Chapter 5

The Comparisons and Controversies

This study makes it possible to trace out three strains of development in Glancy’s plays, which can be used as points of comparison with other American women playwrights. In a way, these aspects are manifest in the critical terms “culture” – which often sources and organizes the structural elements of the play; “conflict” – which initiates and develops the movement in the plays; “social fabric” – which suggests an implicit dynamism that permits the women characters to emerge as empowered individuals. It becomes significant for this study to discuss how the women playwrights used this critical framework with reference to the processes of playwriting.

In addition to these, this chapter will also attempt to explore certain significant debates that are crucial while considering Diane Glancy as a mixed breed Native American woman playwright. Glancy’s works have invited debates on three counts – the first being her claim to her heritage, the second being the thematic ambiguities which seem to be the characteristic content of her plays and the third being her engagement with Christianity which, in the opinion of a few, approximates to an assimilation of colonial culture.
The common aspect between Diane Glancy and playwrights like Marsha Norman, Anna Deavere Smith and Wendy Wasserstein is that they were all socially conscious dramatists, who were concerned with the sociocultural representations of women. There is a valid justification for locating Glancy’s plays against their plays, especially with reference to the three critical terms of reference.

In the case of Marsha Norman, culture makes its appearance in the form of the images to which her characters are forced to subscribe. These images also become the defining constructs through which they access their past. Hence, the retrospective narration at work is often through a single image or a gesture which enables a movement into the past. *Getting Out*, ‘*night Mother* are representative of such models, wherein conversations are contingent on making some points of connection with the past. It is precisely through such processes of making connections that Norman uses memory to ensure that the realism in her plays is not a “reworked version of old realism” (Demastes 125). Though the structure of her plays, which are dependent on memory may seem to be realistic, the trajectories of the process of remembrance are often chaotic and indicate a non-linear pattern of recollection. Her plays are often contingent on creating a conflicting play of voices precisely through the act of recollection.

This can be illustrated with reference *Getting Out*. For most of the play, Arlie tends to subscribe to the ‘violent’ image which the society has set for her. But when she is isolated and the chaplain conjures an image of a serene Arlene, she starts following the socially acceptable norms. However, the presence of Arlene becomes a temporary stay because, even after being released, she is still considered a prostitute and unfit to raise her son. Since there is no obvious resolution, Arlie/Arlene continue to remain in tensional
balance, as hinted by the schizophrenic aspect of their personalities. This is specifically represented in the conclusion of the play, when Arlene remembers a childhood memory and Arlie makes her presence felt (Four Plays 56).

Therefore, it is the statements or words used in the present which initiate the mode of retrospective narration. However, in a departure from the narrative mode, we see the actual representations of those moments in the past entirely in the manner in which Arlie remembers. For example, a query from Bennie about her future provokes Arlie to make her appearance and there is a depiction of the manner in which Arlie had opened fire in order to escape from the prison (11).

In ‘Night Mother, while Norman uses conversation as a frame for breaking illusions, it is Jessie’s epilepsy which functions as a defining image, dominating not only the exchanges but also the retreat into the past. As the mother struggles towards a reconciliation of the fact that she cannot make her daughter change her mind, the stories of how she might have probably contributed to her daughter’s ailment are revealed. Her disease had been kept a secret and in retrospect, Jessie feels that she should have been told about her epileptic fits. But she manages to put things in perspective when she says: “It’s just a sickness, not a curse. Epilepsy doesn’t mean anything. It just is” (‘Night, Mother 71). However, the society that surrounds Jessie had assigned damaging connotations to the ailment itself thereby pushing her into a zone of seclusion and abandonment. So in a way, it is the same trajectory at work again – subscription to an image, living in hope and the final decision when both the image and the illusion provided by the hope fail. Hence, the past, though recollected in a non-linear manner, becomes a significant and a conscious justification for the act of suicide in the present.
Wasserstein’s plays show women engaged on a quest for identities in a world where values are suspect and a woman’s success is determined by her capacity to “have-it-all”. On this quest, much of their identity is shaped by their relationships, which ironically, remain tenuous. There are shards of friendship, promises of company, and assurances of not being left alone. But as these women see time and again, they are left stranded by those very ideologies in which they believe in. In such a scenario, as much as they may attempt at bonding, their relationships remain tenuous.

We can discern a movement from an experimental episodic structure to a traditional beginning-middle-end play. For example, *Uncommon Women and Others* has an episodic narrative, with flashback including the aspect of retrospective narration, whereas *An American Daughter* adheres to the structurally consistent pattern. By the time Wasserstein wrote plays like *An American Daughter* and *Third*, the futility of feminist collectives and the necessity of ‘making it alone’ are more discernible. The college graduates of *Uncommon Women* are no longer sitting together and reminiscing what has been and what is to be, and believing that they are going to be incredible by the time they are forty. Lyssa and Laurie have reached a vantage point where they understand that being ‘incredible’ is a myth.

Of particular significance is also the manner of telling the story. In *Uncommon Women and Others*, there is the voiceover of the man who explains the ideals of Mount Holyoke. At the beginning of the play, he says:

The college produces women who are persons in their own right:

Uncommon Women who as individuals have the personal dignity that comes with intelligence, competence, flexibility, maturity, and a sense of
responsibility. This can happen without loss of gaiety, charm or femininity. (The Heidi Chronicles and Other Plays 7)

By the time we reach the final scene, a woman takes over, explaining the reality of the situation: “Women still encounter overwhelming obstacles to achievement and recognition despite gradual abolition of legal and political disabilities. Society has trained women from childhood to accept a limited set of options and restricted levels of aspirations” (67-68).

Also there is the device of the present leading to the past. Some chance remark or gesture during the present conversation takes the uncommon women back to their college days. For example, the first scene in the first act ends with all of them clinking glasses and Samantha saying that she is going to make an announcement “like at Mount Holyoke”. To Holly however, Holyoke in some way represented some kind of shackling and so she feels disturbed. Therefore, in the following scene Mrs. Plumm explains the institution of the tea ceremony at Holyoke. In The Heidi Chronicles, Wasserstein uses the framework of an art lecture to talk about Heidi’s own development. For example, Heidi ends her lecture in the prologue saying:

As for Mrs Lily Martin Spencer and ‘We Both Must Fade,’’ frankly, this painting has always reminded me of me at one of those horrible high-school dances. And you sort of want to dance, and you sort of want to go home, and you sort of don’t know what you want. So you hang around, a fading rose in an exquisitely detailed dress, waiting to see what might happen (161).
That was precisely what Heidi Holland was trying to do twenty four years earlier in a high school dance with the Shoop-Shoop song playing in the background. She also remembers this song in the penultimate scene when she understands that her act of going away may actually imply that her generation did commit errors. In a way, she is back at the same location, wherein her acquired knowledge of feminist sensibilities becomes inadequate to negotiate her present sociocultural ambivalence.

The common aspect of the characters in the plays of Wendy Wasserstein, Marsha Norman and Diane Glancy is that they are brought into conflict with situations which forces them to reassess and reevaluate what they have been told or what they have understood about their identity as women in a society. On the other hand, Smith’s plays are the narratives of the responses of a community to an event that had the effect of imploding the constituent structure of the society from within and laying bare the paradoxes lying at its core. The canvas moves to a macro perspective as Smith tries to capture at the essence of “identity in motion” and what it implies with reference to the larger idea of “American character”, and by extension, the rapidly evolving definitions of culture.

The texts of *Fires in the Mirror* and *Twilight: Los Angeles* are sourced from the interviews conducted by Anna Deavere Smith with people who were related in some way or the other to the social disturbances. *Fires* is sourced in the Crown Heights riots and *Twilight* is sourced in the riots following the acquittal of the officers accused of beating up Rodney King. While Smith offers a description of the settings of the interview and a brief introduction to the characters, there are absolutely no indications about the questions being asked. Further, these plays are divided into sections and titled by the
most relevant phrase that probably describes the perspective that readers have to adopt while considering those characters. An illustration in point would be the “Badge of Courage” narrative in *Twilight* where the badge of the firefighters becomes a metaphor for the conflicting positions between practical responsibilities and the idea of heroism as suggested by the badge itself. The final effect is that of a montage of various narratives, seemingly at variance with each other.

Smith’s plays were initially meant for the audience who were directly related to the riots. In some ways, she approached the dimensions of documentary theatre but there were significant variations. The very act of choosing and editing established the authorial control. And the audience which was supposed to be directly involved by being a part of the whole issue is led carefully by the author amidst the maze of narratives. For example in *Fires*, we get the perspectives on identity and the shapes it assumes in the mental and cultural make up of the people in various sections before the actual Crown Heights section. So by the time the reader reaches this point in the text, he has already gained the perspectives that warn him about the necessity of holding up a suitable mirror(s) to the event.

Such arrested moments of removed recollections definitely have an impact on the role played by memory, especially when we correlate Smith’s use of this device with the other playwrights under consideration. Memory as it functions in the plays of Marsha Norman, Wendy Wasserstein and Diane Glancy represents more of a conscious/unconscious attempt by the characters to remember what has happened in the past and correlate it to the present. The process of correlation happens in the context of the conflicts that they face between their professed beliefs and the dominant patterns of
social thought. An example that can be cited here is that of Jessie in ‘Night Mother or Heidi in The Heidi Chronicles. But in the case of Smith’s plays, the act of remembering is influenced by a sufficient distancing from the specific event both in terms of time and perspective. The characters try to remember either the event, or the understanding that they had of the event in trying to make sense of the event itself. Especially in the absence of traditional elements of a play like plot and action, memory functions in a freewheeling manner leading to a questioning of the very act of choosing what to remember and the justification behind the remembrances. For example, the perspective that is brought to Alex Haley’s Roots by Leonard Jefferies in Fires sounds like an act of washing dirty linen. But it is also symptomatic of the commercialization of what was supposed to be the African search for roots and the consequent adaptation of the original story to commercial demands. Leonard Jeffries says:

   After two weeks they got tied of me, sat me down
   and said, “Dr Jeffries,” at lunch,
   but we just bought the rights to the book Roots
   and we are under no obligation to maintain the integrity of
   The book
   and we certainly don’t have to deal with the truth of Black history.” (55)

Though her plays seem to have a documentary nature about them, it is also possible to discern the shamanistic role played by the narrator, especially with reference to the choice of the characters and the parts of the stories which are finally told. The keyword here is “invoke” which indicates a subjective decision by the narrator to decide which story has to be narrated and which perspective has to be presented, just like how
the traditional shamans invoked spirits. While Smith adopts a ritualistic mode of narration, she adapts it to the frame of an interview and documentary drama to capture the divergent voices that are heard in the context of the racial issues which she discusses. In the process, it becomes obvious that identity in her plays assumes a collective aspect, with a multiplicity of voices characterizing its movement.

On the other hand, the cultural aspect of Glancy’s plays can be gleaned in the complex amalgam between the personal and the generational memory. Since much of Glancy’s dramatic emphasis lies in capturing the marginalised voices in a fragmented context, memory often works as a dominant force in sourcing of the plays. In her essay “From Salvage to Selvage: The Restoration of What is Left”, Glancy says:

“I borrow another term from physics: recessional velocity, which is the outward movement of the universe, the acceleration of it, especially the outermost edges. I feel the edges of the native past moving quickly away. I want to capture it on stage before it is gone. This for me is the exploration of the structure or construct of native theater. (Writings 17)”

“Recessional velocity”, a term from Astronomy, may very well refer to the manner in which Glancy uses memory to source her plays. The process of transformation of memories into stories is accompanied by a sense of motion, a choice of stories and points of view. When applied in the literary sense, it implies that the recollected narratives and perspectives are dictated more by nature and chance rather than tradition or creed. A similar process is often at work in Glancy’s plays where a chance encounter or a passing recollection engenders the concatenation necessary for the formation of the
play. In such a process, memory plays a defining role by creating the necessary connections between the past and the present. Glancy says in *Claiming Breath* (1992):

> I want to explore my memories & their relational aspects to the present. I was born between two heritages & I want to explore that empty space, that place-between-2-places, that walk-in-2-worlds. I want to do it in a new way. (4)

“Memories” as observed in Glancy’s plays, are actually a complex amalgam of the personal and the generational strands. In an interview to Jennifer Andrews, Glancy talks about the racial, generational memory, a “spirit DNA” that brings the works into line with history and culture. In her case, much of her generational memory is influenced by travel and sociocultural history. While landscape and generational history contribute to the plurality of voices, they also function as the mystical constructs through which the dramatist can access the voices of her ancestors and locate herself in the marginal space between the cultures. Such a pattern can be observed in her plays. For example, with reference to *Stick Horse* (1997) she says, “I guess in the end, the play is in the memory of my father who didn’t drink and told me to do the same” (143).

After having acknowledged that alcoholism affects nearly 90% of Native Americans, she locates a personalized voice in the play implying that memory in this case is both personal and generational. The dysfunctional aspect of family life, as portrayed in the play, bears some correlation to Glancy’s own marital experiences. For instance, she admits that one of the reasons for the breakdown of her marriage was her husband’s addiction to alcohol (*Claiming Breath* 52). The autobiographical aspect of Glancy’s plays emerges when the aspects and incidents are correlated with other relevant pieces of
information. Such references, while distorting the boundaries between the personal and the theatrical, are consistent with the aspect of locational revisioning of the self, which is an intended outcome of her theatre.

When there is clear indication of a mismatch between individual expectation and the demands of the sociocultural contexts in which characters are placed, conflicts operate in the plays of these women playwrights. In Norman’s *Getting Out*, such a pattern can be substantiated with the systematic abuse that Arlie has suffered at the hands of her family and the society which has labeled her as ‘violent’ and her consequent separation from her child. Similarly, Jessie in ‘*Night Mother*’ has suffered seclusion and abandonment because of the connotations attached to epilepsy. In the case of Wasserstein’s plays, it is the limited tenability of the ideals of feminist movement which bring the conflicts to the fore. While the “uncommon women” in *Uncommon Women and Others* are forced to defer their dreams, Janie in *Isn’t It Romantic* is forced to recognize that she has made her choice on an idea that did not exist anymore, because she feels stranded by Harriet. For a relationship in which both equally proclaimed that there was nothing wrong in being alone, Harriet gets engaged whereas Janie dumps her boyfriend. And both the acts are not arbitrary. Janie goes on a learning curve of discovery to realize that there is more to life than getting engaged to a Jewish doctor and struggle to fit in. Harriet goes on a learning curve of recognition to understand that life is a negotiation and so she should grab the chance for survival.

While the conflicts in Norman’s and Wasserstein’s plays function at the level of an individual, conflicts in those of Anna Deavere Smith’s and Glancy’s plays function at the level of the community, but with a difference. In the case of Smith’s plays, the
dominant incidents of a Black boy being run over by the Jewish motorcade, the Jewish scholar Yankel Rosenbaum being stabbed in a seeming act of retaliation and the beating up of Rodney King function as catalysts which enhanced the violent responses of the community to what they thought was a threat to their modes of living. For the most part the conflicts are racial, communal and institutional. In the case of *Fires*, the conflict operates on the Blacks versus Hasidic Jews equation, though there are hints about the divisive strands in the Blacks itself. In the section ‘Hair’, the anonymous girl does make a distinction between the Puerto Ricans and the girls from the Dominican Republic in terms of their tendency to ‘bite off’ – assuming an aspect of another community’s identity in order to fit in. She says:

You don’t know what that means? Biting off?

Like biting off somebody’s clothes.

Like cop, following?

and last year they used to have a lot of girls like that.

They come to school with a style, right?

And if they see another girl with that style?

“Oh my gosh look at her.”

“What she think she is?”

“She trying to bite off of me in some way!” (28)

Conflicts also arise from a tension between natural identity, which can be considered as that arising from the roots of the community or race, and accrued identity. An excellent illustration of this is the Anonymous Young Man 2 – Bad Boy in *Fires* who explicates the fine distinctions between being an “atha-lete” and being a “bad boy”, both
functioning as instances of accrued identity. While the “atha-lete” is not interested in stabbing people because “it’s not in his mind to stab, to just jump into somethin’ that he has no idea about…” (*Fires* 108), a “bad boy” is given to selling drugs and robbing people. The political aspect of such a description arises when the boy states: “It’s a big difference. Like, mostly the Black youth in Crown Heights have two things to do – either DJ or be a bad boy, right?” (109)

Another instance of this accrued identity can also be seen at work in *Twilight*, in a section called “Godzilla”. Here, an anonymous young man, who is a Hollywood agent, looks at the White upper middle class as victims of generic guilt. On hearing the news of the acquittal of the officers accused in the Rodney King case and the consequent riots, they had reacted as if they were fleeing from a Godzilla, though there had been no immediate danger of them becoming the victims of the riots. On one level “Godzilla” does imply a monstrous dehumanization of the concept of identity, mostly fuelled by the fears of a community identified as the “White upper middle class”. Even in the section called “The Beverly Hills Hotel”, Elaine Young, looks upon the Polo Lounge as a place of safety, whereas the public reaction to such a statement found it insensitive on her part to lodge herself in an upper class lounge.

The conflict at the institutional level happens in a very limited manner in *Fires*. It manifests in the legal sanction given to the Rabbi’s motorcade to pass through the streets at high speed and the supposed lack of medical attention to Yankel Rosenbaum. It is more clearly delineated in *Twilight*, where it operates on a racial principle. Blacks and Whites are treated differently by the police officers who don’t mind treating a Black person like a criminal, though he happens to be educated at Harvard or happens to be a
partner in a law firm. But a deeper divisive force seems to lie within the department itself where there happens to be no clear policy on the manner in which controls are to be exercised on people. Another manner in which this had been delineated is through the reaction of the jurors who had returned the verdict of “not guilty” and thereby sparked the riots. As one of the jurors admits, though the law stipulates that the names of the jurors should have been held in confidence for a certain period of time, they were revealed to the public by a seemingly biased judge thereby making them the scourge of public anger.

It can be concluded that the movement in the plays happens due to the tension between perceived patterns of thought and dominant ideas on race and ethnicity which result in a tensional explosion of violence. The responses of the community, as represented by individuals in the plays, reveal the tensional aspects of such conflicts. For example in Fires, the Lubavitcher woman in “Static” pretends that she is dumb enough not to know the switch to reduce the volume settings on her radio and has to ask a Black boy to do the job for her, when the reality is that the rules of her religion do not permit her to touch an electronic device. Obviously the boundaries that have been created between the two communities do not permit her to explain the situation to the Black boy whose attitude is informed by this lack of information. And a perception like George C. Wolfe’s which says that Blackness does not exist in relationship to whiteness results in riots when there are such tensional points of interaction between the two communities. When Aaron M Bernstein continues to talk about mirrors that reflect and distort, it can be discerned that an inorganic combination of race and ethnicities are responsible for the deep divisiveness at the core of what constitutes as ‘American character’ and the consequent “Fires” in the form of unrestrained violence.
In the case of Glancy’s plays, conflicts are sourced in the sociocultural collisions experienced by her characters in a dislocated and a fragmented context, especially from a postcolonial point of view. Hence, the individual conflicts become generational in context. It is not difficult to find characters who mourn the loss of culture in their relocated context. Examples include Segwohi in Segwohi, and Henry in The Best Fancy Dancer. Her characters experience a fundamental disconnect in terms of their cultural standpoint, or religious affiliations, or gender based oppositions, aspects that have been discussed in the third and the fourth chapter of this study. Glancy’s position as a socially conscious playwright is significantly different from that of Marsha Norman, Anna Deavere Smith and Wendy Wasserstein, because she sees conflict in her plays as a perfect springboard from which she can explore the larger issues like the tenability of myths, legends and the operation of oral traditions in a translocated context. In this sense, her work represents a point of departure from that of the other women playwrights discussed.

The term “social fabric” imparts a dynamic aspect to the terms culture and conflict, implying that survival happens when characters make significant attempts at resolving the crises that engender the dramatic action necessary for the play. For example, though Arlie is able to transform into Arlene, the play reveals that this is only a tensional balance and both the aspects of Arlie/Arelene will continue to survive, without any resolution. Similarly, though in ‘night Mother Jessie’s act of suicide proves to be a limited resolution because the larger issue of a problematic sense of identity has already been foregrounded in the conversation between Jessie and her mother. The voice of the woman which emerges in her plays is often captured in its ambivalence. Though Jessie
makes a significant attempt at exerting her autonomy through the very act of taking her own life, there is a negative sense of empowerment because she exerts a limited influence on her sociocultural environment. Hence, the social fabric which emerges in Norman’s plays functions dynamically in a very limited sense, since her women characters find limited means of empowerment from a sociocultural point of view.

Anna Deavere Smith’s open-ended plays are symptomatic of a non-resolution of issues at a larger level. Her work as a playwright was to capture the conflicting voices that are indicative of identity in motion. Hence, instead of a resolution, her plays suggest that there should be some negotiation of the boundaries imposed by factors like race and ethnicity. To lend credence to this, Smith includes the narrative of Twilight, an ex-gang member, who worked towards gang truce. Hence, the social fabric which emerges in Smith’s plays is characterized by the plurality of voices, each existing in its own dimension. He says:

I am a dark individual,
and with me stuck in limbo,
I see darkness as myself.
I see the light as knowledge and the wisdom of the world
and
understanding others,
and in order for me to be a, to be a true human being,
I can’t forever dwell in darkness,
I can’t forever dwell in the idea,
of just identifying with people like me and understanding me
In the plays of Wendy Wasserstein, we find that characters make certain definite attempts at exerting their autonomy. Examples would include those of Janie who decides to break her engagement and Heidi, who adopts a baby to complete her idea of motherhood. Characters like Lyssa in *An American Daughter* emerge as survivors in a social context wherein their acts are scrutinized and judgments are passed in the public realm. The key aspect here is that, instead of attempting to negotiate their sociocultural location, Wasserstein’s women characters are content to be assigned the role of survivors with an implicit indication of altered personal relationships. They would defer their dreams, like the ‘uncommon women’ in *Uncommon Women and Others* rather than run the risk of trying to exert a significant pressure on their sociocultural location. Hence, the social fabric is hardly impacted by the efforts of her characters, who for the most part are alive to feminist sensibilities, but struggle when they try to make their voice heard.

It has already been established in the fourth chapter of this study that Glancy’s women characters often emerge as empowered individuals precisely through their ability to exert a significant influence on their sociocultural location. This happens mainly through their recourse to myths, culture and religion through which they make attempts to connect the personal with the spiritual. Hence the social fabric which emerges in Glancy’s plays functions as a site wherein healing and compassion become achievable goals. And it is through this aspect that Glancy’s heritage enters the scope of her playwriting processes. She uses the “usable past” handed down by culture and history to demonstrate that it is possible for the empowered voice to exist amidst a plurality of voices.
The process of claiming heritage by authors like Diane Glancy acquires a dubious distinction, especially in the light of efforts to break the stereotyping of Native Americans in the mainstream theatre. William Yellow Robe voices these concerns when he says:

That's the reason why there is such conflict now . . . multicultural groups who are now longing to express themselves in theater are being dictated to by the mainstream structure. If a play doesn't fall within the parameters of that mainstream theater, that mainstream structure, even though it is still a valid theatrical event or expression of theater, it loses its validation, so you are invalidated right away (“Telling Stories Through the Stage” 23)

Though Robe advocates a common ground for all Native American artists, he shares a deep distrust of the mainstream theatre, and by extension, resists the idea of working with non-Native people. Such a view arises out of his firm conviction in the nationalist idea that the Native people have a right to “voice themselves and to voice their people’s voice.” (“Telling Stories Through the Stage” 28) He also opines that the critical positioning in plays written by non-Natives usually deals with historical aspects and the magical mystery rather than with the contemporary situation of the Natives. Hence, he views the whole idea of claiming heritage as suspect, especially in the case of a playwright like Diane Glancy.

On the other hand, Elizabeth Cook Lynn feels that literature produced by mixed-blood authors is characterized by excesses of individualism. In addition to this, she also locates a few useful expressions of resistance and opposition to colonial history with reference to the Indian-White relationship. Hence, she feels that mixed-blood authors explicitly or implicitly accommodate their literary aesthetic to the colonial ideologies
imposed by the West. This works to the detriment of generating an aesthetically consistent approach to Native American literature. She says, “Ideas, in general, according to Native American studies disciplinary definitions, are to be generated from the inside of the culture, not from the outside, looking in” (70). In fact, she terms the works of such authors as “literature of disengagement” because the writers often admit that they work in a paradigm that has been removed from the cultural influence of the Indian nation. Even in cases where the authors use specific chants or rituals, she feels that there is little attempt to “connect indigenous literary traditions to contemporary forms” because of which, the use of such devices appears to be superficial or exploitative.

Craig S Womack, while making the case for American Indian literary self-determination, argues for “native viewpoints” because he feels that the “mental means of production” with regard to the analyzing of Indian cultures have been almost exclusively owned by non-Indians. Native viewpoints, in his opinion, will ensure that Indians are not assigned the status of victims of the colonial contact. Rather, they will emerge as active agents in their history. Towards this end, he prescribes the “red stick approach” which works on the basis of the following assumptions: Indian viewpoints cohere; Indian resistance can be successful; Native critical centers are possible; working from within the nation, rather than looking toward the outside, is a legitimate way of examining literature; by subverting the literary status quo rather than being subverted by it constitutes a meaningful alternative (Red on Red 12).

Glancy’s plays have limited referencing with mainstream theatre going by the performance venues of her plays and the reading sessions which they have received. Since her focus is on identity issues involving the individual and the community,
especially in the postcolonial and the dislocated context, her work transcends the requirements of the commercial stage. Glancy’s plays have been read and performed in places like universities, community houses, conferences and art centers. Her approach, though commercially unsullied, seems to be at variance with what can be described as the ‘intellectual sovereignty’ proposed by William Robe Yellow.

Regarding the critical positioning in her plays, it can be observed that the retreat to the past or the mythical is rarely given the cloak of a magical mystery. It is a tensional affair, sometimes occurring with patterns of transculturation aiding the conception of the entire process as a natural outcome of the tensional socio-location of her characters. An excellent illustration of such an effort would be the revisualization of the Turtle Island Myth by Weebjob in Weebjob, or the sightings of the deer by the Grandmother in The Woman Who Was A Red Deer. In Stick Horse, Glancy deals with alcoholism, a burning issue in the context of life on the reservation. In American Gypsy, she looks at the issue of unemployment, which was also common amongst people living in the reservations. She deals with a similar issue in The Woman Who Was A Red Deer. In The Women Who Loved House Trailers, Glancy’s focus is on issues related to mobility and rootlessness. Further, rarely do Glancy’s characters emerge as victims or are cast in a stereotypical mode. Most of the times, her characters emerge empowered, an aspect which can be particularly located in her women characters.

Sometimes, Glancy uses terms like Indian Man or Indian Woman, to show her emphasis on the voices and not on individuals, especially in plays like Mother of Mosquitos and The Truth Teller, which operate on a metaphoric level. Further, her characters are not sketched out in their entirety since Glancy captures significant
moments which are characterized by sociocultural collisions, thereby ensuring that her plays are rarely characterized by excesses of individualism. In some plays, Glancy makes it a point to define her characters as ‘mixed-breed’ whereas in a few others, she identifies the tribes of her characters. But she does this only in a few plays like *The Truth Teller* or *Weebjob*, since the ‘mixed-breed’ or the “Mescalero Apache” status of her characters is crucial to the understanding of the colonial impact on the social and the spiritual fabric of the Native Americans, as depicted in those plays. As a playwright, Glancy tries to move away from “tribal specificity” since brokenness and fragmentation are inherent in the Native American consciousness, in spite of tribal or communal affiliations. Within such a context, her strategy is to engender survival by discovering points of connection between heritages, cultures and communities. Such survival is also contingent on enacting strategies of resistance and opposition to the received contact culture, as depicted in *Weebjob* or *The Best Fancy Dancer*. We often find her characters questioning their location and the received culture, which only opens up more avenues for ambiguities.

Though she does admit that she works in a paradigm that has been removed from the influence of the Indian nations, Glancy’s plays can rarely be characterized as “literature of disengagement”. Despite using a post colonial discourse, her subjective engagement with her plays is obvious in the sourcing itself. And when she uses particular ceremonies or devices specific to Native American cultures, her intention is to relocate the same within the present context of her characters in an attempt to connect the indigenous literary traditions to contemporary forms. For example, it can be seen that Glancy tries to accommodate the trickster discourse and the oral traditions of story-telling
to enable her plays to transcend the Western conception of the “resolution of conflict” mode of theatre.

There are limited possibilities for observing patterns of self-determination, as outlined by Womack, in Glancy’s plays. Moving away from the idea of fractured tribal theories, Glancy instead makes a case for criticism generated by Native theorists, since that would address the issue of looking at Native American arts from “within”. However, she does attempt to subvert the literary status quo in her plays, by exploring the elasticity of theatre itself, especially with reference to culture.

Culture, in Glancy’s conception, is not a monolithic construct, which works when being restricted to a particular tribe or community. As has been established before, her artistic effort is devoted more towards discovering points of connection amidst perceived differences. Further, she strongly identifies history and heritage with feeling and emotion since much of it had been withheld to her due to her mixed breed status. Hence, her methodology of claiming heritage involves an aesthetic conceptualization of the transformation of heart-felt experiences into art experiences. Glancy’s plays deal with what Robe would describe as “expression of theatre”, with the intended outcome being a kind of healing which is engendered through the discovery of points of connection between the physical and the spiritual world.

Claiming heritage assumes a controversial aspect in Glancy’s plays also because of her cultural antecedents. Glancy once stated, “There are many different borderlands. I don’t have access to what the pure Cherokee were like. I work in the borderland; the students who listen to culture walk in a borderland” (Conversation 3). Hence, the dramatic narrative often assumes a locational aspect, especially when she specifically
identifies her characters as belonging to a particular tribe. As she states, she uses the style of mixing and fragmenting to explore this borderland in between her two heritages. This is especially obvious in the mixing of voices and points of view in her plays. In fact, in the introduction to *The Women Who Loved House Trailers*, she talks about the interlocking of cultures being an aspect of the new-wave oral tradition which she is trying to create (20). Hence, the process of claiming heritage functions more like a springboard for Glancy to engage with ideas which are more specific to larger purpose of healing, clarifying and creating through literature.

It becomes essential to point out that the creative and the critical co-exist in Glancy’s works, thereby establishing her as a serious practitioner of the stage with the objective of restoring silent voices. Glancy’s essays on Native American theatre explore the possibilities of representation on stage, and critically explore the conception of theatre in relation to the society and the community. Hence, Glancy’s plays are not outputs of emotional turbulence, but carefully considered and crafted pieces.

Glancy’s plays have also been criticized for using plots which cast a grim light on contemporary Native American life. The loss of tradition, nostalgia for the past, the breakdown of family dynamics, and broken relationships can be read in most of her plays. The sense of loss and the sense of nostalgia are particularly striking in the closing scenes of Glancy’s plays, which have been criticized for their ambivalence. Eric Cheytitz feels that her concluding scenes are frequently tinged with regret for the loss of traditional cultural practices, and the possibilities for recovery seem bleak. (306) Referring to the *Mother of Mosquitos*, he says that the setting of the play (in a village of ice in the far north of imagination) severs the masks from the community contexts, an
opinion which can be extended to the fire ceremony in *Stick Horse* as well. Such disjuncture, loss and cultural disintegration are constructs which seem to be reinforced in various aspects of her plays.

Firstly the criticism regarding her concluding scenes needs to be examined within the context of the plays. In the concluding scene of *Weebjob*, Weebjob makes some statements which put his transformation into perspective. He says:

> WEEBJOB. Belief is a matter of will. I choose to believe. Yet I have seen also the squash patch when the Thunder Hawk comes to me. You don’t believe because you don’t choose to.

> WILLIAM. I see no evidence of it. (81)

This statement by Weebjob can be construed as a form of resistance to a capitalist mode of thought, as evidenced in the response by William. While Weebjob is seen to be willing to make connections between the personal and the spiritual to evolve a system of belief based on faith, William resists such an idea due to his belief in rationality and his resistance to his father’s ideological beliefs. Hence, it becomes easy to conclude that the play ends with no healing being engendered between the father and the son. However, the lines which follow dispute such a conclusion. Weebjob says:

> I have felt Sweet Potato’s anger too. I gave her life and made it bitter for her. But now I want things healed between us. I was always too serious.

> And with you James, I have not been serious enough. (PAUSE) I’ll make a new sign for the fence at highway 380: ‘I have heard by hearing, but now I see with my eyes, Job 42:5.’ (82)
Though there is a distinct hint at some form of engagement with Christianity, Weebjob displays willingness to mend fences with his children and to make better efforts to understand their issues. This is obvious in his effort to translocate the Biblical saying from Job to his own location. Hence, the play ends on a note of hope and faith in the power of healing.

Towards the end of *Stick Horse*, Jake passes the ceremonial pipe to Eli, but the Spirit dancers pass it on to Quannah and Virgene, thereby indicating that Eli is still under their control. Another way of looking at this situation would be to conclude that Quannah and Virgene should assume the responsibility for healing Eli, since the ceremonial pipe is handed to them. Eli states at the end:


(141)

It is clear that Eli is visualizing some form of a happier past when he had been at peace with his community and his father. In that sense, the play indeed ends on a note of nostalgia, proclaiming that Eli’s healing lies in a reference to the past. However, the dramatic directions indicate that Eli is rolled away by the Spirits, thereby hinting that he has succumbed to alcohol. When Glancy stated that she had left the ending of *Stick Horse* as a ‘left-to-the-reader’ interpretation, she has in fact, moved the task of interpreting the meaning to the audience of her play. This is the only play of Glancy, in which she
included an afterword, probably out of the need to explicate the problem at the core of the play. While she points out her efforts to discuss the issue of alcoholism, which was the bane of the reservation life, she also explicates as to why she felt the need to leave the ending of the play as a ‘left to the reader interpretation’ because of the limited possibilities for survival. It is crucial to note that in her original play, she had meant for Eli to survive. She says in the Afterword, “The play Stick Horse is about healing from the disease of alcoholism through a sense of community and ritual. Family and hope. Positive thoughts” (142).

Yet another ‘ambivalent’ conclusion can be examined with reference to Salvage. In the final scene of the play, Wolf says to himself:

I look from the prison window through snow falling.

There’s a figure walking in the distance –

I press my face to the glass –

She continues walking towards the gate.

Something’s happening –

The snow falls in pieces of light –

I look at her again –

She comes to me wearing a white cardigan – a white cardigan covered with pearl buttons. (57)

The image of Memela in a white cardigan with pearl buttons is reminiscent of Wolf’s memories of happier times. The conclusion is marked by a note of loss and nostalgia since Wolf is now confined to the prison, and the play has already established Memela as a woman who wants to get out of the mess engendered by Wolf’s act of indiscretion.
However, the final image needs to be contextualized within the framework of the religious conflict, which is at the core of the play. Wolf’s situation forces his father Wolfert and his wife Memela to reassess their faith in the respective spiritual systems. Hence, while Wolfert beats the drum he makes from an air filter to sing his son into the next world, Memela seems to be coming round to realizing the power of forgiveness. She says:

Has Mrs Stover been floating over our house, watching us, studying our sorrows, so she could let go of her anger? Is that what she has to do to continue her journey? …I hear Mrs Stover choking on the stones of forgiveness. I am choking too. (55)

Though the aspect of death and revenge looms large, almost pushing the play to the brink of a psychological thriller, Glancy engages Memela and Wolfert in the process of making connections between the received knowledge of spirituality, and its exercise in real-life contexts. While Wolfert mourns the loss of tradition and religion, Memela has trouble in accommodating her Christian faith to her location as the wife of a man accused of murder. Glancy deliberately leaves the conclusion ambiguous after giving enough hints that Wolf has to seek succour only through his wife Memela, who in turn, should be able to forgive him of his hasty act. From this perspective, it is possible to discern that Glancy provides as adequate context for healing to be engendered.

The disjuncture, loss and cultural disintegration, which are at the core of many of Glancy’s plays have an obvious sourcing in the colonial contact. For the Native Americans, colonial contact implied an encroachment into their lifestyle and patterns of living, which were based on a harmonious co-existence between man and Nature. For
example, in *The Truth Teller*, colonial contact exists in the form of maps and map
making, which seem to reduce the importance assigned to the mystery of nature by
defining it in terms of set limits. Similarly, in *The Best Fancy Dancer*, colonial contact is
present in the form of an intractable influence on the life of the dislocated Native
American youngsters, who are more attracted to cheerleading and gambling rather than
assuming responsibility for their heritage. In *Segwohi* colonial contact can be discerned in
the commoditization of the Native American artefacts and songs, which, in a way, prove
to be a means of sustenance.

Hence the disjuncture, loss and cultural disintegration in Glancy’s plays to which
Cheyitz refers, is a byproduct of the colonial contact which is a historical fact. In her
attempt to deal with the impact of such contact within a contemporary frame of reference,
and to negotiate the tensional dialectic that sourced in the conflicts between the received
and the acquired culture, Glancy tries to find points of connection which engender the
survival of the characters in her plays. To refer to the instances cited above, in *The Truth
Teller*, there is a reaffirmation in the heritage handed down by the ancients, especially
when the Indian Man chooses to name his son as “He-who-sees-the-way”. While the act
of searching for a name in the dreams reaffirms the belief in the Native American custom,
the nature of the name itself reveals that it will be possible to find a way amidst the
cultural disconnect perceived by the Indian Woman. Similarly, in *The Best Fancy
Dancer*, the closing lines by Jess indicate that the process of transculturation has enabled
them to find a way to negotiate the dialectical tension between their received heritage and
the contact culture. He says:
Maybe a little bit of new wave. Or Gertrude’s K-Mart hard-country rock!

See the ocean beating against the New World shore. We don’t know
where we’re going. But we’re going anyway. (EVERYONE CONTINUES
THE POW WOW DANCE) There’s savages all around. And some of
them are us. But we got this message from two Worlds and we’re coming
to our own. (JESS JERKS ON AN IMAGINARY SLOT MACHINE
HANDLE) Yes, we’re coming into Home. (333)

In Segwohi, survival is engendered through a process of making winter counts, a
tradition specific to Native American tribes. The process of making those murals brings
Segwohi around to the realization that he may have been blind to Peyto, while Peyto
says: “All right, old man, I’m going to work on your mural too. We look our separate
directions, but we might be the same” (251). It is important to note that with the help of
Sereh, Segwohi and Peyto attempt to bridge the gap between themselves – a gap that has
further deepened due to the colonial contact. In that sense, the play indeed ends on a
positive note.

Glancy’s plays also have dysfunctional families and broken relationships at the
core. In the case of dysfunctional families, instances of abuse are brought to the notice of
the audience through recollections or narratives by other characters. In doing so, Glancy
seems to be affirming that the need is for survival rather than a retreat into a not so
pleasant past. For example, in Bull Star, Cicero informs the rest of the characters the
cause of Lody’s strange behaviour. He says:

I remember Lody in school. She would come with her hair uncombed.

She’d look at us like a wild animal. I think her mother was scaring her to
death. One day someone tormented her and she screamed out, I can still hear her down the hall as they carried her off. (162)

While hinting that Lody belonged to a dysfunctional family, the stress is obviously on Cicero’s recollection of his defining image of Lody, rather than the factors contributing to the dysfunctionality in the family. Similarly, in *American Gypsy*, Glancy locates the silent voice of Ocholee amidst a dysfunctional family, when Peri narrates the incident of how Ocholee’s father would leave her alone when she did something he didn’t like. For Peri, Ocholee becomes representative of all the silent voices of her ancestors, whom she wants to access. Hence, Ocholee becomes a useful metaphor for Peri to examine the dysfunctionality at the core of her community itself. In *Jump Kiss*, there are enough indications that the family is dysfunctional, especially when the narrative voice says that each family member looked in a different direction. In *The Lesser Wars*, Coytoe’s narration of a childhood incident reveals the cruelty of his father who ruled his children with ridicule. But the incident itself is only reported, not represented. Similarly, Oscar’s troubled relationship with her father in *The Women Who Loved House Trailers* is reported by Oscar to the rest of the women in the play. The source of the trouble is hinted at by Oscar in the following lines:

I wanted to be bread and my father made me a stone.

I wanted a gift and he gave me what I didn’t want.

I took that stone and broke myself. Imagination came out. He gave me what he wouldn’t have if he gave me bread. (29)

From the above lines, it can be sensed that the tension between the father and the daughters is sourced in his extremely catholic position on Christianity and the Bible.
Similarly, Jelly reports her experiences with her unsympathetic step mother, who had turned her out of her house after her father’s death.

Glancy’s plays are also peopled with single women, especially in the anthology *American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays*, perhaps hinting at the non-sustainability of relationships in a larger sense. The Girl in *The Woman Who Was A Red Deer*, is in search of an elusive idea of love on the highways and in the motels. The four women in *The Women Who Loved House Trailers* make limited references to relationships with members of the opposite sex, except for Jelly who refers to a relationship which could not be sustained. The narrative voice in *The Toad Must Have a Bite* is a woman in her fifties, who has been through a divorce. In *American Gypsy*, Peri’s attempts are to define herself in isolation and not in relation to her dead husband Titomo. In *Jump Kiss*, the narrative voice has been through a divorce, just like Tecoyo in *The Lesser Wars*.

The perpetual reference to broken or dysfunctional families and relationships perpetuates the broken nature of Native American consciousness at a larger level. While the reservation life had resulted in various issues like alcoholism and breakdown of social institutions, the restrained access to language and culture ensured that Native Americans had limited connection to their spiritual systems of thought. However, it is to be noted that the act of brokenness functions only to mirror the systematic denigration of the Native American self. That is why in most of the plays, Glancy reports or hints at the causes for the dysfunction, rather than delineate them in their entirety. Her mission statement seems to be the recovery of the spiritual aspect of one’s personality amidst the broken fragments of Native American consciousness. Hence, the act of brokenness, both
at the structural and the thematic level, functions as a springboard for the dramatist to embed messages of hope and survival within the disrupted discourse of the plays.

Another aspect of her work that has attracted criticism is her missionary zeal and recourse to the Christian model of conversion and assimilation which necessarily involves a ‘disease model’ of Native experience\textsuperscript{15}, especially with reference to her engagement with the Christian processes of salvation. Robe sees Christianity as ‘devastating’ for Native American tribes because it attacked their values.

However, James Mackay feels that the Christian thread which runs through her work is evangelical in its aspect. He says, “Breaking the neck of fear, breaking the neck of self-willed silence, escaping some form of oppressive atmosphere seems to be near the core of the author’s faith” (\textit{Salt Companion} 3). Such a view is further supported by Glancy’s simultaneous engagement with Native American history and culture, while declaring that “the sacred hoop of Native American culture was broken because it wasn’t the sacred hoop of God” (\textit{Claiming Breath} 97).

It becomes necessary to locate Glancy’s own religious affiliations before resolving the issues regarding conversion and assimilation in her plays. While drawing a fundamental difference between the Baptists and the Catholics, Glancy finds Christianity to be a working religion precisely because of the correspondences which it shares with Native American idea of faith. Moreover, at a very personal level, Christianity helped her to understand her own Indian history. She admits that her understanding of her Indian heritage was helped a great deal by her Christian faith. A similar processing of faith can be observed in her plays as well, where there is a definite influence of the Christian element. However, it is crucial to point that her plays are less of the ‘disease models’ as
can be assumed by the processes referring to salvation. There are no instances of conversion or assimilation, which can be gleaned from her plays. Her case is more for survival, and in that sense, her characters parallel her own journey of understanding their heritage against the colonial influence of Christianity. Hence, Christianity is seen as an engendering construct in her plays.

Instances like those referring to Oscar’s rigid father who had been a Reverend, or Weebjob’s experiences in the reservation schools are instances of colonial encounter which encouraged punitive measures. What emerges in Glancy’s plays is the attempt to understand one’s location in the sociocultural matrix using religion as a construct for generating a conflation of perspectives. For example, the message from Mrs Stover in *Salvage* is actually a result of Memela dwelling on significant teachings from the Bible in conjunction with Wolfert’s exhortations on the power of the Spirits. In *Jump Kiss*, the idea of crucifixion actually functions as a regenerative context for healing, albeit its association with violence and bloodshed.

When we examine the syncretic nature of Glancy’s discourse and the transcultural model of appropriation, it becomes clear that Glancy’s specific engagement is with cultural differences and points of interconnectedness. Her transreligious position is reflected in the following statement in *Claiming Breath* – “our humanness is the same whatever the ethnic group. We just have different medicines for carrying those differences” (62). It is possible to trace similar instances in the plays, where Glancy strives to create space for a larger sense of spiritual understanding rather than group the specific religious orientations.
It can be observed that the ‘necessary conflict’ is actually creation by the conception of culture. In Glancy’s plays, this can be perceived in the manner in which conflicts are sourced in the sociocultural collisions. The cultural aspect of the conflict actually helps the playwright to examine crucial issues like role appropriation and relocation of tradition and ritual, empowerment and survival within the context of the plays.

The negotiation of such conflicts happens through a revisioning of the social fabric which necessarily involves an accommodation of the Christian element of religion into the Native American conception of spirituality. By default, such an accommodation implies a re-visioning of the social fabric itself, in terms of role appropriation and the relocation of tradition and ritual. For example, when Tecoyo symbolically guillotines herself so that she can be a part of Coytoe, Glancy is not just recollecting the ancient trickster story of one arm maiming another, but also restoring Tecoyo to her original role of Warrhameh. It is also possible to locate patterns of crucifixion in this act of subsuming one’s self. The accompanying violence is symptomatic of Christ’s death on the cross. However, the idea of regeneration of Christ embeds a message of healing and hope within the sudden and the disjunctured act of Tecoyo. Similarly, the social fabric of Native American consciousness undergoes a revisioning when the Girl in *The Woman Who Was A Red Deer*, states assertively that she is now sewing her own deer dress. While the act of slapping her Grandmother hints at the necessary violence for the regeneration to happen, her own salvation comes when she recognizes the dynamic aspect of the ‘deer dress’. When Weebjob assents to Sweet Potato’s wedding and allows Sweet Grass to assume control of the wedding ceremony, he has accommodated a revisioning in his
social fabric. He has now integrated a perspective which provides a greater visibility to the women of his house. Hence, culture creates the necessary context for the conflicts, which are negotiated through an accommodation in the social fabric. Such accommodations function as sites for survival in Glancy’s plays.

It can be perceived that the stories that Glancy tells in her plays belong to individuals who are forced to transform their perspectives on life. Weebjob makes peace with his family by negotiating the correlated idea of his “squash patch”; Memela in *Salvage*, moves towards the idea of compassion and forgiveness while dealing with a husband who has committed a hate crime; the Girl in *The Woman Who Was Dressed for a Deer Dance* is empowered by culture and history when she understands the personalized location of the ‘deer dress’ and the power it exerts over her life. In the process, it often emerges that identity has a processual and a performative aspect, which emerges in the interstices created by sociocultural collisions. It emerges not in the context of the ‘greater wars’ which happen in the economy and between nations, but the ‘lesser wars’ which as Glancy puts it, “explore the risks of relationship with the other, the risk of knowing self, and the risk of relationship with the structure of writing” (*American Gypsy: Six Native American Plays* 145). As an outcome of such a process of “constant quarrel” with one’s self against a fragmented sociocultural context, a multiplicity of voices, sourced in the personal and the generational emerge. Treading her steps amidst such voices, Glancy tries to engender routes of connection between them, because therein lies the potential for survival tempered by hope and healing.
Works Cited


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