a general perspective for inquiry is active in and necessary for constructing the above account. This perspective provides a general way of inquiring into cultural discourses of narrative and identity. Proceeding on the assumptions that every narrative is an expressive text, and every text is a part of a cultural system of communication practices, inquiry must proceed in each case to discover what a narrative text is, what it expresses, and how it creatively invokes this larger system of practices. Coming to know narratives in this way is to traverse a complex path. Several questions arise. About *situations* and *forms* of expression: What are the contexts of telling and what special form do narratives take here? About *meanings* and communication *events*: What potent symbolic imagery is active, in and about what larger sequence is this being expressed? About communicative *acts*, instruments, and *values*: What action is getting done and what sources of messages are being monitored and valorized? About *cultural meaning systems*: What deeper meanings are getting expressed, what cultural philosophy is being presumed about what a person is (and should be), what actions can (and should) get done, how one can (and should) feel, indeed how one can (and should) dwell in places? Positioned to inquire this way is to be engaged particularly with others, through cultural discourse theory, a general way of hearing specific narrative forms in particular cultural expressions, a way of hearing in situations, forms, in events, deep meanings, and in actions, cultural philosophies of communication. In each case, the narrative form will follow its own path, and so must we.

The guiding general tactic here — with regard to Rising Wolf's narrative text — was first to ground the analysis in the pragmatic context of its performance. This showed the relationship between this narrative and the event in which the text was produced, thus sensitizing us to the specific communicative scene of its use. Next, I explored the specific elements being used to put the narrative together. These revealed several features of the text itself; a complex travel motif in spiritual, spatial, temporal, and cultural movements, a set of structuring devices including place names, a character to action relationship, a grammar of "reality", and a ceremonious event of "mystery". How these elements related to other similar practices and events led to an examination of a set of rituals of which the text is about, including its particular cultural sequence and uses. Finally, I further interpreted the deep mythic and dramatic resources evident in the form of the text itself, these being related to enduring themes about living a Blackfeet life, and ways of telling that particular story. General paths are available through narratives, yes, and also we must be able to sense sweet grass and rabbit willow along the way, especially if seen from "on the cloud".

In the resulting analyses, I hope to have shown how this narrative, and these oral texts, constructs Blackfeet conceptions of themselves, their actions, circumstances, and history. What this implies is that considerations of narrative require cultural and communicative analysis. To hear stories, in the first place, is to be situated with a teller in a particular way. To understand the stories being told to us is to know something of the local world the story is about, and which it reconstructs. One of the purposes of our inquiries, then, is to try "to construct", as Keith Basso (1990, p. 136) puts it, "principled interpretations of culturally constituted worlds and to try to understand what living in them is like". It is to know further whether one should, and if so, how one can and should tell a story. If we want to grasp some of the meanings people claim about themselves, their world, its objects and people, then we stand to benefit from treating narrative texts as cultural and communicative resources. We thus hear in them deeply organized symbolic statements being crafted to address the contingencies of everyday living, meeting life's challenges in revealing ways and thus engendering the courage to go on.

"Things like that will happen"

When speaking about "spirits showing up", Rising Wolf said, "if you think of nature every day, and pray to it every day, things like that will happen." In his

statement is a working cultural knowledge, a set of cultural premises about the world and being a virtuous person. This involves premises of belief, about "land" and "nature" being a "church" with spirits living in nature through its objects and animals, and premises of value with moral guidance being gained from tuning into this, from attending to this realm of life. The resulting ways of the world can be very mysterious, but they are no less powerful and enduring because of this. Rising Wolf mentioned further that the more one takes time to connect with one's environment, "the stronger you get in understanding what's around you." He knows this can be done in various cultural forms, through prayer, listening, and spiritual ceremonies. These provide some Blackfeet ways of communicating through which one can better one's understanding, living a "balanced" way in this modern world, with material AND spiritual dimensions in view. And if finding one's way involves "spirits raising cane" as Two Bears put it, or wisdom from "in the clouds" as Rising Wolf said, so be "the powers of mystery" that we all seek to understand. After all, "if it was real, then the people will come to you... and they'll answer your questions."

Notes

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1. My use of the term, "Indian", reflects the usage of my consultants who refer to themselves this way. This usage of course is a subject of great conversation with several amused discussions claiming that we "Indians" are also "Native Americans", "American Indians", and "Indigenous". The identity term "Blackfeet" is similarly one of many alternatives (e.g., Blackfoot, South Piegan, Amskapi Pikuni, Nitzitapi, Nixokoawa), each use active in different contexts with different shades of meaning.

2. When referring to people in public events, such as those publicized in newspapers and magazines, I do not use pseudonyms. When referring to people I observed or conversed with

in everyday settings, like Two Bears here and Rising Wolfbelow, I use pseudonyms, to honor the commitments I made.

3. The problem being addressed here echoes the one posed by Keith Basso (1996, p.39) concerning Western Apache oral texts, their invocation of stories and places. My debt to Basso's earlier work runs deep.

4. I have in mind here some of the work in conversation analysis that, in principle, explores conversational structures across cultures, rather than culturally distinctive structures, forms, and sequences of conversation (e.g., Schegloff 1986). Some conversational analytic work has, however, conducted cross-cultural comparisons (e.g., Hopper & Doany 1989). Clearly, research in conversation analysis, and ethnographic studies of communication like the one which follows here, are distinct from each other, but also can be complementary, each providing insights that are beneficial to the other (see for example, Moerman 1988).

5. For the former see for example tlie recent works by Sequiera (1994) and by H.L. Goodall (1996). For the latter, see for examples Katriel (1997) and Peshkin (1997).

6. In an effort to capture some of the oral quality and narrative conventions used by Rising Wolf, I present an unedited text. I have however arranged his telling into lines and verses (see Hymes 1981, esp. pp.184–199, 309–341), pauses serving to break lines, subordinate themes serving to group lines into the resulting seven parts (see below), with some features of parallelism serving to indent lines (e.g., "I could see..." on lines 28–31). For a related treatment see Gee (1991).

7. The analyses that follow treat the narrative itself as a complex form, exploring the dimensions of movement in three main parts: The first part consists of live stanzas (The land... is your church, they bring you there, I wanted to go home, In a spiritual world, I-you could see). The middle part, of one stanza (They brought me back), and the final part of two stanzas (When the spiritual people take you, They'll answer your questions).

8. Some Indian writers and speakers have discussed the relationship between the spiritual and material as the heart of intercultural troubles between Indians and Europeans. The well-known Ogala Lakota activist, Russell Means (1992, p.56), has put it this way: *"Being* is a spiritual proposition. *Gaining* is a material act. Traditionally, American Indians have always attempted to *be* the best people they could. Part of that spiritual process was and is to give away wealth, to discard wealth in order riot to gain. Material gain is an indicator of false status among traditional people, while it is 'proof that the system works' to Europeans." He suggests further, "the European materialist tradition of despiritualizing the universe is very similar to the mental process which goes into dehumanizing another person."

9. For the following analyses I am drawing upon the versions of this myth recorded in Schultz & Donaldson, 1930, yp.76–82, and in Wissler & Duvall, 1995, pp.58–61.

10. The concept of social drama I use here is indebted to the works of Victor Turner (1980). The concept explicates a cultural form in four phases, violation of a code, subsequent crises, attempts at redress, and either social reintegration or schism (cf. Philipsen 1987).

11. I am introducing an historical tale here that, in my field experiences, is typically alluded to very indirectly by Blackfeet, if mentioned at all. So, I introduce it here because I think it is also indirectly active in this telling, primarily at line 3, with Rising Wolf's mention of "the

modern day life". The historical tale also provides a condition for Rising Wolf's and Bullchild's tellings, for the events being narrated, indirectly and directly, in the tragedy, create, in part, the very exigence for the existence of these stories.

12. Several discussions of the general perspective guiding this inquiry are available (see for example, Carbaugh 1996, 1999; Philipsen 1987).

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