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Jace Weaver has famously likened Vizenor's style of writing to a drive-by shooting; however, in *Father Meme*, Vizenor's latest novel, this compelling metaphor no longer applies. The figure of the sniper, so important substantively to the narrative and metaphorically to the narrative technique, provides a more accurate analogy. This is a short narrative in which precision dominates. For in this work, Vizenor takes in his sights the difficult subject of child sexual abuse by reservation priests. It was Jace Weaver, again, at the recent conference of the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association, who asked Vizenor to explain his decision to use a second-person narrator in his new novel. In response to this question, Vizenor explained that for a long time he had struggled to find an appropriate discursive vehicle for this subject matter. He knew that he could not write in the voice of an omniscient third-person narrator, the “God's-eye-view,” about pedophilic priests; the first-person voice would be equally problematic, he explained, because it would invite autobiographical speculation that would displace readerly engagement from its proper object. What remained to him was the second-person narrative voice. This is a courageous and innovative choice because the second-person narrative is particularly demanding both of author and reader. Effectively a dialog with one interlocutor silent, the text inscribes the traces of verbal exchange and requires that the reader “fill in the blanks” by reading from what is said to that which is not said. The dialog is set up in the frame narrative where the narrator encounters, in the Mayagi Ashandiwin Restaurant of the Good Cheer Casino, a visiting French woman who is, it turns out, a lawyer vacationing on the reservation because she has heard that there the work of drafting the new Chippewa Constitution is currently underway. Initially the narrator offers to translate the menu which is written in Anishinaabemowin but he quickly moves to translating so much more about Anishinaabe culture and history, all within the context of madame’s interest in tribal sovereignty. The story of abuse arises in the opposing context of genocide and monotheism. From talking about the food offered at the restaurant and its provenance the narrator is led to discuss hunting, then the extinction of certain species as a result of the fur trade, and the opposition between humans and other animals that is taught by monotheistic religion. This brings the narrator to the subject of Catholic schools and mission churches, and to Father Conan Whitty who was nicknamed the eponymous Father Meme because his red hair was reminiscent of a red-headed woodpecker, meme in Anishinaabe. In his account to madame, the narrator betrays two important facts: first, that his mother and tribal elders could not comprehend the true nature of the abuse to which Father Meme subjected him and advised him to respect the mission and its priests; and, then, that the abused altar boys finally killed the priest in a deliberate sacrificial act. Early in chapter two the narrator reveals: “Father Meme is dead, deservedly beaten and pushed under the ice” (p. 20). Thus, by framing the story in this way, Vizenor destroys any sense of suspense. Rather than ask, "what will happen?" readers are led to ask instead, "why did this happen and how?" In this connection, the narrator's role as translator for his interlocutor is crucial. As he translates for madame the narrator also translates for the reader the symbolic Anishinaabe status of the priest, who takes on the mythical dimensions of the monstrous wiindigoo figure and, later, the evil gambler of traditional stories.

Early in the narrative, the French lawyer is called upon to understand how the sacrifice of the priest and the narrator's telling of the story act as vindication of the boys' experience. The narrator observes, “Yes, madame, you understand as a lawyer how my narratives have become a vindication, the actual safeguards of my unbearable memories. Only the sacrifice of the priest saved me from suicide” (23). In *Father Meme*, stories save lives. But why is it that, as a lawyer specifically, madame is able to understand the particular significance of stories? The answer to this question takes us back to the generic nature of *Father Meme*. I noted above that the narrative takes the form of a dialogue in which madame's words are unreported. In fact, the narrative is a colloquy, a discursive form that is important in religious, legal, and literary contexts. In religion, a colloquy is
a gathering to discuss and resolve differences of doctrine; in law, a colloquy is a formal conversation, such as the exchange between judge and defendant to ensure that any plea is entered into voluntarily; in literature, the colloquy is a genre with a long and distinguished history especially as a pedagogical or didactic form. The formal conversational structure is particularly well suited to subjects that demand one interlocutor persuade another of the truth he or she is expressing. Thus, this form is precisely the correct choice for Vizenor's telling of stories of sexual abuse by priests of altar boys, children whose stories would not be believed even if they could be told. The colloquy requires that the telling of the story be such that the interlocutor and, by extension, the reader of the literary text, finally be persuaded of the truth of the story. Vizenor has found an answer to one of the most pressing questions for contemporary Native American Literature: how, in an age of debased media reportage and commodified trauma narratives, can a true story of horror be told? Through the sharply directed, deliberately spare, and absolutely precise narrative technique of Father Meme Vizenor shows how.

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