

Beyond the Tragedy of Absence: Vizenor's Comedy of Native Presence

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Abstract : This essay explores Gerald Vizenor's innovative concepts of the tragedy of absence and the comedy of presence as frameworks for understanding and challenging dominant narratives about Native American identity and history. Vizenor's work critiques the notion of irrevocable cultural loss and rigid definitions of Indigenous identity based on blood quantum and stereotypical practices. Through subversive humor, trickster figures, and storytelling, Vizenor asserts the active presence and continuance of Native peoples, advocating for a dynamic, self-determined understanding of Native identity. The essay examines Vizenor's use of postmodern techniques, including his engagement with simulation and hyperreality, to disrupt colonial discourses and create new spaces for Indigenous expression. It explores the concept of "crossblood" identities as a means of resisting essentialist notions of Native authenticity and embracing the complexities of contemporary Indigenous experiences. Vizenor's ideas of survivance and transmotion are analyzed as strategies for cultural resilience and adaptation in the face of ongoing colonial pressures. The interplay between absence and presence in Vizenor's work is discussed, particularly through the lens of shadow survivance and the power of storytelling. The essay also delves into Vizenor's critique of terminal creed and his promotion of natural reason as an alternative epistemology to Western rationalism. While acknowledging the significant influence of Vizenor's work on Native American literature and theory, the essay also addresses critiques of his approach, including concerns about the accessibility of his writing and its political effectiveness. Despite these debates, the essay argues that Vizenor's concepts offer a powerful vision of Indigenous futurity that is rooted in tradition yet open to change, inspiring hope and agency in the face of oppression. By examining Vizenor's multifaceted approach to Native American identity and presence, this essay contributes to ongoing discussions about Indigenous representation, cultural continuity, and resistance to colonial narratives in literature and beyond.

Keywords : gerald vizenor, identity native american literature, survivance, trickster discourse, identity

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