

tions. Flannery O'Connor, Walter Sullivan, Madison Jones, and Merrill Joan Gerber, for instance, all studied the craft of fiction with Andrew Lytle. Eudora Welty and Peter Taylor have known him for a long time and share a certain collegiality with him. Other writers belong to other regions, perhaps, or have modulated their tones in different ways, or have opened their stories to different realms of experience, but they still adhere to the demands of excellence as George Core has defined them: "[E]ach has the constituents of strong fiction: a compelling story, a credible action and an inevitable plot, character expressed and exposed (as Henry James would say), sharp detail and acute description properly subordinated to action and plot. The engine driving the plot and revealing its causality as the action unfolds is the story itself, what James calls the 'irresistible determinant,' 'the prime and precious thing'—the element providing the fundamental energy and combustion for the fictive occasion. That ingredient I particularly commend to you."

He has commended to us the stories in this volume as well. In recommending them, I would like to confine myself here to certain remarks that I have meant to apply broadly to this volume as well as to particular writers. I have found Flannery O'Connor's "Revelation" to take on a new resonance in this context. Walter Sullivan's "Elizabeth" seems to share with O'Connor's story a sense of mystery, and Madison Jones's "Zoo" a quality of serious fun that suggests a commonality that is not only literary but regional and even spiritual.

George Core's own declaration effectively dramatizes what I have merely attempted to indicate: "I would put this selection of stories up against any other without the slightest embarrassment or even a trace of defensiveness, arguing that it is better than any comparable anthology published during the last decade and more. What I especially savor as a reader is the richness and diversity these stories offer." Barry Targan's "Kingdoms" proves his point about the diversity, for that effective work is open and free in form compared with some of the more traditionally shaped ones. As for the rest of his claim, the editor of *Revelation* gets no argument from me.

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Goodbye, Columbus

by Gregory McNamee

Dead Voices: Natural Agonies in the New World

by Gerald Vizenor

Norman, Oklahoma: University of Oklahoma Press; 144 pp., \$17.95



Gerald Vizenor intends in his fictions to pay due homage to Coyote, the American Indian trickster figure, through twist-and-turn narrative high jinks. He has often been successful, notably in the rollicking novel *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, a comic masterwork in which a visiting Native American scholar sets a nation of a billion citizens on its ear, while Mao spins in his grave and Coyote howls. *Dead Voices* is more academic and nowhere as successful. Its form is taken from *wanaki*, an Indian card game that resembles tarot, except that its players are transformed into the characters they turn up: bears, owls, lice, and so on. The conceit is familiar enough: Italo Calvino and Umberto Eco played with novel-as-card-game structures for years, and they barely missed the preciousness that overly intellectualized plots often degenerate into.

In *Dead Voices*, a professor at the University of California (like Vizenor himself) meets an urban shaman named Bagese Bear, who wanders the streets of Oakland dispensing advice and consulting with passing birds. Fascinated, the narrator asks Bagese to teach him the art of communicating with animals. Bagese takes him to her apartment, turns up the first card, and off they go down a tortuous trail that involves transparent symbolism, awful punning, literary allusion (our shaman quotes the work of Elias Canetti, the Bulgarian writer-philosopher), parodies of American Indian oral narratives, and more than one instance of downright dull lecturing. Vizenor wants us to understand that American Indians inhabited an idyllic universe until the arrival of the Europeans, who ruined the continent with "loans, sewing machines, metal bundles, engines, and steering wheels." It's a fair enough charge, I suppose, but after the Columbian quincentenary and its accompanying rantings, it's hardly unfamiliar.

All Europeans and their descendants (whom Vizenor calls "wordies") are, in his view, corrupt. And all Native Americans are intrinsically good, if now dislocated and powerless in the new world of reservations and rat-infested urban ghettos: "The land was discovered by those who were dead in the heart and unforgiven. The tribes were scarred with inventions, and our stories were removed with the animals. Our voices ended on a schedule of civilization, and the war ended in translation." Regrettably, Vizenor too often sinks to the sort of *ad hominem* and *ad captandum* argumentation that George Orwell so devastatingly parodied in *Animal Farm* ("four legs good, two legs bad"); the idea, I suppose, is to make all Anglos feel personally responsible for the crimes of their fathers.

Vizenor is capable of great subtlety and humor—as I said, *Griever* is a howlingly funny book and a real pleasure to read—but the heavy-handedness of his approach often makes *Dead Voices* a chore. Because his characters are symbols in a morality play, figures who never come alive, the title of his novel is entirely apt. In fact, considered alongside Leslie Silko's remarkable *Almanac of the Dead*, in which the narrator prophesies a continent-wide Indian uprising and the forced removal of whites from the Americas, Vizenor's criticism seems flat.

The book has its moments, however. The second chapter, "Bears," nicely depicts the shamanic metamorphosis of man into grizzly and imagines an America of picket-fence suburbs inhabited by marauding ursines who keep the locals honest. (Vizenor's call for a salmon stream behind every well-groomed cul-de-sac has a certain appeal, too.) And Vizenor, finally slipping into Coyote's skin, pulls off a good joke when his characters transform themselves into fleas and bring down an exterminator or two, transferring a touch of the Little Big Horn to the Bay Area.

But the good points don't quite add up to a good novel. In preaching to the choir while the rest of the congregation slumbers, Gerald Vizenor has turned a potentially fine novel into an exclusionary sermon. Reliant on formula and innuendo, *Dead Voices* fails to live up to his great promise.

Gregory McNamee's most recent book is Named in Stone and Sky: An Arizona Anthology (University of Arizona Press).

Letter From Moscow

by Robert C. Whitten

Change and Its Consequences



Last October I journeyed to Moscow by invitation for a conference on conversion from military to civilian production. Upon arrival, my colleague, Professor Constantine Danopoulos of the political science department at San Jose State University, and I were informed that the meeting had been shifted to December to coincide with the Congress of the Supreme Soviet. Rescheduling and canceling without warning are typical Russian failings that they must somehow overcome if they are to bring in Western investment.

The question was what to do in Moscow in what proved to be a week of early winter, indeed the earliest winter in 20 years. Our contact, Vladimir, was resourceful—he is something of a “wheeler-dealer”—and we had a most interesting meeting with Father Gleb Yakunin and two Russian Army colonels, Colonel Mikhail Kuznetsov and Lieutenant Colonel (Colonel-select) Boris Lukichev. Vladimir speaks excellent English and proved to be an able translator. (I assume that he was honest and accurate. Even today, one is wise to be at least a little suspicious.)

First we took the Metro from our lodgings at the Gorbachev Foundation to Red Square and the GUM state department store. It was strange to see the white, blue, and red flag of the czars flying over the Kremlin on that chilly, overcast morning. The last time I was there, in early June 1970, the hammer and sickle were firmly ensconced, seemingly forever. GUM, which lies on the other side of Red Square, was then something out of the 19th century. Although it still is to a considerable extent primitive, the modern vies with the antique. For example, PlayMobil toys, German stereos and camcorders, and Italian shoes are sold (for hard currency only) right next door to Russian shops selling Matryushka dolls (stacked dolls-within-dolls). Before re-

turning to the hotel to meet Vladimir, we took the Metro to Dzerzhinsky Square, or rather Lubyanka Square as it is now called. Before the coup attempt, a gigantic statue of “Iron Felix” stood in the center of the square opposite the infamous Lubyanka, headquarters of an insurance company before the revolution and later headquarters of the Cheka/KGB. It was pulled down and destroyed at the time of the coup and replaced with a crude cross.

Father Gleb (Russian Orthodox) had been a dissident who was quite independent of the KGB and who spent years in the labor camps for his vocal opposition and religious practices. A man of striking appearance and presence, he is now a people’s deputy in Parliament and an important figure in “military reform.” Although he did not mention it, Father Yakunin had just returned from a conference convened in Washington by the Institute on Religion and Democracy—“More Than Just a Constitution: The Future of Democracy in Russia and America”—where he had received the IRD’s 1992 Religious Freedom Award. Our meeting took place in Father Yakunin’s office in the Russian White House, the Parliament building that served as Boris Yeltsin’s redoubt during the aborted coup of August 1991. From an upper-story window our hosts showed us the scene of Yeltsin’s standoff with the tanks. The window also overlooks the ill-fated American Embassy building, riddled with KGB “bugs,” whose security design earned a State Department official an award.

Upon entering the Parliament building, we immediately spotted life-size paintings of the Russian czars, which only recently had replaced similar paintings of Bolsheviks and communist party apparatchiks. Our Russian hosts, who repeatedly referred to the “spiritual rebirth of the Russian Armed Forces,” were mainly interested in two aspects of military reform: civilian control of the armed forces and the creation of a military chaplain corps to replace the old political commissar system. Colonel Lukichev cited the results of a recent poll which indicated that about 10 percent of the officer corps is *strongly* religious and that about 25 percent is religious, but not as strongly. About five percent are atheists.

Colonel Kuznetsov challenged these figures, claiming that as much as 35 percent is strongly religious, but he did not tell us how he arrived at his numbers. In any case, the Russian Army seems on the way to establishing a chaplain corps with genuine religious freedom for Baptists, Catholics, Muslims, etc., as well as for Orthodox Christians. In the course of conversation I suggested that they might wish to consult Cardinal John J. O’Connor about their proposed chaplain corps, since he has served both as U.S. Navy Chief of Chaplains (as far as I know the only admiral ever to become a cardinal) and as a military vicar of the Roman Catholic Church. The Russians were interested, and so I pursued the matter after returning home. I ultimately spoke to the senior chaplain on the Joint Staff at the Pentagon who informed me that, yes, conversations with the Russians about forming a chaplain corps had taken place.

The conversation on civilian control of the armed forces proved to be more nebulous, I suppose because of the nature of the subject. A retired U.S. Marine Corps colonel who was also present cited the example of George Washington’s refusal to have anything to do with military rule as an important precedent in the American subjection of the military to civilian control. Colonel Kuznetsov also cited the brutal hazing to which Soviet Army recruits have long been subjected. It turned out that his son had been drafted into the Russian Army, and he was concerned for his son’s safety. The meeting ended in the coffee shop of the White House where Father Gleb served us tea or coffee and the Russian version of “crumpets.” It is hard to find people more friendly than the Russians, and I was saddened to leave the meeting.

That evening Danopoulos and I were invited to the home of one of his Moscow friends, an Armenian editor, Vagan. His wife, an attractive and intelligent Ukrainian, had prepared some delicious salmon, which must have cost them a great deal. Their apartment, which they own, would be considered small in America but is decidedly plush by Russian standards. During the course of dinner Vagan was called away to the telephone. While he was gone, his wife proceeded to tell us what atrocious hus-