A Conversation With Mary Brave Bird

INTERVIEWED BY CHRISTOPHER WISE AND R. TODD WISE

PREFACE BY C. W.

I did not learn until two hours before her speech that Mary Brave Bird would not be coming to the Sisters of Color conference in Bellingham. We were told only that Mary could not get a ride from Rosebud to the airport in Rapid City, South Dakota. At the last minute, Kate Trueblood arranged to have the Micmac poet Gail Tremblay read from her work, as well as from a chapter of Lakota Woman. Tremblay performed superbly, which lessened our disappointment. Audience members, especially those unfamiliar with Brave Bird’s writings, were visibly moved, and the opening session was a success. Still, my own disappointment remained. This was, in part, because I had seen the regenerative effect of Brave Bird’s writings upon my students at Western Washington. Luckily, the academic quarter neared completion, and I had a couple of weeks to drive out to South Dakota. I phoned my brother, R. Todd Wise, who lives in Sioux Falls and who teaches Native American Studies at the University of Sioux Falls. Todd agreed to drive out to Rosebud with me, to see if we couldn’t find Brave Bird. I phoned Mary’s mother, who seemed to think she would go along with the interview, but she warned us that Mary had just gotten out of the hospital and was on medication. Mary herself did not have a phone, so there was no way to confirm with her directly. On 19 June 1998, we drove the five hours or so from Sioux Falls to Rosebud, planning to ask around until we found Mary’s place.

We found it without too much difficulty, a trailer structure on a three-to-five-acre spread. Her house sat alongside a muddy creek and was surrounded by trees and heavy brush. There was a broken satellite dish in front, where a bird had built its nest, and piles of wood chips everywhere. Mary pulled in behind us in a beat-up, red pickup. Her two kids, Summer Rose and Rudi, spilled out of the truck cab and ran toward us in curiosity. I told Mary who we were. She looked us over for a moment and then invited us inside. I could not tell she was on medication, though Todd mentioned later that her hands were slightly trembling. To me, she seemed only tired, listless.
In the living room, she sat heavily in her favorite chair and lit a cigarette. We listened for a moment to the Rolling Stones on her radio, which played continuously. I noticed at once a framed poster of Jim Morrison, arms extended in a Christ-like pose, in which Mary had inserted several smaller photographs, along the edges of the frame. The photos were mostly of her children—Pedro, for instance, who was now in prison. I told her I was a Doors fan, and we talked about her brief role in the Oliver Stone film. She told me she could hear an Oklahoma accent in my voice. “I’m here all alone,” she said. “Rudi split, but it’s all right. I got some beautiful children out of it.” She pointed around to the concrete floors and loose plywood. “I’m fixin’ up the house by myself. It needs work, but it’s paid for.” She asked if we wanted to take a tour. Her kids showed us around outside, the creek and their secret hiding place, a sandpit filled with toys. It was a nice spot, very quiet with beautiful skies overhead. Back inside, Summer Rose, an affectionate seven-year-old, told her mother, “We showed them our secret hiding place.”

“Well, it’s not a secret now,” Mary said. Summer Rose brought out a photo album and sat beside me on the couch. Mary’s boy Rudi wore a long, black braid. He was as pretty as his older sister. When she finished her cigarette, Mary shooed her kids away, and we came down to business. She had to be somewhere and was late already. However, she’d talk with us, if we were willing to come back in about four hours. We told her we’d have a look around and return at six. We were welcome to wait inside, she said, sleep on the couch, do whatever. When I asked if there was somewhere we could get a beer, her eyes lit up. “There’s only the golf-course lounge over in Rosebud,” she said, “otherwise you can’t get alcohol anywhere.” Todd and I drove off, looking for something to eat. Things had gone well enough, it seemed, but we wondered if she’d really come back.

Not far from Rosebud, the smaller town of St. Francis houses the Lakota Museum, where tourists will find, among other objects, the ghost dance shirt of Crazy Horse. We were originally interested in seeing the boarding school described in *Lakota Woman* and the inside of St. Francis church. The museum turned out to be richer than we’d expected. Behind the desk, we met a middle-aged woman named Mary One Star, who knew Mary and Leonard Crow Dog from way back. Years ago, she had wanted to cut off Leonard’s pigtails for teasing her. When she learned we had come to talk to Mary, she assured us that many Lakota had had good experiences at St. Francis. She herself had run off from boarding school as a child but was Catholic now. She would have nothing to do with the Native American Church. Still, she supposed that it had done some good things. She had not read *Lakota Woman* but had seen the film, which she liked. However, Mary Brave Bird only gave one side of the story, she insisted. Mary never told about any of the good things.
We were led on a tour of the church, the boarding school, and an old sleeping quarters for the German priests. Inside the sanctuary, we were overwhelmed by the typicality of the German Catholic architecture. We could have been in Baden-Baden. The contrast with the rural setting was striking. Immediately upon entering the church, a bloody, life-sized Christ on the Cross greeted you in the hallway. Mary One Star asked if we wanted to see the tomb, which harbored another, life-sized Christ figure, visible only at an angle. She was careful to point out to us a small shrine to the Mohawk Virgin and a Lakota Star quilt upon the altar. Behind the sanctuary, she showed us priestly vestments with Lakota designs. “Not a single Lakota has been ordained as a priest,” she volunteered. “Not one in a hundred years or so.” Later, in the sleeping quarters, she showed us a chastity scourge used by one of the German priests. “He was a good man,” she said. But then she added, “My husband was beaten with that scourge for speaking Lakota.” It was easy to sympathize with her. Whatever else you could say about the church, it had deeply affected Indian peoples. You could not make that history go away.

When Mary did not return at six o’clock, Todd and I went fishing in the creek behind her house. We caught some trout, but they were too little to keep. The brush was thick with poison ivy, insects, and snakes, as Summer Rose had told us. After three hours passed, and Mary had still not returned, we wondered if we should let the matter drop. We decided to stay no later than ten o’clock. It was summer and still very light. Finally, Mary returned, and it was obvious that she was irritated. She went inside, carrying groceries and hardly acknowledging our presence. I followed her inside and found her standing on the back porch, looking off at the clouds. She told me she had had a terrible day. Something very bad had happened, but she did not elaborate. I apologized and told her we did not mean to hassle her. We would go, if it was not a good time, but I had to leave for Washington in the morning. We watched a thunderstorm blowing across the plains. At last, we sat down, and Mary spoke into the tape recorder.

Q: Does it seem odd to you that there are a lot of very privileged white people, particularly young college women, who look at you in an idolizing way?

A: I’ll have women coming up to me, crying and blubbering. They’ll just start crying in front of me. I think it [Lakota Woman] bothers a lot of women, and a lot of people. Well, I told them we are all sisters. It doesn’t matter what color we are, what nationality, as long as we respect each other. I try to emphasize that we must respect men, to respect the balance, even though you can be strong and everything. But there has to be a balance. I have met a lot of feminists that are really hard, hard core, and I try to talk to them. To get them more on a spiritual level, to put that energy into something positive. Remember to
balance it. Some of them will never understand that. Some of them have been worked over so much that they’re gone, you know.

Q: What did you think of the movie Lakota Woman? You were briefly in it.
A: It was okay. I wish they had two parts to it because they took so much footage. You can’t put everything into an hour and a half. You can’t fit everything into it and try and make a story out of it at the same time. It was romanticized here and there, some stuff that I really didn’t do.

Q: They did change some things, like St. Francis School became St. Tristan.
A: Yeah, they wouldn’t even let us run the test there.

Q: Did you feel it was somewhat watered down? You didn’t have high expectations?
A: It was all right. People had jobs for a little bit there.

Q: You see it in a lot of video stores. It’s out there. It seems to popularize.
A: Yeah. A lot of young people that worked on it would say, “I wish I was there [at Wounded Knee].” They really got into it, and I said, “Well, it wasn’t any fun when people started getting killed. After the fact, a lot of people got killed, so I try to tell young people, you know, go to school. Go to school and fight, fight. Fight in the courts, fight in the law. Do something. I am tired of politics in the tribe and everything. Nobody really wants to make a change. Nobody really wants to get out of the BIA. To be sovereign means being your own entity. To take your own sovereignty, but everybody stays with the federal government, and nobody leaves the system. It is all they know. And they’re afraid, you know. People don’t want to leave their nice cars, nice jobs, the easy life. I don’t blame them in a way, but our tribe is so much in debt now. There is nothing for the young people when they grow up. There is a lot of alcohol. There is a lot of drugs, a lot of young people dying. Like some of those gang members, I talk with them. If you can find unity, you know, even with their own leadership, if you form unity, you can make a strong movement within yourself. Because they are all, you know, fighting over drugs, or women, or whatever. If they could get it together, they could be strong, young people. There is nothing in the tribe. Even if they go to seek out a lot of bureaucratic, older people, they will turn a deaf ear to them.

Q: Do you find that your status as a cultural figure makes young people more willing to listen to you?
A: I can go mostly into any hoods. I’ve always run with the outlaws, you know, and I get tired of it. It is all right, but then I feel bad. I have seen a lot of bad things. It is very seldom that I see anything good happening around here. And it seems like there is nothing here. I went to the cities, the twin cities, where they still have the AIM house, where they have different programs. There is nothing here, nothing but gangs. It’s hard. Even my daughter—I sent her to
Denver of all places. It seems better in the city, just to get her out of here. There is too much peer pressure. She couldn’t even make it to school because of the different gangs in the school. Because she isn’t affiliated with any gangs, she is ostracized. It is so bad living around here. Myself, I am going back to school in my old age.

[A thunder and windstorm quickly blows in, slamming the shutters and screen door. We stop to watch it for a moment, before resuming our discussion.]

Q: If you look at someone like William Faulkner, he wrote all these books about people he lived around for years and years. But, people in Mississippi didn’t actually read his books. He was famous all over the world, but not in his own county. Do you find that a lot of people here are reading your books?

A: I get people I don’t even know [who say] “Lakota Woman!” and shake my hand. A lot of people I don’t even know will come up to me and introduce me to their kids and stuff. At first, there was a lot of negative stuff. Actually they must have realized what it was about, some of them anyway. I got jumped a couple of times.

Q: Really?

A: Oh yeah, physically. They were drinking, and I was sober. The alcohol was involved in it, and there was a lot of misunderstanding. Some of them that hadn’t even read the book said, “I heard this was in it and that was in it.” And I told them, “Read it. Read it yourself, and then come see me and tell me what you think. Don’t go by hearsay.”

Q: You say in Ohitika Woman that many of the women had a positive response, but for some of the men it was difficult?

A: Men kind of shied away from me then. But it’s all right. A lot of them, a lot of them call me sister, and a lot of them say, “I got your book.” So, before it was different.

Q: These people that jumped you, do you think it was out of a kind of misogyny?

A: No, some of them, like that girl, was from Pine Ridge.

Q: So it wasn’t an anti-feminist thing?

A: No, no. These were women. They were drunk. I don’t go myself into those places. I stick to myself. If I go anywhere any more, it is with people I know real good.

Q: We went to St. Francis this morning, that boarding school with the museum, and they’re selling your book in there.

A: [Laughs] I remember when it first came out. Father Fagan Ryan grabbed it and ran out. It put them on the map. And you know, a lot of my classmates, they’ll tell me, “You put that in there, but you should have said this in it.” Because there was some really weird stuff that happened in the school that I didn’t put in the book. “You should have put this in, you should have put that in.” But
a lot of my classmates said, “Yeah, right on!” A lot of the people that were in school at that time think it was pretty good. But I did speak out, and I did tell the truth. That is one thing. If I am going to write or say anything, I won’t lie. I won’t lie because you get caught up in lies. If you tell one lie, you have to cover it with a bigger one, and you get caught up in something. I always try to be honest.

Q: There was a story in the newspaper that the Catholic school in Yankton [South Dakota] made a formal apology to Indian people for what they had done over the years. If this school out here were to do anything like that, would it make any difference at all?

A: No. My mom is a Christian. Like myself, I don’t have a problem with Jesus Christ. When I got older, I tried to understand him like the Indians have. He was a brother, a spiritual healer, a liberator. He got persecuted in his own time, in his own world over there. Even Crazy Horse took that flag, so you can uphold that Bible and uphold that flag because it sets down the spiritual laws. But that is what some people do. I mean, that’s them. I mean, I don’t have any problems with anybody religiously. I try to get along with anybody.

Q: In your second book, you give some descriptions of the rituals in the Native American Church. It’s surprising that, at least in the Cross ceremonies, there is so much that seems Christian. Would you consider the Native American Church a form of Christianity?

A: There are some good Christians [in Native American Church]. If you belong in that way, you have one wife and one set of kids. Their vows are unto death. There is no drinking and no smoking. The same thing as other churches. You got to be really disciplined to be in that religion.

Q: You’re still involved in the Native American Church, aren’t you?

A: Oh, yeah. I’m a member and all my kids are too, all of them. It is a hard thing to choose, to be part of the Native American Church.

Q: Does that mean that someone could say that Mary Brave Bird is a Christian?

A: What I belong to is the half-moon religion. That is a different part. It is traditional.

Q: So, within the Native American Church, there are two tracks, and you’re on that track?

A: Yes, like my uncle [who] died last week. He was a major figure in the tribe here.

Q: So, some people go back and forth between the two?

A: Yes. I don’t have any trouble. I don’t have any trouble with the Great Spirit. If people choose to pray, the way they want to pray, if that is good for them, that’s up to them. The thing about Christians is that I don’t like hypocrites. A lot of prophecy and a lot of stuff in the Bible I don’t believe. And there is a lot of incest. I mean stuff like that I don’t agree with. Like I said, Jesus Christ,
he is okay. He was a radical in his day too. I just try to get along in the ceremony. If they are praying to God, the Great Spirit, or the Lord, it’s a Good Spirit. It is all in a good way. It doesn’t matter how you believe. As long as you believe in something and have faith in praying in a spiritual way.

q: There are all these debates going on now about Black Elk. One scholar, whose name is Julian Rice, says that Black Elk was Lakota through and through, in the Lakota religion. Another scholar named Michael Steltenkamp, who is a Jesuit priest, says that Black Elk’s Catholicism has been completely erased or ignored through the years. [R. T. W.] recently interviewed Hilda Neihardt for *The Black Elk Reader*. She was not happy about Steltenkamp’s book.

A: I remember Leonard was here with some friends, and the sun dance was going on. His dad Henry Crow Dog was a strict crossfire man. I remember he said to all the retired and pro-movement people, “We are all Christians, and you have to remember that.” You know, it’s kind of like the same thing, I guess. If you hold the Pipe, or believe in the Way. It is the same thing. If you get along with people.

q: So someone like Black Elk could be both at the same time, and that is no problem?

A: Well, even like burials now. You know, the Christian people will do their whatever. The traditional people, if they want a medicine person there, then there’ll be one there. You can do whatever. They get along like that now. Like before, twenty years ago, it was either one side or the other. [Now] people can understand and get along. There is no right or wrong. There is not only one way, you know. Another thing that hits me, is like the movement people, a lot of them gave their lives, they thought, for a religion that was outlawed for so many years, and they brought their traditions back. And now, everybody does it. It is all legal. It’s good, but people forget. People forget the struggle. It takes you back a little bit. I don’t know. Some people need direction, I think. You know, like with young people. If they form a movement, they could be really strong. They could shape the reservation in a good way. In a good way, you know.

q: It is obvious walking through St. Francis Church here, when every figure you see is some cherub-looking guy from Europe.

A: It wasn’t until I went to Europe that I knew . . . I understood because over there the culture is there, the language, the history. Everything is there. It is deep. I then understood, you know. But they don’t like American people now. They’re [they think Americans are] coarse. I don’t know. They are pretty good in Europe, even like the media. They will cover things that go on in Mexico and South America. You will never see that in the States.

q: The German influence at Rosebud is pretty strong. For the Germans in particular, it seems like there is a lot of romanticizing of Indians. We saw two German tourists at St. Francis this morning.
A: They were the meanest people, the Germans.

Q: You know, Hitler's favorite author was this guy named Karl May, who wrote these really bogus novels about Indians that didn't exist, these kind of fantasies.

A: You mean like a Shirley Maclaine kind of thing?

Q: Yeah, exactly. Except it was for European schoolboys, back in the days that Hitler was growing up. He grew up on that stuff. I [Christopher Wise] was very happy to see that you took the New Agers to task in the second book.

A: Well, some of them overdo it. I mean I have been on the reservation for a long time, since I was a teenager, and I am forty-three now. I have seen a lot of people come and go, ways come and go. It is okay, if you have the money to back it. [But] to actually heal somebody, that's a gift. You have to be gifted at that. You can't just walk around the pole, or take something out of the ground, thinking that will take care of it. My kids, I keep telling them, "Stay close to your dad, all the medicines, all the recognized medicines he's got. You can pick it up. It can be like an inheritance and be passed down."

Q: You mean [your son] Pedro or the other boys too?

A: All my kids. There is Pedro and his half-brother. They were three months apart from infancy. Richard is the oldest. He just turned twenty-nine. I have three boys. When I married Leonard, he had five boys. Out of these, at least one has to take it. One has to take it on. Because we've got different ways, with all different ceremonies. One has to learn to do all of it. This one [Pedro], my son, knows all of them, all of the songs, all the ways, all the little things that go with it. That is his picture on the wall.

Q: Pedro?

A: Yes, he is getting his GED. He is getting it because I want him to. I told him, you can be respectable for us. You help your tradition, your culture, but at the same time, you can educate yourself, and you can make it in the world.

Q: He has got two kids, right?

A: Three. His [Their] mom drank and drank, and the law took them away from them, so my mom has them. My mom is very attached to them, and she won't let them go. Until [Pedro] gets out [of prison], and she can take care of them. Their mother just drinks too much. They are safer there. She will call in just to get close to them. That hurts my mom. She just lets her know that the baby will be safe and is well taken care of. She can see them anytime. We're not putting any restrictions on her. We just want to take care of the baby. And I don't know if I am going to do it. The IRS put a lien on me, so all my royalties have been going to the IRS for three years now. I only get royalties once a year, and you never know what you are going to get. It's like fame without the fortune.

Q: The IRS gets it straight from them?

A: Straight from the publishing house. They take the cut out. I would have
gotten two thousand last week, but they took that. They must have got about four thousand now. I figure another couple of years. . . I'm not going to live on welfare or nothing. My mom pays my lights and groceries. I help her for the rest.

Q: Are you involved in the struggle to get the Black Hills back?
A: We never lost it. We never lost it, but we are still in the struggle. Pine Ridge is the largest reservation in the country, the whole United States. We're holding on. We're holding on to our land, our treaty, our sovereignty. A lot of the young people want to stand up and occupy again. But there has to be another way. Our tribe last year bought Bear Butte. My tribe did that. They let some people go, so volunteers go up there and have ceremonies. But there is a lot of talk.

Q: Yeah, from both sides. It sounds like the Indians are going to get it back. Is there optimism about that?
A: Yeah, I think so. Even if we did get it back, it might change a little. It could give us that foundation. I used to fight a lot, and you get to the point, you look around and your fighting is using all your energy.

Q: You ever get out to Rapid City anymore?
A: Yup. Now and then I do. Maybe once or twice a year.

Q: Do you still think it is the most racist city in the United States?
A: They've really come down. There is still an underlying current, but it is not blatant like it used to be, before the movement. Then it was really bad.

Q: Are things really getting better, or are people just getting slyer?
A: The people are getting slyer. But I think even the ranchers and farmers are realizing what our point was, about preserving the land. So we have to change with the land. We have to compromise. Not to give up our rights in order to compromise, but to work things out. I have tried it all. Did it all.

Q: Where do you see yourself twenty years from now?
A: I don't think I will be alive twenty years from now.

Q: Ten years from now?
A: No. [Shakes her head]

Q: You don't plan on going anywhere? Or, are you going to stay right here?
A: Yeah, I like to travel. Work on my mind. I like to go back to the ceremonies to keep clean.

Q: I [C. W.] brought your book last year to Africa, and I taught it. You know in Africa, well this was Burkina Faso, which is a former French colony, and they know about imperialism. They know about colonization. They know about schools where you can't speak anything but French. It was very well received. I don't know. I just thought you would be interested to know that.

[Mary's kids, Summer Rose and Rudi, noisily rush into the room. We turn off the tape recorder and talk about our kids.]
On 23 June 2000 I returned to Rosebud to have Mary Brave Bird look over the interview and give her signature for publication. It had been two years since our previous conversation. Mary was at her mother's house in He Dog and there I spoke with Mary, Merle, her stepfather, and three of her children, Rudi, Summer Rose, and Jennifer. After some introductory conversation, Mary and Jennifer asked if I would give them a ride to Mission to pick up some mail, and in Mission we ate at a restaurant and talked about many things related to Mary's life.

She spoke about her daughter Jennifer who is expecting a baby in early fall and how it feels to play the grandmother. We also discussed the recent death of Mary's sister who was killed by a former male friend of Mary's. She said that this man ran her sister down by car while drunk as an act of jealousy and that this happened on the Rosebud. The man that killed her sister also tried to kill her before being arrested and sent to jail. She referred to other difficulties beyond this tragedy. She stated that she still does not receive any of the royalties from her books because the federal government is collecting on "back taxes." Although Mary stated that she has gone through some hard times, she also referred positively to the future and her plans. She keeps busy with her books, tracking their translation in other languages, and she keeps in regular contact with Richard Erdoes. She spoke fondly of her son Pedro's talent for art, and of her own interest in studying art through the Sinte Gleaska University in Mission. She made several comments about the health of her community, her family, and herself. She said that she has stopped smoking and has been working on improving her own health.

While Mary described herself in the interview as "running with the outlaws," it is also apparent that she is a very gracious and caring individual who is interested in doing the right thing. She is still not afraid to speak out about situations that disturb her. One example is her encounters with people who offer opinions about her writings, even though they haven't actually read them. Gossip and hearsay are sometimes a burden. Mary certainly has her detractors, but she continues to be concerned for her community. She also is concerned about racism both in and outside her community. She finds the recent ban at Pine Ridge for non-Lakota Natives in the sun dance to be in somewhat the wrong direction. While she respects different "factions," she supports Leonard Crow Dog's open approach to the sun dance. (She also follows the news from the recent negative report on racism and prejudice in South Dakota by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.)

After I drove Jennifer and Mary back from Mission to He Dog, I was able to revisit the St. Francis Mission and was given another tour through the St. Fran-
Since the tour guide mentioned that she herself was a former student at the mission school, I decided to ask the tour guide a few questions about Mary’s book *Lakota Women*. She reported that she “gets very angry” when she hears about “that” book. She found that Mary stated many things about other people, but “left out” some things about herself. This reaction was similar to the one I received from the director of the museum. I asked the director Charmayne Young about *Lakota Woman* during a private tour. Her tone changed with a degree of seriousness, and she also said that Mary’s book left out some things. She said she no longer allows the book to be at the museum bookstore because of the negative perceptions placed in the book about the St. Francis Mission. She also said that Leonard Crow Dog had been publicly upset at another place in St. Francis for refusing to offer Mary’s book, implying that there was local disagreement about the worth of the book.

Both of these women were former students of St. Francis and their reactions intrigued me. I asked Ms. Young if she didn’t think that sometimes a radical action and testimony is needed to bring about change, in order to counter strong social forces, even at the risk of appearing one-sided. We were standing in front of two ghost dance shirts taken from the collection of Fr. Eugene Buechel, S. J. She paused and said reflectively, “You mean like the ghost dance?” The director immediately began telling me of a school-required interview with her great-grandmother who was a ghost dance participant before Wounded Knee, and how the ghost dance still continues at several sites on the Rosebud in secret. She referred to the ghost dance as a “beautiful vision,” still speaking in the context of Mary’s book.

She also brought out a different dimension to her own relationship with the St. Francis Mission. She claimed to have made up sins as a schoolgirl for the private confessional at St. Francis, which was a requirement for all students at that time. Once she made up a sin, the next week she would confess that she made a lie, referring to the contrived sin from the time before. Admitting that she is a Catholic, but not a “practicing Catholic,” she referred to the low attendance at the church in St. Francis and how it is acceptable now to be both “traditional” and a member of the Catholic Church, which is very different from when she was a student. She closed her reflection by saying she looks forward to the Black Hills being returned to the Lakotas, although she didn’t believe it would be “in my lifetime.”

In the museum next to a series of old photographs a commentary stated that the Brule Lakotas are “still a people in need of a vision.” Although the statement sounded presumptuous, it made me think of the importance of Mary for her community. It may be many years from now before the complete impact of her witness is understood by historians or by her own community.*Black Elk Speaks*
was not appreciated until years after Black Elk’s death, even though his report to Neihardt is now hailed as a “Bible” for Native Americans. We also have to contend with an ongoing scholarly dialogue of distinguishing any editing from the recorder (Erdoes) and the voice of her testimony. While further clarifications to the present-day Lakota context will certainly be forthcoming, it is certain that Mary has addressed enduring themes of Lakota life and tradition. In a time when many Lakota young people are losing their language and their heritage, Mary offers a live connection with a tradition of resistance to colonial and dominant-culture oppression. It is always important to be reminded that any cultural context is complex and of the great risk of literary reductionism; it is also important to not lose Mary’s voice or the aspect of Lakota life she represents. While there are many personas that Mary has to assume with her public, including the archetypal Indian, social activist, and enemy of the state, as well as prophet, mother, and woman, she continues to offer her perspective with admirable sincerity. Mary states in the final sentence of Ohitika Woman that she will “continue to fight for all that lives.”

NOTE

The interviews with Mary have their context within the perspective of academic literary culture. The first interview in SAIL 10, no. 4 (winter 1998) established some of Mary’s own reactions to the Erdoes project. The as-told-by interviews have become a hotly debated topic in American Indian literature. In this interview Mary tells how she feels about Erdoes, and sheds some light on the process of putting her two books together. Although the context for the overall interview was shaped by the questions that were asked, Mary’s words are precisely her own in both reports. This second interview record offers Mary’s perceptions about her community and culture in order to update an academic literary community.