



## *Dances With Wolves: An American Heart of Darkness*

In 1988, a little-known author published a book with a funny name and a *Conan the Barbarian*-type cartoon on the front cover (Span). His work was barely noticed and warranted the barest of reviews describing his book as "a pleasant escape into a mythical love story . . . [or] a historical romance of sorts for men" (Kaganoff 68). For a while after the publication of the book, the struggling artist, Michael Blake, continued to work odd jobs, wash dishes, and harbor feelings of failure. No one seemed to notice his book or to take it seriously, no one except long-time friend Kevin Costner. Costner was enthralled by the novel and contacted Blake about writing the screenplay for a movie based on his book. Of course the rest of the story is well known, and Blake's book became a commercial success on the strength of Costner's box-office prosperity. It may be difficult to take seriously a book that began with a cartoon Conan on the cover and that ended on the cutting floor of a Hollywood production studio; nevertheless, Blake's *Dances With Wolves* is a significant and serious novel.

*Dances With Wolves* is an important book for several reasons. First, it is an entertaining epic tale, and Blake's subsequent screenplay produced a Western that immediately brings to mind the classic *Little Big Man* (Castillo, Zaleski). Second, the story at least attempts to view Native American virtue and traditions from a positive perspective, even if it does tend to romanticize (or even patronize) Native American society.<sup>1</sup> Third, like so many other stories, this one provides insight into the human condition by narrating a journey of self-discovery. *Dances With Wolves* does all of this and does it well; however, what sets this novel apart from others is Blake's reappropriation of an enduring literary theme, the destructive influence of Western civilization, in light of the ubiquitous Euro-American history of conquest of space. Unlike many Westerns that focus on the conquest of Native Americans, Blake's story focuses on the conquest of land and the resulting tragedy when humanity unthinkingly obeys the biblical command "to subdue the earth." In this sense, Blake's story is an ecological novel that critiques the American enterprise to the extent that such an enterprise involves subjugation of the natural world.

To mount this critique, Blake employs the predominant mythical symbol of American space, the nineteenth-century frontier, describes the attempt to realize material gain through conquest of the frontier, and highlights the disastrous results of such an attempt to conquer. As such, Blake's novel is an American *Heart of Darkness* that describes and reproves "the underside of American" civilization.<sup>2</sup> Like Joseph Conrad's classic, *Dances With Wolves* can be read on many different levels and shares some of the characteristic themes of *Heart of Darkness*. In particular, both books contain three dominant themes based on the modern crisis of relationships. First, both narratives construct a journey of self-discovery based on humanity's inability to relate to the self and constitute critiques of human isolation and alienation, which lead to insanity and decenteredness. Second, the American notion of Manifest Destiny that drives *Dances With Wolves* parallels European colonialism that lies

behind *Heart of Darkness* and focuses on humanity's inability to relate properly to others through a scathing critique of racism. Finally, both stories expose and critique European, or "civilized," attitudes about the natural world by contrasting them to aboriginal, or "uncivilized," ways of approaching nature. In the process, Blake provides an alternative "naturist" approach to space that counters the "civilized" approach and that results in a harmonious relationship to the natural world rather than an antagonistic one.

This third concern in the two works is the most important, because ultimately, the way one relates to the self and to others is mirrored by and perhaps determined by the way one relates to the natural realm. When one approaches the natural world with the intent of subjugating and conquering, one risks self-alienation and racist domination, for "the conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses" (Conrad 69), leads to degradation of self, the conquered, and nature. The end result of such an attitude toward natural space is the suggestion that Mother Nature will take its revenge on the would-be conquerors who fail to pay attention to her intricacies. This revenge takes the form of failed human relationships and personal decenteredness. Thus, Blake's book can provide either a harrowing warning or a timely message for an age haunted by the specters of global warming and ozone depletion. In the final analysis, an uncaring approach to nature will lead to the destruction of society while the proper approach to the natural world, which in turn builds society, must be religious, based upon harmony and a spirituality of awe.

The first similarity between *Dances With Wolves* and *Heart of Darkness* is the theme of self-discovery, and in both stories the way a character is able to overcome isolation and insanity, to fully relate with the self, is to first properly order life in the natural world. In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow's journey becomes a spiritual journey of self-discovery only when he escapes the entrapments of European civilization in the untouched wilderness of the heart of darkness (the setting is generally thought to be modeled on Africa). Marlow journeys up a river (reminiscent of the Congo) to a trading outpost to recover Kurtz, an agent who is feared to have gone mad from isolation away from civilization in the depths of the jungle. In the process, Marlow discovers the primitive impulse within himself that so-called civilization disguises. Marlow discovers his own humanity only when he reaches the most remote outpost in the depths of the jungle, which is for him "the heart of darkness. . . an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. . . [that] seemed unearthly" (105). Only in the heart of the jungle does Marlow escape the accoutrement of civilization long enough to be confronted by the remnant of humanness that civilization has all but destroyed. He finds a link to primordial humanity when confronted with the natives' harmonic resonance with the rhythms of nature. Thus, Marlow's journey represents a translation to an alien world where he discovers his human roots.

Likewise, characters in Blake's novel experience a similar self-revelation only when their lives are ordered in respect to nature and other human beings, and the implication is that Euro-American society destroys such ordering. Like Marlow, Lieutenant John J. Dunbar experiences self-revelation when he journeys to the "most remote outpost" of civilization—"the heart of the frontier" (10). Lieutenant Dunbar, having failed to bring about his own death, seeks to resurrect his life by asking to be stationed on the frontier, and, like a modern-day executive in the throes of a mid-life crisis, he begins his adventure religiously awe-struck by "the great, cloudless sky. The rolling ocean of grass" (1). Dunbar's destination, Fort Sedgewick, is reminiscent of Conrad's unearthly earth—it is, in Blake's words, "a nonplace" (14). Yet, it is here that Dunbar gains freedom from the shackles of civilization. This freedom allows him to discover himself in his new name, "Dances With Wolves." As in *Heart of Darkness*, this self-actualization takes place only in an alien setting when confronted by natives who are completely foreign. Such an encounter with the unknown allows Dunbar (as well as "Stands With A Fist," the widowed white woman who is adopted by the tribe) to overcome a traumatic sense of dislocation, and his journey becomes the journey of the mythic hero.

*Heart of Darkness* and *Dances With Wolves* also examine the antagonistic and subjugating clash of peoples and cultures. Both of these books can be read as an indictment of

colonialism and both suggest that cultures tend to relate to other cultures the way they relate to the natural world. In *Heart of Darkness*, the European colonial enterprise subjugates the people and the land of Africa for capitalistic gain, and in *Dances With Wolves*, the same dynamic takes place on the American continent as the European push westward strips Native Americans of their land and their humanity.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, *Dances With Wolves* can be read as a critique of European culture wherein the white race (i.e., the so-called civilized race) is shown to be inferior to the original inhabitants of the continent. There is little ambiguity at this point. Blake portrays Native Americans as an ordered and noble people who are respectful of human life, while whites, with few exceptions, appear as slovenly, dirty, uneducated, crude, and ruthless. One need only remember a few characters to see this clash of character types. Noble native characters such as Kicking Bird, Wind In His Hair, or Ten Bears have their counterparts with Timmons, the disgusting supply wagon driver, Major Fambrough, the mad officer at Fort Hays, and the illiterate Private Sheets, who uses Lieutenant Dunbar's diary for toilet paper. At the risk of romanticizing Native American life or reducing his book to another retelling of the noble savage tale, Blake contrasts the lives of his aboriginal characters to the lives of white characters, and the comparison reduces the European invaders to the role of conquistadors who are subhuman at best. In Blake's telling, as in Conrad's, the colonial impulse that leads to subjugation of a race dehumanizes not the subjugated race but the conquerors, and this dehumanization is related to the way the colonizers approach physical space.

Therefore, like *Heart of Darkness*, *Dances With Wolves* can be read as a myth of self-discovery and actualization or as an indictment of racism. In either case, these works highlight two conditions of the modern world—the inability to relate properly to self or to other human beings. Nevertheless, the two books converge to produce a remedy for the disassociation of ourselves from ourselves and from others. The solution emerges with the discovery and revival of a primal and forgotten spirituality achieved only when one nurtures a proper relationship to the natural realm. In *Dances With Wolves*, the natural realm is space, the frontier, and Blake offers the reader what one reviewer calls “an optimistic blueprint for a new America, where a spiritually based and ecologically sound future awaits those willing to learn from this land's first children” (Castillo 23).<sup>4</sup>

The presentation and role of space, natural space, is the dominating force of *Dances With Wolves*. In Blake's fictional world, other factors of importance, such as the humanness of a person or the structure of the social world, are intimately interconnected to how one appropriates space and relates to the natural environment. In a sense, Blake restates the American Dream in a way reminiscent of Sidney Mead's thesis concerning American religion. Mead suggests that an understanding of American consciousness and the development of American religious liberty comes more from the encounter with space, the unbounded freedom that a continent had to offer its European invaders, than from an understanding of linear time or a sense of history (1-15). Likewise, Blake's attempt to understand human interaction is based on looking at events spatially as well as temporally. From Blake's perspective, a society that validates the humanity of its inhabitants must first achieve a proper approach to the natural world—a stance that constitutes a religious appropriation of nature. In other words, there is a proper order to life that must be upheld for life to be meaningful.

This order is presented and highlighted in Blake's novel and in Conrad's classic through the contrast of two very different perceptions of the natural realm. The first approach to the natural world is represented in Conrad's work by the white race, which “grabbed what [it] . . . could get for the sake of what was to be got, . . . to tear treasure out of the bowels of the land” (69, 99), and is characterized by the need to dominate and subjugate the natural world for material gain. This approach is utilitarian in essence, territorial in reality, and usually capitalistic at heart. When one approaches the natural realm with these goals, encroachment of civilization on the natural realm, usually termed progress, results. This approach is undergirded by the biblical command to subdue the earth and by the human trait of greed. It occurs when a civilization loses its awe for nature and its rhythms, intrudes upon the natural realm without respect for its integrity, and utilizes natural resources for capital through the subjugation of both land and its inhabitants. For lack of a better term, “materialistic

desacralization" will suffice to describe this first approach to nature.

The second approach to the natural world is represented by aboriginal inhabitants and is vastly different from the desacralizing push of civilization represented by whites. In contrast, this second approach seeks harmony with the natural realm rather than domination, searches for beauty in nature rather than utility, attempts to respect and honor the rhythms and interconnectedness of nature, and always approaches the natural world with the religious awe one displays when approaching sacred objects. The second approach reveres the natural world as sacred space, and rather than desecrating nature, this approach seeks to preserve its balance by insisting on its sacredness. One might describe this approach to the natural world as "naturalistic sacralization."<sup>5</sup>

The failure of "materialistic desacralization" is clearly seen throughout *Dances With Wolves*. In the beginning of the book, attempts to impose civilization on the frontier are clearly unnatural and lead to absurdity and insanity. As in *Heart of Darkness*, Blake creates for the reader settings which are more and more absurd and bizarre because they represent attempts at imposing civilization in settings distant from civilized centers. Blake's reader first encounters this situation at Fort Hays where Dunbar receives his orders from Major Fambrough, who after years of loneliness at his frontier outpost has gone quite mad and is waiting to be crowned King of Fort Hays. Fort Hays contains the last semblance of civilization before the most remote outpost and Dunbar's destination, Fort Sedgewick. As such, Fort Hays is an outer station of sorts and simply hints at the more absurd situation at Sedgewick, which is completely cut off from civilization.

Fort Sedgewick is first introduced through the plight of Captain Cargill, a story that is absent from the highly edited, shorter box-office adaptation. Cargill, the commanding officer at Fort Sedgewick, teeters on the brink of desperation and views his command site as a "sore on the land that didn't deserve a name" (7). In addition, he faces a mutiny, the storehouse is devoid of food, his men are hungry and await the supply wagon, and thirty-three of the original fifty-eight men stationed there have deserted, risking death on the prairie rather than madness in the wilderness. Cargill decides to march his men back to Fort Hays where he is made a hero and where the decision is made to abandon Fort Sedgewick temporarily. Ironically, while Cargill and his men make their way to Fort Hays, Dunbar is clattering across the prairie with the foul-smelling Timmons, carrying a wagon load of supplies to Sedgewick. To further complicate matters, Timmons is killed by a band of Pawnees during his return trip to Fort Hays after leaving Dunbar at Fort Sedgewick. These plot manipulations result in Dunbar's utter isolation—he is forgotten at the abandoned Fort Sedgewick. What had been "the spearhead of a grand scheme to drive civilization deep into the heart of the frontier" (10) becomes the absurd setting of complete isolation from civilization. Dunbar is completely cut off—"No man could be more alone" (24).

The condition of Fort Sedgewick when Dunbar arrives provides ample testimony to the failure of the materialistic, territorial despoliation of the frontier. Trash is everywhere, animal carcasses are scattered along the river and fill the air with the stench of decay, more carcasses are in the water and Dunbar must drag "the oozing animal bodies from the fetid mud of the shallow water" (27), and the Fort buildings themselves are collapsing. The religious euphoria Dunbar felt on his trip across the prairie fades as the reality of his situation and isolation begins to settle in. The setting at Sedgewick reinforces the tragedy of the drive to conquer the land, the Fort and what it represents appear unnatural, and, at least for a time being, Mother Nature gains the upper hand. She will crush Dunbar with loneliness and madness (as she does other whites in the book) unless he learns the lesson the other Euro-Americans fail to see—unless he learns to live harmoniously with the natural world. Dunbar first begins to learn this lesson through his growing relationship with the old wolf, Two Socks. Yet, no other white character in this book appropriates this wisdom. This failure becomes clear when, toward the end of the novel, white soldiers indiscriminately kill Two Socks for mere sport.

Even though the conditions of the two Army Forts demonstrate the improper approach to nature characterized by subjugation, the failure of materialistic desacralization is seen nowhere more clearly than in those scenes later in the book where the Comanche tribe mem-

bers (they are Teton Sioux, Lakota, in the movie) happen upon the disastrous outcome of white insensitivity to the land and its natural resources. Two scenes in particular contrast the white Euro-American approach to the land with the Native American conception of nature and establish Native American sacralization of space as superior to the white domination of it. The first scene occurs after Dunbar reports the appearance of buffalo to the shaman priest, Kicking Bird, and the rest of the tribe. At this point, Dunbar and his new friends have developed a profound respect for one another, yet they still regard each other with suspicion. The lieutenant accompanies the tribe as they travel in pursuit of the massive herd when they happen upon a gruesome sight: at least twenty-seven buffalo slaughtered for their hides and tongues, the rotting carcasses left behind for the ravens and wolves. As Dunbar surveys the "buffalo lying dead on the ground, their guts spread all over the prairie just because someone wanted their tongues and hides," the carnage intensifies when Dunbar spots "an unborn calf, half hanging from its mother's slit abdomen" (162). Dunbar and his companions ride on in silence, wondering what kind of creature would commit such a crime against nature and indeed against the gods. Blake writes they are "mysterious enemies from another world. By their deeds they had proved themselves to be people without value and without soul, wanton slaughterers with no regard for Comanche rights" (160-61).

At first it seems ironic for a group of people on a buffalo hunt to be incensed when they find that another hunting party has slaughtered a small portion of the thousands in the herd; however, crucial differences exist between the slaughter and the hunt. First, the Comanche view the hunt and the hunting grounds as sacred, so their temple has been desecrated by the slaughter. Second, the Comanche in the book waste no part of the hunted and killed buffalo. They kill just enough to sustain the tribe and they put every part of the body to a use of some kind, while the white slaughterers take only the hides and tongues and waste the rest of the carcass. Third, and most important, the Comanche depend on a successful hunt for their existence and understand the delicate balance of life that exists between the tribe and the world of nature. The white hunters seek only monetary reward and commercialize the slaughter for material gain—it is this act that makes them "people without value and without soul," for it is this act that desacralizes what to the Comanche exists as sacred space.

A similar scene later in the novel, one of the most powerful scenes in the book and one that is absent from the shorter, first release box office version of the story, makes a similar point. At this point in the story, Dunbar has become *Dances With Wolves*, has married Stands With a Fist, and has been incorporated fully into the Comanche tribe. He and Kicking Bird spend their time talking about many subjects, among them religion. *Dances With Wolves* learns that the Comanche religion is based upon "the natural environment of the animals and elements that surrounded them" (281). In this context, Kicking Bird invites *Dances With Wolves* to accompany him to a special place, a sacred space where "game renews itself . . . [where] trees shelter every animal the Great Spirit has made . . . [where] life began . . ." (283). The place is a great primal forest that *Dances With Wolves* fancies as "the Garden of Eden" (283), the most sacred of all places. With his imagination intact, *Dances With Wolves* "envison[s] a fantastic utopia, peopled with a holy race leading tranquil lives in concert with all living things . . . in this open-air cathedral" (283). However, as the two men ride further into the forest, into Eden, they learn that "the place had been horribly desecrated." Blake describes the sight in a few short passages:

Trees of all sizes lay where they had been felled, . . . shorn of their branches. Everywhere he looked the ground held bodies, or pieces of bodies. There were small animals, badgers and skunks and squirrels. Most of these were intact. Some were missing their tails. They lay rotting where they had been shot, for no apparent reason other than target practice.

The primary objects of the genocide were deer that sprawled all around him. A few of the bodies were whole, minus only the prime cuts. Most were mutilated. (283)

*Dances With Wolves* is "shamed for the white race" (284), and he reveals to Ten Bears, a great Comanche chief, that the white men will come in hoards and overrun their land.

By contrasting Euro-American attitudes toward space with the Native American conception of space, Blake clearly suggests the Native American approach to be superior. The Comanche tribe in Blake's novel establishes a harmonious existence in the natural world where space takes on a sacred quality and where natural space and social space coalesce in a cycle of interdependence. The life of Native Americans is idyllic because they adapt their society to the natural realm rather than trying to adapt the natural realm to fit their social structure, which is the strategy of Euro-Americans in the book. Even time is adapted to nature in the Native American camp and is described in terms of natural rhythms centered on their prairie home as "the only place on earth" (241). Dunbar learns there is no need for calendar dates or time pieces when the world of nature orders time (249), and time is even described as occupying space when Kicking Bird's time becomes crowded (127). The spatial conception of time, and indeed of life, produces a unique harmony that allows Native American life to be "tuned perfectly to nature's clock" (189).

When Dunbar first visits the Comanche village, he is overwhelmed by this harmony exhibited by a "primal, completely untouched civilization" (99), and throughout the book he is surprised by the harmony exhibited in scenes depicting the village in tune with nature or the tribal procession that molds into and becomes one with the land, "like the great blade of a plow rushing across the landscape, its furrow barely scratching the surface" (74). The Native Americans in Blake's novel live harmoniously because they approach space properly—they revere the land as sacred, they mold their existence to natural rhythms, and they recognize and respect the interdependence of all life. As a result, the Native American social space molds into natural space where whites, who try to dominate the natural, experience only isolation and loneliness when separated from their society back East.

Dunbar experiences this isolation acutely in the beginning of the book—the natural world will crush the lone soldier stationed at an outpost on the edge of civilization. Dunbar survives the madness that plagued his comrades only because he is able to transform his life to the rhythms of the natural world, and as in any transformation, the change takes place through a series of rites of passage, most of which are associated with sacred space. The scenes of desecration of nature that Dunbar witnesses are two such events; however, the most important occurs when Dunbar separates himself from the tribe and dreams in a mystic place. Before his marriage and identity change, Dunbar, who is confused by his feelings for Stands With A Fist, rides off alone "with the idea that, surrounded by space, he might start to feel better" (223). Eventually he rides into a canyon in search of relief from the heat; however, the initial relief he experiences turns to mild panic as the walls of the canyon began to close in around him and as the wide open space of the prairie shrinks behind him. He thinks perhaps this enclosed space is "evil" (224). The canyon ends with a stand of cottonwoods and a small stream, and as Dunbar stoops to drink, he spots a cave near the base of the canyon. Upon entering the cave, Dunbar realizes he has made an archeological discovery. As fatigue overcomes Dunbar, he drifts off to sleep while studying drawings and figures on the wall of the cave. In that undefinable moment between wakefulness and sleep, Dunbar becomes the hunter depicted in the cave drawings, thus solidifying his connection to the ancient Native Americans who had once made his sleeping chamber their home.

Once asleep, Dunbar dreams and his life passes surrealistically in his slumber. There are soldiers in his dream, his father is there, and he sees "a prostitute . . . [and] his massively bosomed elementary-school teacher . . . [and] the sweet face of his mother, tears frozen to her cheeks" (226-27). Then, Ten Bears enters the dream, and the soldiers spring to life and massacre Ten Bears and his tribe. There is money inside each slain Comanche, and gold, silver, and greenbacks spill out of the dismembered bodies. The soldiers begin to fight among themselves for the money and exit the dream until only one is left—it is Dunbar. He surveys the scene of murder and notices the hearts of the slain still beating, and he lies "down among the corpses" (226-28). When Dunbar finally escapes his nightmarish slumber, he fights his way out of the cave in a daze and retraces his path out of the canyon. Once out of the canyon and back in the open space, he experiences a unique "oneness with . . . the prairie . . ." (230) and a renewed relationship to nature, to his adopted tribe of Comanche, and to himself. He knows that his vision, granted in a sacred place, "would have to be

assimilated somewhere down the line of his future" (230). Dunbar returns to camp and "in perfect Comanche he [says], 'I'm Dances With Wolves'" (231). His transition is complete—he turns his back on his former life and fully assimilates himself to the Native American way of life.

This dream, signaling Dunbar's complete transition to Native American life, prefigures the end of the novel and accounts for its difference from the box office version. Rather than having *Dances With Wolves* and *Stands With a Fist* ride off from the village together to face the wrath of the United States government alone, the novel ends with *Dances With Wolves* and *Stands With a Fist* remaining with the tribe. However, the novel does not end happily, for it ends with the suggestion that the tribe itself will ultimately fall victim to the Army. With this suggestion, *Dances With Wolves*'s dream is prophetic.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, even after painting an idyllic picture of the Comanche tribe, after allowing Dunbar his conversion to a superior way of life, and after setting the tribe up for martyrdom, Blake tries to avoid simply romanticizing Native American life. The Pawnee in the story are characterized as fierce and often ruthless warriors, and the Comanche find themselves at constant warfare with their brothers as well as the white race. The tribe struggles against hunger, cold, and the incessant uncertainty of life, and in one scene the Comanche demonstrate they can be ruthlessly violent. Dunbar happens onto a Comanche celebration in which *Wind In His Hair* and other warriors are dancing with fresh scalps attached to their lances. The scalps belonged to the buffalo hunters who had desecrated the hunting grounds by slaughtering the buffalo for their hides. The Comanche had exacted their revenge, and Dunbar realizes that even the harmonious existence of the tribe is not without its ugly side. Nevertheless, a qualitative difference exists between Comanche violence and white warfare. The Comanche fight "to protect . . . homes, wives and children and loved ones . . ." while the white soldiers "battle for territory or riches [or] . . . some dark political objective" (269). Even Native American violence becomes less threatening because it is connected to the natural rhythms of life while Euro-Colonial violence is evil because it springs from capitalistic motives.

Blake's book can be read on many levels and represents an American *Heart of Darkness*. Like Conrad's novel, this book explores the personal journey of self-discovery and the subjugating clash of cultures. And like Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, this book is dominated by space (by setting) and uses the primeval setting to critique the ways of modern, Western civilization. In the telling of the story, Blake convinces the reader that all of life is interconnected, that the natural world is of ultimate significance, and that human relationships (even the relationship to one's self) are wholly dependent on one's relationship to the natural realm. This is what civilization forgets and, if left unchecked, destroys. In its materialistic quest to dominate land and space and to glean its riches, modern civilization desacralizes sacred space and in the process subjugates all inhabitants of that space. The desecration of the land for material or capitalistic gain leads to dehumanization, sometimes of whole races of people, but always of those conquerors who are the authors of subjugation and desecration. Perhaps Blake's vision explains more about American history than simply inhuman treatment of Native Americans, and in any case his vision is a social one based upon a spiritual approach to the natural world—the spirituality of this book hints at ecological and social consequences for modern human beings. Modernity must revalidate the grand, sacred nature of the universe in order to recognize the small, simple humanity of its inhabitants. Until one achieves this harmony, one cannot expect to live a fully integrated human life. To this end, may the words of the shaman priest, Kicking Bird, spoken to *Dances With Wolves*, haunt all people: "There are many trails in life, but the one that matters most, few men are able to walk. . . . It is the trail of a true human being" (281-82).

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Most reviewers praise Blake's writing and Kevin Costner's film adaptation for its sensitive portrayal of Native American traditions and for its potential for consciousness raising. See Castillo's "Review" in *Film Quarterly* and "Native American Chic," *U.S. News & World Report* (31 December 1990/7 January 1991): 71. However, some chastise the story and film as a subtle form of racism. See David Seals, who claims that Native Americans are stereotyped in the story through what he calls "the celluloid residuals of Manifest Destiny, played out as emotional climax."

<sup>2</sup> The allusion is to Alfred Kazin, who referred to "the underside of American life" in Theodore Dreiser's fiction. Kazin referred to the underside in terms of Dreiser's social critique. Blake's vision of the dark side is bound to a spatial understanding of American life. See Kazin 241.

<sup>3</sup> For this point of view concerning *Heart of Darkness*, see Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," as cited by Gerald Graff, in "What Has Literary Theory Wrought?"

<sup>4</sup> Castillo's review essay of the film is quite insightful. Of particular note is his discussion of *Dances With Wolves* as "a shamanistic allegory."

<sup>5</sup> See Conrad Ostwalt, *After Eden: The Secularization of American Space in the Fiction of Willa Cather and Theodore Dreiser*, for the use of the terms materialistic desacralization and naturalistic sacralization. Materialistic desacralization refers to the despoliation of the frontier in Willa Cather's fiction, while naturalistic sacralization refers to approaching the natural realm with awe and reverence found in Theodore Dreiser's fiction.

<sup>6</sup> This suggestion was first pointed out to me by Jenny James.

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