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underlying unity. They create passages and set the boundaries. As animals and humans grew to awareness, they would learn a common code of conduct which bound and defined them.

The Yup'ik rules for living were built on three supporting tenets: "the power of a person's thought; the importance of thoughtful action to avoid injuring another's mind; and, conversely, the danger inherent in following one's own mind" (p. 53). These basic principles were elaborated into a complex series of rules governing every aspect of life. An individual might not learn all of them in one lifetime, yet following one's own mind in matters was considered dangerous. In many traditional narratives from "when the land was thin," the original differentiation between animals and human results from a disregard for the rules and a desire to follow one's own mind. Many obstacles exist between human and nonhuman worlds. Only by careful attention to the rules for living can the appropriate boundaries and passages be maintained.

Fienup-Riordan draws on work done by other anthropologists working in western Alaska, but she also uses concepts from some influential anthropologists who do not work with Eskimo people. The result is a very thorough, careful analysis—one that bristles with the stories of people. Her bibliography is an excellent place to find listed all the major work done on the Yup'ik, and the photographs by James Barker carry much of the feel of life in the Kuskokwim-Yukon delta. With the extensive use of Central Yup'ik words, I found myself wishing the author had included a glossary. Nonetheless, Fienup-Riordan has produced a book of first-rate scholarship woven with the voices of Yup'ik elders. As she maps their cognitive world, we hear them speak to us, and we understand the coherence and integration of their view of life.

James Ruppert

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Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris. Edited by Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994. 253 pages. \$35.00 cloth; \$14.95 paper.

If you like Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris, you will like this book. As Erdrich says of her fictive community, "It's great fun"

(p. 7). Between 1985 and 1994, Erdrich and Dorris gave more than one hundred forty interviews in the United States, in addition to numerous foreign interviews. Chavkin and Chavkin include twenty-one of these interviews in *Conversations*, ending the collection with two of their own interviews. The interviews reveal that much of the intrigue that Erdrich and Dorris provoke pivots on two key, recurring questions: How would you describe your writing style, particularly your collaborative process? Do you consider yourselves Native American writers?

Bill Moyers reacts with surprise as Dorris matter-of-factly says, "Our job as a writer . . ." (p. 139). Moyers retorts, "'Our job as a writer'—two people writing a novel, not one. We think of the literary act as such a solitary invention" (p. 139). Erdrich and Dorris explain how their collaboration works. Although they do write drafts privately and separately, each in his/her own "space," after the drafts are finished, they share ideas and edit each other, often ruthlessly. Erdrich comments, "I suppose it's a process of gaining trust and going through the rough times when one of us has to say, 'This stinks,' and the other person had to take it. It was rotten and rough, but after you let go of the self who has everything invested in that particular character or that piece of language, you realize what's important" (p. 140). In this process of repeated give and take, the characters, plots, and settings come alive, sometimes in their kitchen or sometimes during a walk through the woods.

Erdrich and Dorris do not place as much importance on plot and politics as they do on the emotional and spiritual identity of characters who seem to become family members. Dorris says, "You gain affection for them" (p. 43). Although the characters are invented, Erdrich and Dorris try to get to know them better by asking each other, while shopping at Sears or eating out at a restaurant, "What would this character pick out in clothes to wear?" "What would this character order from this menu?" (p. 87). Erdrich and Dorris admit they dream about characters and even draw their pictures. As Dorris speculates, "It's one of those questions we always ask each other. What do they look like?" (pp. 45–46). The characters take on a life of their own. Dorris says, "Once they exist, once they have a voice and a bit of a history, then they are in control more than we are" (p. 139). Sometimes, they even dislike their characters: "That's odd to say about characters that you make up, but we don't like them" (p. 201). Erdrich and Dorris are constantly surprised by what their characters say and

do: "Sometimes they surprise you. They do things you don't expect, and that's how a story develops. Just like life—things don't happen in one, two, three order" (p. 87).

When characters get out of control, as they sometimes do, they take over the plot and haunt their creators. Dorris comments, "Oh, we **dream** about these people. We wake up in the middle of the night and have new episodes for them. I'm serious. We really do" (p. 183). Erdrich chimes in during the Michael Schuman essay, "A Marriage of Minds," "We can't get rid of them" (p. 183). Yet Erdrich and Dorris thrive on this lack of order; for them it is a nutrient-rich, fertile ground for creative ideas. When Chavkin asks Erdrich if her writing forms "an organic whole," she responds, "It's more like a compost pile" (p. 240). But the disorder produces seeds of inspiration. "Maybe I could really get something perfect if I plotted, but I don't think I'd have such a good time uncovering the plot day to day . . . I do have a high level of tolerance for chaos and disorder" (p. 248). Of course, Erdrich and Dorris well know that, for the Ojibwa trickster figure Nanabozho, life forms as we know them today grow out of chaos. This is not to say that their writing is hasty and unplanned. Erdrich and Dorris go through hundreds of drafts and supply their publishers with camera-ready proofs. Chavkin asks Erdrich, "Some writers have stated that writing is a painful, exhausting, and frustrating process for them. What's your experience?" (p. 249). Erdrich replies, "It's easier than hoeing sugar beets" (p. 249).

Erdrich's and Dorris's earthy humor is always evident in the interviews; it is no wonder that humor is a component of their characters' personalities. Lakota medicine man Lame Deer says that humor is always an element within Indian people—it is a way to get through the tragedy that is a part of Indian life. If we can laugh, it makes us feel better about the pain. Hertha D. Wong makes the point that Erdrich's and Dorris's characters are seen by some as "doomed and durable" (p. 49), but Dorris counters, "There were sad things that happened and there were unhappy people, but we never thought of it as a book about poverty or depression" (p. 49). *Love Medicine*, for example, can be described as a tragi-comedy, because in the midst of tears, there is always laughter. Dorris verifies this: "I think the greatest secret of all that we violate about Indians is that Indians don't have humor. The one thing that Indian people have said about our books, and the greatest relief to us, is that they find them very funny. Many

literary reviewers read *Love Medicine* and saw it as a book about plight and despair and poverty and tragedy, all of which is there too. Many Indian readers saw the survival humor and the kind, odd, self-deprecating humor that Indians have" (p. 110).

Integral to all the Erdrich/Dorris interviews is the question of whether the authors consider themselves Native American authors. Chavkin observes to Erdrich, "Silko suggests you are ambivalent about your Native American origins" (p. 237). Erdrich responds heatedly, "Of course, I'm ambivalent, I'm human. There are times I wish that I were one thing or the other, but I am a mixed-blood. **Psychically doomed**—another mixed-blood friend once joked. The truth is that my background is such a rich mixed bag I'd be crazy to want to be anything else" (p. 238). Dorris, as well, exhibits a certain frustration about his ethnic identity. He responds to Wong's remark about "observing from the outside": "In a way it's a kind of a mixed-blood condition as well. When I lived with my father's [the Indian] side of the family, I was too light. And when I lived with my mother's side of the family, there was a kind of distancing because of my other experience Always feeling peripheral When I got the Indian Achievement Award this year, I talked about that condition in my acceptance speech. Afterwards, a number of people, who growing up I would have given my eye teeth to look like, came and said to me, 'Don't be silly. You're really part of it'" (p. 46).

Ambivalent or not, Erdrich and Dorris are both a "part of it." Though mixed-bloods, they feel passionately about their Native American identities. In their writing careers, they have chosen to write about both worlds. In the 1986 Wong interview, Erdrich observes, "While it is certainly true that a good part of my background, and a lot of the themes are Native American, I prefer to simply be a writer" (p. 31). Erdrich is not so much resisting the idea of being a writer of Native American literature as she is objecting to being labeled. Dorris agrees with Erdrich: "It adds a level of complication to say that you are a Native American writer because it sets up expectations in readers which you may or may not fulfill for them One would hope that one gets a reputation for writing with some sensitivity about the subjects one deals with. And if it were just a question of whether this person is a Native American and also a writer, fine. But 'Native American writer' strikes me as a little cumbersome" (p. 32).

Nevertheless, both Erdrich and Dorris are devoted to Native American people, politics, and beliefs. Erdrich speaks warmly of

their Indian readers: "My first audience that I would write for, that we write for, as a couple, is American Indians, hoping that they will read, laugh, cry . . ." (p. 24). Dorris, who writes extensively about Native American problems in his nonfiction, observed in 1988, "The problems of the one and half million Indians in this country have become abstract to the population at large. If people read what we have written and identify with the characters as people like themselves, people with needs and desires and wants, that's political. That's something that we're very grateful to be able to do" (p. 114). In 1992, Erdrich adds, "In later books, there is more involvement with the political life of the country, and of course reservation people are gravely impacted . . . In *Love Medicine*, the effects of Roman Catholicism, missionary zealots, termination, boarding schools, The Great Depression, World War II, Vietnam and the siege of Wounded Knee are all touched upon" (p. 251-52).

Chavkin and Chavkin present Erdrich and Dorris as young, honest, simple, humble, and ever-so-in-love human beings. Importantly, this is the first compilation of interviews with Erdrich and Dorris, but the editors could have made it much spicier had they included the critical reviews by Leslie Silko and Katha Pollitt. Silko criticized Erdrich's *Beet Queen* "as the product of 'academic, post-modern, so-called experimental influence' which de-emphasizes the referential dimension of words" (Chavkin quoting Silko, p. 237). Erdrich's reaction is, "Leslie Silko didn't read the book carefully" (p. 237). Pollitt took on Dorris's *The Broken Cord*: "She suggests that you are part of what she calls a 'fetal rights' social trend, which is really about 'controlling women'" (Chavkin quoting Pollitt, p. 205). Dorris responds, "That article made me furious. I thought it was culpably ignorant and elitist" (p. 205).

Vince Passaro (1991) calls the Erdrich/Dorris union a "literary marriage" (p. 157), and Douglas Foster (1991) entitles his essay "Double Vision" (p. 168). Both interviewers are correct. Throughout *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris*, I cannot recall a single instance when Erdrich and Dorris disagree with each other. They claim it happens frequently during their editing bouts, but they are always in agreement during the interviews. Erdrich refers to their collaboration on *Crown of Columbus* with a wonderfully Star Trekkian metaphor: "I mean, we just meshed. If you could sort of take a writer out of both of us and mind-meld. Mind-meld! That's what it was! It was the Vulcan mind-

meld" (p. 170). Even Spock could not have described Erdrich and Dorris better.

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Cultivating a Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America. By Matthew Dennis. Ithaca, New York, and London: Cornell University Press, 1993. 280 pages. \$37.95 cloth.

Matthew Dennis's *Cultivating the Landscape of Peace: Iroquois-European Encounters in Seventeenth-Century America* is a thought-provoking study of cultural interaction in seventeenth-century North America. The book is effectively divided into two parts. In the first, Dennis presents essential background information for his analysis while discussing the emergence of Iroquois culture from its Owaskan predecessor. According to Dennis, the transition from a hostile, village-centered culture, characterized by internecine warfare, to one of intervillage alliance and later multinational confederacy involved the creation of a "landscape of peace." It is Dennis's contention that the Iroquois League of Peace arose in response to intervillage fighting that had made the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries hostile, fearful, and, hence, intolerable, times. He writes, "[I]nternecine fighting . . . did not annihilate communities or create empires but instead provided the incentive to invent peaceful solutions" (p. 68).

Dennis uses the term *create* (and its derivatives) often and purposefully. He asserts that Iroquois were not passive but instead "promoted and pursued an active program of ecological, social, and political change" (pp. 86–87). It is Dennis's assumption that the reference point for the program for change within Iroquois culture was, and is, the epic of the founding of the League, the Deganawidah Epic. Throughout the book, he analyzes the epic, building on the premise that not only do actions and events shape cultural interpretations, but they actually take on reality based on those interpretations. In the seventeenth century, therefore, "the text [Deganawidah Epic] and Iroquois behavior were both factors; each helped form and reflected the other" (p. 114).