Chapter 2

Echoing Voices and Stories

Diane Glancy’s plays integrate aspects of post-modernist discourse like de-structuring of the text, the constant play of meanings, the disparate and fragmentary experiences, and the blurring of boundaries between reality and artifice, with Native American traditions of storytelling. Such a mode of work enables her to open new areas for intrusion of meaning, while negotiating a space for survival. The movement in her plays is towards a destination of understanding, which, in Glancy’s words, assumes the framework of “a vectoring that is a conflation of crossroads in different perspectives” (Further 200). While her work involves radical experimentation in drama and performance, coupled with an integration of Native American dramaturgical elements, her artistic focus is on finding modes of survival and healing in the realm of art and performance.

According to Vizenor, memories have the visual aspect which creates a sense of motion and choices as far as stories and points of view are concerned. Hence “memories turn in stories” (Postindian Conversations 19). From this perspective, her act of playwriting becomes a dynamic process rather than a terminal endeavour. In conjunction with imagination, memory plays the crucial role of organizing and sometimes “dis-ordering” the patterns of recollection. Therefore, memory often controls the structure and the direction of the plays. A sample of the methodology which Glancy follows can be gleaned from her essay, “Endnotes on Salvage before the End Was found”:

It was somewhere on Highway 2, that I passed a salvage yard. I remember at the edge of the highway, a corrugated fence, and the corner of a sandy
lot. I think the three characters in the play, Wolfert, Wolf and Memela got in my car. They rode with me a long time before I realized they were there. (*Writings* 14)

Since her intention is to capture the voices and the memories of the three characters that had “got” in her car, she consciously accommodates a plurality of voices into the structure of her plays. This necessitates the de-structuring of the plays which facilitates a space for the voices which are often silenced or marginalised. This kind of structure has an obvious source in Bakhtin whom Glancy credits as being an “instrumental” force in her work, especially with reference to the idea of multiple borders (*Conversation* 4).

She says in *Claiming Breath*, “Art is pacification and purification of old grievances, healing for those left behind when everybody else goes to school” (62). For the pacification and purification to happen, the old grievances have to be recollected through a complex web of recollection. In this aspect, we see Glancy approaching Vizenor’s idea of survivance¹— a continuous process of survival, which in her works integrates the patterns of exchange, relationship and interaction. Such a process is contingent on the recognition of a sense of identity which often rests in the points of contact between tribes, settlements and cultures, and also possibly between the performers as well. To create such a dramatic space, Glancy had to find a meeting point between the Western practices of theatre and the Native American culture of orality.

When Glancy says, “The kind of work that most engages me is the margin between native storytelling and western theatre” (sic) (*Writings* 11), it becomes obvious that she envisions neither the Native nor the Western traditions of theatre as monolithic
constructs. Though her engagement with Native American characters and culture may lead to the impression that her perspective is pan Indian, she often avoids describing her work as either “pure” or “hybrid.” Her admission of not having direct access to Cherokee culture in fact reflects her opposition to the term “hybrid” since it presupposes an exclusion of the individual and the collective subjectivity of the colonized. The drama in Glancy’s plays arises precisely from the conception of individuals who as conscious subjects react to actions, modifying and adjusting their communities and cultures to new influences (Murdrooroo 108). Her experiments in drama are devoted to the discovery of “what elements of native stories survive the crossing into staged theater where the audience expects communication of some sort on some level yet carries the import of native voice” (Writings 11). In such experiments, memory primarily works as an open-ended construct. In plays where time functions as a linear construct, the myriad workings of memory are evident either due to dramatic visualization or an obvious blurring of boundaries between the physical and the spiritual world, which often borders on the ironical. For example in Weebjob (1997), the squash patch becomes Weebjob’s sacred “Canaan” which is a reworking of the Turtle Island Creation myth is possible. However, in some plays time seems to function in a non-linear frame of reference permitting the dramatist to make radical movements and connections between the past and the present. In such plays, memory functions mostly as an unconscious construct that moves seamlessly between the personal/cultural narratives and action of the play. For example in The Collector of a Three-Cornered Stamp (2006), the narrator moves from a range of perspectives from the Vietnam War to respect for the natural world and from there, to a conception of the process of creation itself. Memory not only permits an open-
ended structural pattern, but also aids the process of connecting the personal with the cultural. Glancy says in the introduction to the play, “I like to work with disconnected pieces that don’t seem to hold together, discovering a connective between them” (30). In the play, the three seemingly disconnected voices of a woman who remembers her husband’s return from the Vietnam, a woman who remembers a friend and the postage stamp as a spirit, are unified by the processes of creating meaning through a recovery of events passed. Therefore memory works to find points of connection between the personal and the cultural narratives.

Such an act of breaking the boundaries between genres and worlds using memory as a device has more to do with the “uncontainable” sense of identity that Glancy wanted to capture on her stage. In her plays, identity functions as a complex phenomenon that is influenced by historical, social and cultural collisions which bring into relief the fragmentary nature of Native American consciousness, thereby necessitating the element of “de-structuring” the play.

To begin with such an act of “de-structuring”, Glancy looks beyond the traditional classification of a play into acts and scenes. Sometimes her plays are divided into plates of earth, fragmentary journals of perspectives, sorties of a dance, or sometimes, simply sections. Such structures have a metaphoric import which is usually linked to the main thesis of the play. They often function as organic constructs that work at different levels contributing to the multivalency in the plays. In *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance* (1995), the breaking of boundaries between a dialogue and a monologue permits the dramatic play of voices which in turn allows for multiple readings of the play. At one level it puts women at the centre of experience while at another level
it illustrates the conflicts created by the generational gap between the Grandmother and the Girl. The structure of the play brings into relief the margins between the mythic world of the grandmother and the visible world of the granddaughter and offers the thesis that this margin can be negotiated through a compassionate acceptance of the contradictions that make up their sense of identity. Memory plays a vital role in ordering such a structure, by functioning in terms of leaps and bounds, thereby lending further support to the blurring of margins between a dialogue and a monologue. As Glancy states in the introduction of the play, aided by memory, the story moves like “…rain on a windshield. Between differing and unreliable experiences” (4).

In *Halfact* (1993), there is enough indication that the play is taking place in the mind of the Coyote Girl as she struggles to negotiate her rapidly changing role exacerbated by the death of her mother. Hence memory functions more in the unconscious mode, through a process of associative leaps between the inner and the outer landscapes leading to a revisualization of arrested life experiences and perspectives.

In *Jump Kiss* (1999), the ‘orbiculate’ aspect of the narrator’s recollections can be observed in the constant movement between the narratives and the perspectives. In such a context, the movable plates of the earth’s crust become a perfect metaphor for the narrator to freewheel between myths, experiences and perspectives. Therefore, the play is divided into “plates” rather than acts and scenes.

*The Best Fancy Dance the Pushmataha Pow Wow’s Ever Seen* (1997) reveals the intrusion of Columbus’ narrative into the lives of the characters. Gertrude’s consensus between the spirit and the physical world and Henry’s uneasy awareness of the voices of the spirits, are influenced by the act of recollection. Further, every time Jess tries to
perform Columbus’ narrative, he draws an unconscious parallel between his own life and that of Columbus. The doubts that assail Columbus on his return journey find a correlation in Jess’s childhood memories and his desire to arrive at a location wherein he is able to negotiate his identity as a Native American and deal with the pressures of adolescence. There is an inbuilt fluidity of boundaries which allows him to locate the performance of the narratives within his own sociocultural context.

When *Bull Star* (1982) opens, the conflict revolves around Cree receiving share of the property that the Chief is intending to sell. However, as the play progresses, larger issues of identity are foregrounded. This happens mainly through the personalized reinterpretations of Wovoka’s visions that appear at significant points in the play. Hence the structural process is guided both by personal memories as well as relocated cultural stories, all aiding the movement towards a better understanding of the location of the characters. This parallels the process of creation as imagined by Wovoka. The surrealistic aspect of the play emerges through Lody who lives in a paradigm which transcends the binary categories of the seeable and the non-seeable. She functions as an agent directing the movement towards an understanding of the contradictions that make up the fragmented Native American consciousness. She functions as a foil to the rest of the characters who are bound by the “seen”.

In all the instances above, the complex interweaving of myths, stories and perspectives has its roots in memory. However, in a curious twist, Glancy traces certain organized patterns of behaviour/response sourced from her characters’ socio-cultural encounters rather than the social and cultural norms defining their responses. These patterns in turn become the defining constructs of the plays. The pattern may be
orbiculate, oriented by a kind of multivalence, and sometimes defined by a dominating metaphor. For example, the house trailer image, which hints at the lack of stability that the women experience in their lives, becomes the operating metaphor for the structure of *The Women Who Loved House Trailers* (1996). The lack of discernible action in the play can be attributed to this metaphor that operates in the background, literally shaping the movement of the play. Similarly, the concept of changing identities is paralleled by the changing of the masks in *Mother of Mosquitos* (1997). The Woman wears one mask after another in an attempt to look beyond the margins dividing the physical and the mystic world. Such a process suggests the changing/shifting identities of the Woman to ensure her survival, especially in a context where she has to contend with the loss of her heritage. Though the concept of changing seasons organizes the pattern of action in *The Truth Teller* (1992), the reflections of the Indian Woman have limited sourcing in the activities of the season itself. She performs those activities more as an attempt to hold on to the stories of her cultural and mythic past rather than to move in the footsteps of the white man whose map limits his world to the “seeable” and physical.

Such a pattern of representing an “uncontainable” sense of identity accommodates the trickster aspect into the discourse of the play. In Native American oral narratives the “trickster” concept functions as a link between the physical world and the mythical world of spirits. He/she functions as a mystic medium of contact between the human and the sacred, many times bridging the gap between the two. The trickster also functions as the narrator of memory, thus finding a voice for the muted and buried collective history/memory.
The attributes of the trickster, as evinced in the stories and myths include those of transformation into any form, manipulation and survival. And in most of the situations, survival happens through an act of deception. In addition to this, the trickster is often androgynous. Sometimes, he/she can also be conceived of as a truth-teller and as a Native Shaman. Paul Radin comments that laughter, humour and irony permeate everything that a trickster does (*The Trickster* x). This makes the trickster figure a suitable narrator for a subversive history of colonization.

On close observation, we find that the trickster figure embodies a contradiction, because as much as he/she is in a state of constant flux, the space occupied is liminal. It is from this location that the trickster discourse operates in Glancy’s plays. Her plays explore the possibilities for survival within the sociocultural contexts rather than an effort towards self-actualization. Her intention is not to provide a prescriptive solution, but to capture the identity crisis faced by her characters, especially in terms of the changing social and cultural contexts. To accentuate this shift, Glancy tweaks the structure of her plays to present shifting perspectives rather than structural movements. The trickster patterns embedded within the structure provide a discourse that remains open-ended and generates possibilities for multiplicity of meaning and plurality of voices. The trickster concept most effectively captures the fractional experiences, narratives and the perspectives which visualize the contradictions experienced by her characters. Forming the basis for the storying aspect of her plays, the assumption is that once a story is told, it splinters into various other stories for the listeners, which in turn, are infused by their personal voice. The act of storying embeds within itself the idea of an uncontainable sense of identity, thereby creating scope for fluidity in the structural discourse.
Glancy sometimes makes overt references to the trickster figure within the framework of an oral narrative. For example, in a story narrated by Henry in *The Best Fancy Dancer*, the elk was responsible for the vegetation on earth and the Bear was responsible for cranking the sun into the correct position – both the animals capable of transformation as far as the story construct is concerned. In *Weebjob*, the trickster Nanaboozhoo is the only survivor after a fighting among the tribes. With the help of the Muskrat and the turtle, he brings about the creation of earth once again. In *The Truth Teller*, Wenebojo, the trickster, manipulates the process of obtaining maple syrup so that the Indians have to obtain it through hard work. In *The Lesser Wars*, the androgynous aspect of coyote trickster is embodied in the two characters Coytoe and Tecoyo, who function in a complementary manner. Such processes hint at the need to reconstruct native society in a post colonial context, precisely through an allegiance to the idea of “indigenous impulse” giving rise to “culture based on the environment”.

Of far more significance however, is the manner in which Glancy integrates the trickster figure into the structure and the discourse of her plays. Since the concern is more with the voices with which people invest their stories, plot often functions as a non-static construct. This means that the act of storying becomes a dynamic endeavour, working in calibration with the voices that the playwright is trying to capture. One of the major outcomes of integrating the trickster discourse patterns is perceived in the shifting boundaries between genres, forms and worlds. For example, *The Woman Who was a Red Deer* moves between a dialogue and a monologue. There is also an integration of the collaborative aspects in depicting the shift of perspectives through the pattern of questioning. Such a discourse provides for an intrinsic reading of the text at multiple
levels. At one level, it puts women at the centre of experience, while at another, it illustrates generational conflict exacerbated by sociocultural experiences. While the dialogues establish sufficient distance between the Grandmother and the Girl, the monologues ironically reveal that their life experiences might have been similar. The combination of dialogue and monologue breaks the barrier of the stage and allows the Girl to address an imaginative audience in an attempt to record her shifting perspectives on the Ahw’uste.\(^\text{11}\) Hence while the dialogues are laced with interrogation, irony and sarcasm, the monologues establish a space where the Girl attempts to confront the validity of the myth called Ahw’uste. The effort to “combine the overlapping realities of myth, imagination, and memory with spaces for silences” (4) brings out the crucial point of difference between the Grandmother and the Girl. While the Grandmother confesses that her initial subscription to the Ahw’uste was more out of a sense of survival, the Girl perceives them as an abstraction that finds limited currency in the context of her sociocultural location. The monologue creates the necessary disconnectedness to consider the shift in conception of the Ahw’uste from a contextual perspective. This is especially significant in a context where natives have lost their languages and their communities. The monologue becomes a metaphor for their life in the sense that continuous communication with their own people as well as others becomes a difficult task. Such blurring of boundaries between dialogue and monologue also allows the Girl to selectively recollect only those excerpts of the “frustrating” conversations which would permit her to connect the everyday realities with the sacred and the spiritual. Moreover, there is a clear attempt to bring into relief the mythical world of the Grandmother and the visible world of the Girl, thereby offering the thesis that the marginalised status of the
characters can be negotiated through a compassionate acceptance of the contradictions that make up their sense of identity.

The “interdisciplinary world that walks the border between script and poem” (190) creates the necessary disconnectedness for *Halfact*. Such a sense of disconnectedness mirrors the predicament of the Natives who have been distanced from their culture and language. In keeping with the oral narrative traditions which integrate dialogue and narration, the structure of the play moves between verse and prose. For example, the Narrator says: “Coyote Girl’s Father and Brother carry Coyote Girl’s Mother from the kitchen. They place her in the backyard on a board between two chairs. See her from the corner of your eye while you watch Coyote Girl grieve” (196). While directing us to observe the attitude of grief displayed by the Coyote Girl, the point of view established by the narrator integrates the Mother and the Coyote Girl. This exhortation from the Narrator lends the aspect of mourning to the lines of the Coyote Girl. She says: “Ring the church bellies/My arms agree/I’m proud owlie outta the tree” (196). Here, the intrusion of the jarring comic verse disrupts the flow of the text, allowing a necessary disconnectedness to enter the meaning. This disconnectedness is captured in the movement of the Coyote Girl from a location of mourning to a location of resignation. In the process, the focus shifts to the provocative “unsaid” implicit in the process of the transformation of the Coyote Girl into a Woman, with all the accompanying responsibilities. The significance of the phrase “proud owlie outta the tree” appears later, when the Coyote Girl equates her mother’s death to the killing of an owl. She says, “Mother was sick in bed. Outside an owl hooted in a tree. Father went out and shot the owl. Now Mother’s dead of a gunshot wound in her chest” (197).
Through an amalgam of narrative, poetry and the comic, a jarring interlude is created within the narrative discourse, which permits the intrusion of violence into the processes of transformation of roles. By extension, the Coyote Girl’s processes of making the connection with the spirit world are arbitrary and are often accompanied by a discordant note of violence.

In some plays, it can be observed that a necessary disconnectedness is engendered through the “journal” element which organizes the play in terms of perspectives rather than any discernible sense of action. With reference to *Jumpkiss*, Glancy says that her attempts had been to “enclose different voices and genres” (87). In such a context, the necessary disconnectedness is created by the journal element itself characterized by a simplistic, general, yet a sudden impact on the movement of the narrative. The journal element opens up the dramatic space for foregrounding the voice of the character/narrator. The woman who is narrating her visit to China, or the narrator in *Jumpkiss* emerge as empowered individuals who can perceive points of interconnection between the apparent differences in culture and traditions.

In an attempt to make connections with the spiritual aspect of life, Glancy’s plays blur the boundaries between the physical and the metaphysical worlds mainly through the stories, myths and narratives. For example in *The Truth Teller*, connections with the mythical world are established through stories which are sometimes integrated as surrealist dream sequences or dance performances. The story of the land, narrated in the second section of the play, blurs the boundaries between the real and the mythical worlds. In this version of the story, the land decides to move out of its own volition after a thunderstorm. The movement of land has the potential of a disaster for the Indian Woman
who has already equated land with memories and culture. However, in yet another
gesture of reorientation, the musician in the bear mask beats the drum and directs the
Indian Man to a place for fishing, giving him a hint that he can “fish” a name for the baby
in his dreams. Just like how the bears had previously functioned as parental figures,
directing him towards his Grandmother, the idea of bear functions as a connection to the
mythical world. The Indian Man is finally able to arrive at a name for the baby by
tapping his unconscious self and locating a name. It can also be considered that the act of
‘arriving’ at a name approximates to resisting the influence of the colonizers, rather than
a gesture of reconciliation or assimilation because of the very processes involved in the
act of naming. In spite of his mixed blood status and his continued association with the
White colonizers, the Man in the play chooses to arrive at a name for his yet-to-be-born
baby through the process of dreaming. While the transition into the mystical world
through dance and song indicates the co-existence of the physical world and the mystical,
there is an indication that the borderlines are being rapidly decimated due to cultural
upheaval. After the act of naming the child as ‘truth teller’ – “an individual who is able to
walk in both the worlds”, there are indications that the Indian Man decided to leave, just
like how a part of the land decides to leave in the story narrated by him. The significance
of such an act lies in the assumption of an implicit connection and identification with
land which is conceived of as a holistic construct composed of memories and culture.

The Sum of Winter is conceived as a “village in a fog that clears now and then so
the plot is visible” (84). The metaphor of a village in a fog accurately corresponds to the
thin plot of the play which permits movement between physical and conceptual realms of
action. Therefore the terminology that Glancy uses to talk about her idea of the structure
also adopts a similar pattern of correlating the components of the structure with the abstract. For example she says: “The piece explores how to cross the indirectness of an abstract field of snow by certain variations in dialogue” (85). By extension, the play contains the elements of surrealism and realism, punctuated by the desire of the dramatist to see “how far a story can be stretched and still remain a story with a recognizable plot, conflict/crisis, and character development” (84). By locating the play in the area “over the rim of the world” for her audience, Glancy enables a processual movement between the fluid margins of the ‘visible’ and the ‘invisible’ landscape.

The voice of the Spirits, who function in the spirit realm, establishes a parallel narrative about the significance of the Beluga’s actions. The perspectives which they establish for the audience take into account the changed sociocultural context, which envisions the Beluga as a vehicle for the negotiation of a contradictory sense of identity. The following lines are an example for this:

SPIRITS. The beluga makes leap out of the water – his jumps are an attempt to return to the land.

DIESEL. I hear the beluga’s cries of anger in the roar of my new snowmobile. (sic) (87)

The Beluga and Diesel are defined by the frustration that they experience. The Beluga is not able to return to land and Diesel would soon have to give up his new snowmobile because of the debt he has run up. Rather than resolution, this aspect of intertwining the spirit realm and the real life serves to illustrate the not so hard and fast boundaries between the two worlds. There is a clear indication that this is a play of possibilities which works precisely through the blurring of boundaries between the world.
of spirits and the world of characters. While this is indicated for the most part through dialogue, Glancy also mentions in the foreword: “There also is the possibility for dance, interpreting the story of the Beluga, the solar storms, northern lights, the ghosts of the early explorers, etc” (85). As a result, the structure of the play functions as an open-ended construct facilitating the integration of various voices. While probing the possible causes for juvenile delinquency, it permits a discussion of the metaphysical implications of relationships against a background of received knowledge of conscious/unconscious memories which are represented through the stories of the early Arctic explorers. The Spirits push the play into the realm of the spiritual as they serve to explore the parallels between the Beluga and the characters in the play. The story of the Beluga’s repeated attempts to reach the land serves to highlight the identity crisis faced by the characters amidst a fragmented sense of life. This is obvious in the two versions of the Beluga’s story as narrated by the Spirits. The first version of the story happens in the introductory part of the play, in the context of Eugene’s boarding school experiences. The Spirits say:

The walrus and the caribou wanted more room. They tricked the beluga. They tied him up saying it was a game. They dragged him to the water, cut off his arms and legs and pushed him in the sea. He splatted like an old ship heavy with ice. He sank into the water. The beluga makes leaps out of the water – his jumps are an attempt to return to the land. (87)

The Spirits are comparing Eugene’s predicament to that of the Beluga in the story. Just like the Beluga, Eugene had been left immobile by the lack of access to his language and culture in a boarding school context. However, towards the end of the play, the
Beluga attains the status of a cultural emblem. In yet another narration of the story, the Spirits say:

At one time the Beluga had arms and legs – The walrus and the caribou tied him up saying it was a game. They pulled him to the water and pushed him in the sea. He leaps from the water attempting to return to land. The seafarers who drowned hold onto him. We call the Beluga, *ghost hauler.* (sic) (103)

The most obvious difference between the two versions is the change of tense, implying that the story of the Beluga is now a story in motion. Further, the Beluga, which mirrored Eugene’s dissociated consciousness, now emerges as a symbol of survival. In fact, the Spirits describe it as a *ghost hauler* – acting as a hope for survival for seafarers like Eugene, Mora and Diesel. The setting of the play is aptly “the rim of the world”, a vantage point from where both the “visible” and the “invisible” worlds can be accessed. By extension, the patterns of survival become a recurring trope in the structure of the play. The three characters emerge as survivors of their situations, as illustrated by the fractional experiences of their life. The conclusion of the play is signalled by Eugene’s declaration: “It’s about owning up to who we are. Tattered – half frozen, a fraction of what we should be” (103).

Another noticeable aspect of the trickster discourse is the non-linearity of structural action. When Glancy describes the script as a “character which the story enters” (*Writings* 28), the focus shifts to the manner in which the story is shaped by the character. For instance, at the beginning of *The Women Who Loved House Trailers* (1996), the plot functions as a “thin line” on which the stories of Berta, Oscar and Jelly
hang in isolation. The conversations appear dissociated with no logical progression in the
dialogue. Their effort is at transcending the gap between the visible, limited world and
moving to the realm of stories, ideas and harmony. The triad like nature of the play is
sourced in the isolated efforts of the women to relocate their conception of identity in the
realities of their everyday life. Their conversations approach the issue of identity from
three different locations which are defined by the images that dominate their act of
recolletion.

*Jump Kiss* works as a play of possibilities, with an open-ended structure
facilitating the “*genre-tive* blend of the fictive and nonfictive” (87). As Glancy describes,
the play is a “search for definition of self fragmented by the act of memory, buckling
events, pushing one plate under another. Disordering the landscape in other words” (87).
Hence “the play rides upon plates like the earth’s crust” (87) characterized by sudden
shifts in perspectives. The sections which are titled or sometimes simply named
“Fragments” capture the significant memories and experiences of the narrator which
reveal the contradictions which the narrator has to negotiate. Moreover, since the play is a
“recovery of events and experiences and relationships for the purpose of understanding
what has passed” (87), the implication is that it can be read or performed in any order.

To create an adequate platform for the working of this “journal piece”, the
structure of the play had to accommodate parallels between received knowledge and
personalized life experiences, in addition to providing for the play of voices. This is
achieved by shifting the focus from recollection and retrospective narration, to a living
experience that transcends time and the limits imposed by particularity of the memories
sourced in the socio-cultural contexts of the narrator. The memories of the scars obtained
through an accident at the old grocer’s, the recollections of cows being taken to the 
slaughter-house, and dream of the brother’s throat being slit at the barber shop create an 
impression of the initial disorientation that is needed to proceed to a liminal stage of 
consciousness. From such a location, the spiritual ambiguity of the narrator forms the 
undercurrent for the acts of recollection that are recorded in every plate.

Though the author states that the plates could be moved in any order in her 
working notes, there also seems to be a possibility of moving the sections within as well 
as across the plates. The play itself can be conceived of as an organic construct, 
constantly providing scope for interpretations and reinterpretations. Originally conceived 
as a one voice piece, three additional voices were included in 2001. The play had seven 
voices, including those of the husband and the son with the inclusion of other elements 
like family photo slides (establishing an autobiographical connection) and musical 
instruments. Inclusion of new voices meant inclusion of new pieces in the plates. This 
included a section titled “Mixed Heritage” that had the voice of the Father as a narrator, 
and a “Fragment” with the Husband’s voice. A poem (Without Title) and a Buffalo 
Song\textsuperscript{12} were also added. Though Glancy doesn’t provide reasons for the inclusion of 
additional voices and sections, there is a clear attempt at creating a blueprint for an 
inclusive idea of performance where the performers bring in their personalized voices to 
the play. She says in her production notes:

As we talked about the play, everyone involved wanted to tell their own 
stories. At the discussion with the audience following the Autry 
performance – which centered around how the play worked for them – the
same thing happened. The stories in *Jump Kiss* involved everyone in their own stories, and those stories caused other stories – (208)

By establishing a metaphoric connection between the structural division of the play and the plates of the earth’s crust, authorial control is established through the conception of the play rather than the performance. This ensures that the structure functions as a metaphor referent for the representation of the shifting sense of identity as perceived within each section of the play.

In keeping with the idea of the trickster discourse and its implications on the staging of the variants, the play of imagery and metaphors in Glancy’s plays is often tensional in nature. This facilitates the shifting contexts and meanings in her plays. The imagery often approximates to Spivak’s concept of “catachresis” – a tactical maneuver that involves wrenching particular images and concepts out of their place within a particular narrative and using them to open up new areas of meaning. In *The Post-Colonial Critic* (1990), Spivak uses the word catachresis to refer to a metaphor without an adequate literal referent (154). Interestingly, in Glancy’s plays, metaphors sometime function contextually without the presence of a literal referent, as evidenced in the following example from *Halfact*. While associating her mother with the owl, two events have been correlated with the common image of an owl, a correspondence that is further bolstered when the act of shooting establishes causal connection between the mother’s death and the owl being shot. This, by default also lends credence to the assumption of the maternal role by the Coyote Girl as she describes herself as a “proud owlie outta the tree” (196). Hence the process of identifying the mother with the owl in the tree works more in terms of a catachresis. The necessary tension is generated through the rapidly
shifting contexts of the Coyote Girl’s life wherein responsibilities are thrust upon her. Similar is the case with the pine doll image which extends into a defining metaphor for the Coyote Girl. In the cultural traditions of Native American life, playing with pine dolls prepares girls for the domestic responsibilities in future life. At the beginning, the narrator tells us that the Coyote Girl is making a pine doll out of pine needles and traces its origin to the cemetery, hinting at an ironic revelation that she may have to assume domestic responsibilities soon. At a later point in the play, the narrator describes the Coyote Girl’s room where, amidst the funeral rubble, there are a row of pine cones on her dresser – a reminder of her disintegrated childhood and her acquired identity as the woman of the house. It is only when she wears her space helmet at the end of the play, can she dance with the ghost of her pine needle doll, which by now approximates to her lost childhood. Here we find the pine needle doll functioning not as a vehicle carrying a singularity of meaning. It functions in the mode of “catachresis” whereby Glancy uses the metaphor to record the constantly shifting meanings based on the location of the Coyote Girl, thereby suggesting that the metaphor itself is tensional in nature.

The tensional aspect of the discourse is also shaped by the disparate comparisons by the narrator, which remind us that we are looking at jagged edges between two worlds. For example, in the statement, “Inside the porch where the sky doesn’t reach, thoughts are tucked like hair into the old leather flight-cap she wears now” (198), an implicit connection is assumed between the silence of the Coyote Girl and her new role which ensures her silence. While the metaphor implicit in “porch where the sky doesn’t reach” reminds us that much of the play is happening in the subconscious realm of the Coyote Girl, “thoughts are tucked like hair into the old leather flight cap” reveals that the Coyote
Girl is resigned to such a transformation which denies her individuality, but permits her flight into the mythical world. Such disparate comparisons open possibilities for a relocation of the owl image in her mother. By extension, there are also possibilities for transformation of roles not just from Coyote Girl to Coyote Woman, but also to the Coyote Boy, as we are left with the impression that Coyote Boy could just be a literal manifestation of the “other” of the Coyote Girl. In another instance of a disparate comparison, the Coyote Girl says: “I hear my Father pounding the barn roof. It sounds like my Brother biting into an apple” (193). In this comparison, the jagged space between the Father and the Coyote Boy is opened for the location of the Coyote Girl vis-à-vis her father and brother. Ironically, her voice is silent. The reason for this silence is substantiated in the following statement: “Mother I take your apron and grease the bread pans. The voice of a woman is a foreign object. It feels like silence in my mouth” (198).

Once the role transformation happens, the Coyote Girl is also silenced. In a rather manipulative gesture, disparate comparisons aid in the creation of a third space facilitating what Stephen Hawley would call the aim of the trickster in literary discourse – enticing the steps into metaphor (1). In this case, the Coyote Girl is able to arrive at a metaphor that best describes her location amidst the triad of characters – she has been silenced just like the pine doll that she had buried earlier.

In *The Truth Teller*, maps function in a similar manner. In the post-colonial discourse, maps often emerge as symbols signifying mastery and control not just over a territory, but over its attendant culture as well. While objectifying the process of discovery maps also act as agents signifying the influence of acquired ideology on an unknown. Further, the act of renaming spaces indicates a process of cultural
superscription, which in many instances, creates multiple and sometimes conflicting accretions. Therefore maps acquire political significance because they narrate stories of colonialism and imperialism as perceived by the colonizer. From this, it can be seen that the act of naming, which appears to be a crucial issue in The Truth Teller, assumes a sociocultural significance. While locating the baby against a cultural horizon, it will also include the influences of the Indian Man and the Indian Woman, who become integral in the act of “observing”.

In the play, the Indian Woman resists the idea of maps because they challenge her notion of the indivisibility of the mythical and the real world. It is precisely this aspect of maps that troubles the Indian Woman who wonders how the whites operate with maps and by extension without the attendant stories which guide the life of the community. She asks: “What drives them up the river to make marks of land on their map? To set up villages behind the walls?” (262)

The idea of demarcating boundaries poses a problem for the Indian Woman because it opposes the idea of mobility. Similarly, stories function as carriers of messages from the ancients. They aid in survival through the tensional aspect of their narratives and cannot be confined to a book. In the particular case of the Indian Woman, stories help her during her husband’s absence, as she narrates them to herself. It is precisely the mobility of stories, typified by the comparison to a canoe, which functions as an agent of healing. The Indian Woman declares, “Our stories carry us like a canoe. That’s what stories do” (259).

At a larger level, while the maps clearly relegate the world into a seeable construct defined by limits, the absence of stories denies the presence of mythic world.
The absence of stories and the presence of maps represent an effort to break the connection between man and nature. While for the whites, maps function as vehicles which familiarize the unfamiliar, even if it involves a denial of the history connected to the land and renaming it according to convenience, the maps make the familiar remote and inaccessible for people like the Indian Man and Woman.

The bear functions as a dominant transformative image that the Indian Man has retained from his significant childhood memories. In Native American myths, the bear is a powerful figure associated with healing. By the virtue of its ability to hibernate, it functions as a symbol of renewal and seasonal change. The Cherokee belief holds that the bears are actually humans and possess the ability to speak. Further, the physical attributes of the bear lend credence to the conception of the bear as a brother, a kindred spirit and a teacher, thereby enabling the transformation of humans into bears, as illustrated in the following recollection of the Indian Man:

When I was a boy my mother and father died within two days of each other. My father died of a hunting accident. My mother died in childbirth. I went into the woods. I didn’t want to live. I had nothing but water for seven days, and a man and woman came to me. They said your grandmother is crying for you. What are you doing here? They asked. Then they changed into bears and walked away. (259)

While this represents a personalized recollection focusing on the message that he had to return to his grandmother, the whole episode of retiring to the forest reinforces the idea of hibernation and renewal. The bears perform an additional role of cultural healers,
especially since they initiate the ensuring dream in which the Indian Man sees a visual representation of the growing colonial influence. He sees a drum painted red and blue signifying the land of the rising sun and the land of darkness. He also sees an approaching white storm and his song is an entreaty to the storm to go away. What we sense in the process of this narrative is not just a recollection of a childhood memory shaping the present perspective, but also the resignation of the Indian Man and Woman to the fact that the inscribed colonial influence is a reality that they have to survive. Very significantly, the bears point the way towards cultural survival, by redirecting the Indian Man to his grandmother.

In the *Mother of Mosquitos*, the complex interplay of images and their associated significance are in a state of flux. An ordinary mosquito at the beginning of the play acquires the status of a Mother Mosquito towards the end. This process happens through the associative mode in which the images are linked to each other in terms of their implications. The dialogue aids this process by working at the level of association rather than a linear progression of thought. This accounts for the fragmented nature of the exchanges which enable the dynamic aspect of the images through the play. For example, at the opening of the play, the dialogue between the Woman and the Chorus seems to be fragmented. After swatting the mosquito, the Woman asks: ‘Why mosquito fly near us?’ (275). The response of the Chorus starts as a biological reasoning but ends by making an association that demands for a suspension of reality. The Chorus says: “She drinks blood. Her life’s in our blood. Red drops come to our arm like leaves” (275). The comparison of red blood drops to leaves initiates the reference to the underwater driftwood forests. The underwater forest is first established by the Chorus as the source of dreams but the Forest
disputes its presence through its rhetorical questions, implying that the existence of the forest is determined by a belief.

The Forest, in tandem with the Chorus, functions as a medium blurring the boundaries between the world of the woman and the world of Nature. Instead of simply commenting on the action, the Chorus exhorts the woman to make the connections between the images and metaphors. Therefore the fragmented exchanges, which work more at the level of references and associations, enable the movement of the play in terms of images within the particularized and general experiences of the woman. Though the play happens to be an instance of locating the idea of survival specifically through the strategy of using masks, the element of transformation is visible in the tensional aspect of the masks, implying that identity is indeed a fluid construct.

In *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer*, by talking in terms of concretized abstractions, the Grandmother implies that it is for the Girl to make sense of the tensional construct of the Ahwu’ste. In her visualizations, the deer could have wings if one imagined and could sometimes also become two legged with the remaining two hidden in her deer dress. The implication is that the spirit deer and the deer dress are tensional constructs that permit a specific and particularized interpretation depending on the location of the characters. The location of the characters in turn, is defined by their degree of belief in the myth itself.

GIRL. Your deer dress is the way you felt when you saw the deer?

GRANDMOTHER. When I saw the Ahw’uste, yes. My deer dress is the way I felt, transformed by the power of ceremony. The idea of it in the forest of my head. (14)
The Girl considers the deer dress to be an avenue for escape from the realities of life. However, by the end of the play, she understands that her deer dress is shaped by personalized beliefs rather than tangible constructs. For the grandmother, an animal like deer becomes an abstract spiritual construct approximating to the Ahw’uste. A red deer dress is transformed by the power of ceremony into an aspect of her identity. After the recovery of the conversations that she had with the Grandmother, the Girl is able to relocate the myth within her own sociocultural framework. For her, the tangible construct of the deer dress becomes an intangible construct of a “dress of words” (18). Rather than working on the basis of acts and scenes, the dialogues and the monologues about these two images create the necessary tension for appropriating the story of Ahw’uste.

Similarly, The Women Who Loved House Trailers is punctuated by tensional images sourced from significant childhood experiences and cultural myths. For example, Oscar visualizes her mother as a wren and hence her conversations are punctuated with references to birds. She says that her mother made a nest from her anger and discontent. Since she is also engaged in finding points of contact between life experiences and cultural myths, she pictures herself as a welder and her operating metaphor is a blowtorch used for welding. Similarly, Berta’s memories are dominated by the image of a house trailer, which becomes the operating metaphor for the stories that she narrates. The migratory aspect of the house trailer is captured in the various versions of the stories that she narrates, or as she puts it, “stories of versions”, since the versions are the same but the narrative patterns differ. Therefore the stories function as points of integration for her. For Jelly, the birchbark canoe functions as an operating metaphor since her memories are influenced by the childhood image of a waterlogged boat which implies the idea of
floating. In her case, she is floating between the various implications of her identity as a daughter and a lover.

At the conclusion of the play, the women address each other in terms of their images which implies that they have acknowledged the relative impact of the images which are themselves in a state of “eternal tease” as far as their implications are concerned, thereby subscribing to the metaphor of a house trailer. In fact Glancy states that the fourth character in the play is the house trailer itself and had originally conceived its presence through a developing multimedia trailer during the performance. However, a semblance of it was captured by putting wheels on a birdhouse and using a light to shadow it on the wall (206). The need for integration is made obvious by the house trailer functioning as a construct for negotiating their dissociation between the visible and the invisible worlds. Hence, in a gesture symptomatic of Spivak’s catachresis, the image of the house trailer is wrenched out of its common everyday signification and is instead employed to create a foundation for the narratives of rootlessness and migration. In that sense, the house trailer in fact can approximate to the fourth character in the play whose silence preponderates and directs the acts of recollection that the women engage in.

In *Jump Kiss*, the movement in the play happens through the associations of memories and images within a web like reconstruction and revisionalization of events, initiated by the first act of snuffing out the life of the Spider. An illustration of this is the Vacation Bible School experience, which shapes much of the narrator’s idea of Christianity. In “Glow-Ree” it is stated that Christ died for the sake of the people. It is obvious that this aspect of Christianity is received knowledge that turns out to be in conflict with Native American modes of understanding the concept of sacrifice. The same
idea reappears as a fragment in Plate 3, when Christ’s act of crucifixion is interpreted not just as an act of glory, but as a mode of penitence. It is through an act of “jump kiss” that Christ is able to ascend the heaven. In a literal transfer of the imagery associated with crucifixion, the narrator suggests that forgiveness may hold the key to a better understanding of Christ and his sacrifice, and its location in the everyday life of individuals. She says:

I needed it so. Forgiveness.

But you know Christ doesn’t care who you are or what you’ve done. He opens you like a pear. Takes His pearing knife right down to the core. It doesn’t hurt. Does a pear feel pain? Have you ever heard one cry out as you bit into it? (114)

A space is created for the idea of forgiveness to operate only when the narrator is able to confront the painful experiences of the past. Within the context of the play, the knife has already been established as a symbol of violence and bloodshed against silent victims. As a result, the images have a tensional aspect with reference to the experiences from which they are sourced.

Another instance of such tensional aspect of an image appears in the section “The Stockyards”. The narrator first narrates a general experience of seeing cows being led to the slaughter house. Intertwined with this narrative is the particular experience at the barbershop, which is patterned after a dream sequence. The common image that the narrator retains from both the experiences is the act of slaughter. “Slaughter” with its accompanying implications of violence and bloodshed, also breaks the sacred Native American beliefs concerning the harmony with the environment. “Hunting”, as
interpreted in the Native American context, was an act necessary for the survival of a community, and hence was considered to be a ritual. However the narrator is able to morph the implication of ‘hunting’ onto ‘slaughter’ due to her changed sociocultural context. ‘Slaughter’ has replaced ‘hunting’, not just as a way of survival, but as a means of supporting the economic requirements of the family. She is also able to assign a ritual aspect to the act of killing, especially when she raises it to the level of a metaphor. She says: “It was later, though, I had to kill myself before I could go on to life. A ritual I had to do” (110).

In The Sum of the Winter, the images and the metaphors serve to highlight the tension in the relationships between Eugene, Mora and Diesel. For example the memories of his wife that Eugene holds on to (in the form of her dresses) become the bone of contention between him and Mora. In a very symbolic move, Mora gives Diesel a box containing the clothes of his silent mother, which she describes as “wings for your journey” (99). The metaphor used here is associative, because the clothes in the box are representative of Eugene’s first wife. Hence the wings for Diesel’s journey are these clothes since he holds on to the memories of his mother and refuses to accept Mora in her place. Even the story of the Beluga functions as a tensional metaphor which parallels the frustration of the characters. The play ends on a highly imagistic note with correlation being established between memories, stories, and the voice of the Beluga which has been pushed into the cold sea, just like how the characters have been pushed into life.

In The Collector of a Three-Cornered Stamp, images and metaphors function in a tensional association with memory. In the first section, a woman vicariously relives the horrors of the Vietnam War through the memories of her husband. A complex association
between the memories and the desire for escape result in the correlation of the postage stamp with the helicopter wing. The images are sourced in the significant experiences of the husband while flying a helicopter with the instrument flight. In the second section, the memories of an old friend “happen” against the background of post cards being sent from different places. Here, the postage stamp is conceived of as an animal or a bird because the most significant memory that the narrator retains of her friend is her philosophy that people have animal counterparts – an idea that bridges the gap between the world of humans and the larger physical world and moves the narrator into the world of empathy. In the third section, the postage stamp functions as a unit of creation as conceived by the Spirit. In a retelling of the story of human creation, the Spirit creates the postage stamp in its own image, but as it kept dividing, complications ensured that the creation was separated from the creator. The narrator says:

> After a while the stamps became so complicated they became a lot of separate things (sic). So at that point the unifier was the separator. It started thinking for itself. It decided to think it was spirit. The stamp had rebelled. It got a big head looking at everything it had done. (31)

The image of the postage stamp, in combination with the story of its separation, functions like an allegory, building up on the memories recollected in the previous sections and arriving at the conception of the three-cornered postage stamp as the residual image. This image functions as the required objective correlative for the narrator to try and arrive at an explanation for her own separation from the spiritual realm of life, through a process of recollection, reliving and consolidation. Such a process enables Glancy to conceive of the play itself as a collector of a three-cornered stamp, lending it a
voice that speaks from realms of a fragmented sense of identity. As she tries to find scope for connection between the three distinct voices of the narrator in the play, the three-cornered postage stamp literally functions as an agent stamping memories onto the consciousness of the narrator.

While Glancy’s characters delve into a “usable past” in search of survival and healing, and engage with metaphors and symbols whose dynamic aspect parallels their “uncontainable” sense of identity, the patterns of such processes are significantly impacted by the sense of irony, which in turn, renders the narrative discourse tensional. Such patterns also enable the characters to engender their own modes of resistance to their sociocultural ambivalences, thereby illustrating that their reach for tradition and authority functions mostly in an ironical context, often facilitating a pattern of contradictions.13

For example in Halfact, the statements of the intrusive narrator embody the pattern of contradiction. While his questions and rhetorical statements enhance the impression that the play is happening in the subconscious realm of the Coyote Girl, they also serve to highlight the contradictions imposed by the changing realities of her life. For example, as soon as the Coyote Boy compares his mother’s death to an act of closure, the Narrator intervenes with a rhetorical question: “Isn’t that life, The split she walked?” (197) thereby raising the individual experience to the level of an operating trope of life in general. The play represents a motion of “uncontainable identities” which runs parallel to the assumption of multiple identities by the trickster during the course of a narrative. While the contradictory aspect of the trickster is embodied both in the discourse patterns and the language, the narrator, by playing the role of an interlocutor between the audience
and the text, directs the focus onto the contradictory sense of identity that the Coyote Girl experiences.

In *The Truth Teller*, the pattern of contradiction starts from the title of the play which subscribes to a defining aspect of the trickster – that of telling the truth. Though it is the Man’s responsibility to ‘dream’ a name, he happens to be a Native American of mixed descent, who guides the whites across the uncertain terrains of the Native American territories – an act which the Indian Woman does not approve of. However, in a seeming attempt to negotiate the demands of both the worlds, the Indian Man names the new born baby as “truth teller” – a person who can walk between the margins of Native life and Western idea of civilization. Set in Circa 1800, the play captures active resistance to the idea of colonization through the patterns of contradiction in the narrative discourse of the play. The constant questioning by the Indian Woman, while simultaneously being engaged in activities specific to the season indicates that she is in a tensional balance with the cultural fragmentation that she is experiencing. Such interrogative modes of dialogue capture some of the peripatetic moments that are instrumental in shaping the responses of the characters. For example, the story of Wenebojo the trickster who made the process of obtaining maple sugar syrup more difficult for the Natives seems to serve as a justification for Indian woman’s constant engagement with work as she broods on the metaphysical implications of naming of her baby. However she senses the virtual upheaval of the cultural aspects of life in the contraptions and the dreams of the whites. The resultant tension she experiences manifests in her perpetual questioning of her husband’s choice of occupation. Objects like the steel traps and leg bands are reminders
of the fact that her husband has already been labeled as a “half-breed traitor” by the village elders and hence her doubts about his ability to dream a name for her baby.

*Mother of Mosquitos* works at a surreal level, establishing an assumed contact between the Indian Woman and the natural world. The play is set in “a village of ice in the far north of imagination” (274) which implies that a freewheeling between the physical and the mythical world and making radical connections between the both is possible. The four characters – Mosquito, Woman, Chorus and The Forest – aid the structural movement of the play as they attempt to find points of contact between images and meanings. The structure of the play revolves around the act of correlating the buzzing of a mosquito in the real world to the presence of leaves in a mythical underwater forest made of driftwood. This forest exists only in dreams and visions¹⁴. Hence the woman has to move towards a holistic connection between nature and myths, visions and dreams. Through a process of intense correlation the play tries to depict a literal representation of the contradictory perspectives of the Woman. The remaining characters – the Forest and the Chorus as well as the masks (fish, seal-skin, dream) aid the woman in assuming the various roles as she proceeds on what seems to be a vision quest. As she moves, the masks aid her in assuming the identity required for that particular dimension of the quest, thus having an intrusive presence on the narrative and a strong impact on the consciousness of the Woman. For example, when she steps into the fish mask, she declares, “I become one with the mask” (276). The impact of this statement appears in the following lines in which she believes that she has been liberated from her identity as a woman with its associated pain of child-birth and tattoos. She says, “Sweet Mask. No childbirth pains. No tattooing-needle in my face. No soot-black thread drawn through my
cheeks” (276). More importantly, she is apparently safe from the bites of the mosquito because her domicile is now underwater. But the contradiction arises when she realizes that this identity does not protect her from a fish-spear. Therefore a need arises for her to step into the seal-skin tunic which would permit her to live both on land and water, implying a negotiation of the contradictory sense of identity.

Glancy does not give directions as to when exactly the woman uses the mosquito or dreams mask, leaving it possible for an open-ended use of these masks. However, a reading of the text would reveal that the woman might probably assume the dream mask, when the Forest tells her about the stories of the underwater forest from where the driftwood comes. This would not make sense to her in the real world, but such a possibility exists in the world of dreams. When the Chorus says, “We know things now. These dreams are our masks” she responds, “I dream-dance in a seal-skin tunic” (279). This prompts the question as to what would happen without the dreams. The implicit assumption in the play is that the driftwood in the underwater forest is the source of the dreams. But the woman is not able to find the underwater forest. At this point the Forest functions as a character and disputes its presence. It has a different idea about leaves – they are subject to decay according to the changing seasons. The implication is that the leaves can also assume and change in colour before being completely annihilated, just like how the woman can change her masks. There is a parallel between the journey of the leaves and the journey of the woman. From this perspective, the masks function as vehicles carrying beliefs and stories. In a ritualistic context, masks aid the ritual performer in changing his/her physical form to enter the world of the spirit in a way analogous to shaman’s magical transformation. Theoretically, it is only in the village of
ice, far away from vegetation, that she can stay away from the mosquitoes. In an ironical twist, her hope in this belief is shattered by her abrupt realization that the catalyst to this whole movement, the driftwood, is now ordered only through catalogue, because of which she has lost her connection with the mythical world. Hence the idea of the driftwood becomes an elusive construct for the Woman.

In *One Horse*, Glancy looks at the cultural institution of Pow Wow from an ironical perspective. The original idea behind the Pow Wow is the identification of Native Americans as people with a common heritage rather than a community divided by individualized orientation of tribes. In that sense, it becomes a space for integration and hence the social aspect of the Pow Wow contributes toward the preservation of a generational sense of identity. However, Glancy structures her play as a modernized Pow Wow broadcast, in which the audience listens to the proceedings, thereby restricting the scope for active involvement. The source is an actual radio broadcast heard by the dramatist while traveling across Northern Wisconsin on July 19, 1992. Though removed from the actual context of the ceremony, the recollection and the narrative awaken an ironical awareness of the connection with the sacred and a generational history of the community.

In *The Woman Who was a Red Deer*, the irony in the discourse is patterned after two kinds of action motifs. They are the grandmother’s fluid accounts of the sightings and significance of the Ahwu’ste, and the increasingly personalized interpretations of the red deer dress which amounts to conscious and localized interpretations of the deer and the dress. Hence, both the narrative strands are in a state of flux. For example, the grandmother first locates the Ahw’uste in Deer Creek and later in the Asuwosg precinct.
In the first instance, she could see only the head of the deer, but later it becomes a four
legged deer with wings wearing the red deer dress. For the Grandmother, the deer dress is
the way she feels, “transformed by the power of ceremony” (14) while the Girl’s deer
dress is composed of words. Hence, a general myth progressively transformed into a
personalized recollection with metaphysical implications, becomes the source of survival
for the Grandmother with an ironical implication that her efforts at integrating the
physical and the mythical worlds may sometimes fall short of her expectations. She
acknowledges that the “damned spirits” didn’t always help her out during her rough
times. This brings out the contrast between the Girl and the Grandmother because the
Girl has been conditioned to see her world in categories of visible and mythical. The
irony also evolves from the fact that the Grandmother consciously refuses to share
information with the Girl, thereby not living up to her role of being a nodal point in
sharing, instructing and moulding. However, since survival seems to be contingent on the
process of pulling a mythical belief into her everyday life, the Girl has to negotiate the
categories, for which she has to break the boundaries between the visible and the
mythical world. In other words, she has to live with the contradictions that her cultural
identity imposes upon her. The Girl’s declaration of sewing her own deer dress is
illustrative of such an effort – of living with the contradictions. As Christy Stanlake puts
it, “the girl’s task is not to simulate her grandmother’s traditions of the Ahw’uste but to
discover how to embrace “the pleasure of contradictions” within her own postindian
identity” (188).

In *The Women Who Loved House Trailers*, the titled sections establish ironic
context for the reflections of the women. The disconnectedness of their families and the
limits imposed by the visible world creates the disconnect in their discourse. This disconnect captures the sense of contradiction that the women experience in their encounters with the world of relationships and economics. The first section is titled “The Three Women Are Nearing the Last Days in Their Studio Because We Can’t Pay the Rent.” The sudden shift from an objective third person to a collective first person as illustrated by the use of the term “We” indicates that the women are now taking over the narrative structure of the play. The life situation of being unable to pay the rent is raised to a metaphysical location from where the women are able to negotiate their “uncontainable” sense of identity. While the idea of movement is reinforced by the stories and narratives of the women, the house trailer image starts functioning as a defining construct of the play as evinced in the following exchange between the women:

BERTA. He made the house trailer from a dream.

I’m sending off my dream in a grant proposal.

Leaving it for the mailman.

OSCAR. A trailer can’t go anywhere on its own, that’s my first objection.

(23)

The irony is built into the idea that though the defining metaphor has the integrated aspect of mobility, it cannot function in the absence of control. In this case, control is established by the characters who recollect events from the past, which, in turn, serve to highlight the tensional aspect of the identities they have assumed.

The title “In the Cemetery at Oscar’s Father’s Funeral” hints at the irony of being in the presence of an “absent father”. The women know that it is the power of belief that ensures the presence/absence of people in their lives. For example, since Oscar has
already correlated her mother with a bird, she is working on the ‘Wren Series’ and ensures that her blowtorch does not allow her to be touched by men and by default, her father as well. Jelly’s canoe functions as a vehicle of belief since she knows that she can “weave” the presence of her father. Hence, though he is physically not present at the cemetery, she can feel him there. Berta, through her stories, can discern the presence of her father. This is in opposition to Oscar who cannot feel her father’s presence since he had “made a stone” out of her. From their anger and discontent at their sense of inadequacy, the image of the house trailer emerges again – they describe themselves as house trailers and look for answers in the world of art, stories and nature. The triad of perspectives which run parallel to each other become the root of contradiction in the fragmented sense of identity that these women experience.

In a rather symbolic gesture, the Holman Gallery asks Oscar to de-wing her sculpt-piece of the Wren w/2 half wings. The rejection has an acute impact because, there is a method in the sculpt-piece in which she has welded two half wings. It signifies the idea of escape into a dream, just like how she had visualized her mother. In structural terms, this pattern of rejection becomes the trope guiding the memories and perspectives of the women in this section. Hence the dialogue initiates the rejection, a fact that the three women have to negotiate in their own distinct manner. So the triad appears again with Oscar seeking answers in the rejection of her sculpt-pieces that she has welded, Berta in her stories and memories, and Jelly in her canoes. However, the structure moves towards ironical implications when we understand that the women are not referring to tangible constructs when they talk about stories, canoes and blowtorches. Jelly’s canoes don’t float and hence can be hung as “Canoe in flight” or “Returning the Tree” depending
on the perspective that the viewers choose. The names can be changed in tandem with the perspective and the location. As the idea of canoe moves far away from the literal, transformation of identities is symbolized by the act of renaming, a distinct possibility in Native American discourse.

The women move towards a sense of closure when they realize that though their dreams and memories may have to be symbolically packed under a ‘burial mound’, they will symbolically reappear in the form of their canoes, blowtorches and stories. The triad of perspectives operates yet again, to highlight the irony implicit in the title of the section as the women realize that a total sense of closure remains a distinct impossibility. They say:

JELLY. You walk through your dream with your birchbark canoe.

OSCAR. You walk through your dream with your blowtorch.

BERTA. You walk through a dream with your stories as you close the studio door behind you. (37)

In Jump Kiss there is a clear attempt to capture the contrasts in the relationship dynamics between the Father, Mother, Brother and the Narrator. For example, in Plate VI, the mode of dialogue serves to highlight the contrasts in the relationships recorded in the play. The brother has a superficial view of the tattoos whereas the Girl associates them with childhood memories of being burnt at the grocer’s furnace. The fire, through a process of association becomes an agent facilitating an escape from living with an “uncontainable” sense of identity. The integration of dialogue facilitates two forms of discourse patterns. The first is the interrogative pattern where the conversation assumes
the framework of a question/answer session and in the process brings out the irony in the
locations of the characters. The section “Death Bed” illustrates this pattern.

FATHER. Do you regret being with me in the dark?

BROTHER. I have no regrets.

FATHER. Yes, you do. I hear them in your sleep.

BROTHER. How can you listen to my sleep?

FATHER. Sometimes I wake hearing ghosts of everyone who lived in the
house, they leave their voices hanging on the walls. (131)

The Brother’s world is limited to the visible and the literal, whereas the father’s
world is stretching into the realm of the abstract – a location from where he can listen to
the voices of his ancestors. Since he has limited contact with the spirit realm, he cannot
hear the voices of the ancients.

The second kind of discourse pattern emerges towards the end of this plate when
the Mother establishes a conversational relationship with the audience, more to register
the whimsical irony that characterizes years of silence in a relationship. The occasion of
Father’s death releases the final ironic comment from the Mother. She says, “He should
have been a vacuum-cleaner salesman. I heard the WHOOOOOOOOMMMMMMMM!
of his motor when he stepped into the afterlife” (134).

Such a pattern also appears in the dialogue between the Brother and the Sister.
The Sister who has been conditioned to relocate her spiritual ambiguity within her
everyday life is clearly in opposition to the Brother, who depends on seeable constructs
like “photographs” which in his conception, operate on the single dimension of
“viewing” only. He is able to correlate his decorative tattoos to the burn marks on his
Sister’s legs since both involved an element of pain, but with an element of difference. His tattoos were obtained out of his own volition whereas he finds it hard to understand why his Sister kneeled on the fire. Her response indicates that she has been able to relocate her cultural ambiguity within the context of her general conception of a dislocated Native American life. She says:

Maybe the fire called me to kneel before it.

Maybe I was trying to escape the evil queen of the range.

Maybe I knew the road under us would always be ice, and we’d slide over it – the walls of the house were a fjord we were passing – one sharp call and it would fall. (133)

While Glancy’s primary focus is that of holding on to the past in the face of the sociocultural collisions that her stories chronicle, she acknowledges that this is a past that is receding and is now accessible through the margins of contacts. This also explains the sourcing of her plays – most of them are sourced in her own personal reflections arising out of conversations, dialogues and travel. And these reflections become the stories that her characters enter, thereby lending control to the voices that “cause” the stories.

Glancy’s works show an increased tendency towards experimentation with forms, genres and structures. For example, the first play *Weebjob* approximates to a traditionally constructed play, while *The Toad Must Have A Bite*, falls in line with the idea of one-woman theatre. Still further, a play like *The Collector of a Three Cornered Stamp*, functions totally at an allegorical level, just like the *Mother of Mosquitos*, but with an increased emphasis on capturing the plurality of voices. At the background of all these experimental efforts, the dramatic emphasis lies on capturing the “engaging fractures”
that open up a space for “tradition and assimilation, preservation of a way-of-life that has all but vanished while forging a contemporary world-view in the process of being created” (Writings 18). Hence Glancy’s dramatic focus is on the “strip between” the physical world, the dream world, the spirit world, and the imaginative experience. When memory is integrated into this location, possibilities arise for voices and stories to happen. As a direct result of the emergence of various voices, achieving personal sovereignty becomes an achievable goal for Glancy’s characters. It can also be seen that such personal sovereignty is duly impacted by their ability to connect the personal to the spiritual and thereby engender the potential for healing within the dimension of the play. Such a process, when conceived of as a translocated Sweat Lodge ceremony, or a Pow Wow opens up avenues for spiritual negotiation with its attendant implications on the structural discourse of the play. In the next chapter, attempt will be made to study such patterns of spiritual negotiations, especially with reference to the questions regarding survival in a marginalised context.
Notes

1. Vizenor considers survivance as an ongoing process of survival, mainly through the humour and irony of stories. He says in Postindian Conversations – “Native stories are sound and vision, and both are survivance. See also “The Ruins of Representation: Shadow Survivance and the Literature of Dominance” published in the American Indian Quarterly.

2. In Conversation, Glancy says, “I bring a memory of the Cherokee in the back room, which I could never speak and was never a part of, but it was there (6).”

3. Murdrooroo questions the postcolonial interpretations of the word “hybrid” since they rest on the belief of the existence of a “pure culture” uncontaminated by outside influence. He terms such a process as a “dubious proposition” and instead argues for an “indigenous impulse” which gives rise to a culture based on the environment (108).

4. Vizenor gives an interesting interpretation of the Turtle Island myth, which in a way, theorizes Glancy’s own conception of the creation of meaning. Vizenor describes the turtle island creation myth as an “imaginative place”, a “metaphor which connects dreams to earth”. (Earth Divers xv-xvi). Glancy says, “The sacred realm was the sky. It was a rock sky on which animals used to live but fell off to the water below, and formed mud on the surface, out of which land grew. Which was called Turtle Island. Which became America” (The Cold and the Hunger Dance 60).

5. Glancy uses the term “orbiculate” to describe the circular movement of the Native American Drama. (Further 204).
6. Wovoka (1856-1952) was a religious leader who had prophetic visions of the resurrection of the dead Paiute tribe. To realize the visions, apart from righteous living, he prescribed a Ghost Dance in a series of five day gatherings. In Bull Star, Cicero has three versions of the visions, the common features being those of dance, ghosts and the earth being cleared for the Indians after some kind of a deluge.

7. This is typified by the image of the underwater driftwood which is no longer accessible to her even after the process of assuming various masks.

8. In the Lakota and the Inuit mythologies, the trickster is said to have initiated the process of creation. In that sense, he functions as a native shaman.

9. Thomas King’s A Coyote Columbus Story can be considered as a good example.

10. Arnold Van Genepp (1873 – 1957), a German ethnographer, first used the term “liminal” to describe the second stage in the three-part rites of passage ritual. He describes the liminal stage as a transitional period.

11. Ahw’uste refers to the mythical deer that appears only in the realm of visions. In a version of the legend sourced from Friends of Thunder: Folktales of Oklahoma Cherokees, the Ahw’uste or the spirit deer plays more of a “tutelary” role in the thought systems of the Indians. When translocated to the contextual space of the play, it implies that the mythical deer which appears only in the realm of visions is the dynamic construct which enables connections between the material and the spiritual worlds.

12. The buffalo song is significant because it is suggestive of healing after the infliction of violence and destruction.

13. This is in line with Vizenor’s conception of Native American Literature as a construct for liberation, and not a “terminal creed” (Postindian Conversations 91).
14. The Inuits believed that the entire creation was initially under the water. Hence the underwater forests become the source of the driftwood.


---. *The Sum of Winter*. (unpublished manuscript).


---“The Ruins of Representation: Shadow Survivance and the Literature of Dominance”.
