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## Living with Stories

William Schneider

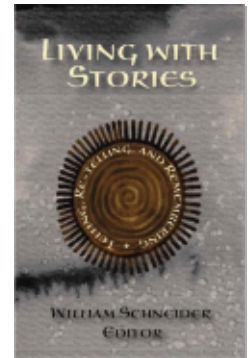
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## The Weight of Faith

*Generative Metaphors in the Stories of Eva Castellanoz: A Conversation  
with Joanne B. Mulcahy and Barbara A. Babcock*

Joanne Mulcahy and Barbara Babcock point out how Eva Castellanoz's stories are part of a cultural tradition that she shares with her ancestors—a bond that sustains knowledge through generations and nourishes the teller and her guests today. For Mulcahy and Babcock, metaphors help transcend cultural differences and provide a way to share their understandings, experiences, and feelings. The relationships formed in the process are too often left out of public discourse, too often dismissed as unimportant, despite the fact that the relationships are the reason and basis for sharing the stories.

BABCOCK: When I read about Eva and her stories, the first words that come to mind are Leslie Silko's stories about Pueblo stories and storytelling. The words I cannot forget come from the title poem in her novel *Ceremony* [1977], and from her essay, "Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective," in *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* [1996] in which she describes stories as "life for the people," as essential to survival: "you don't have anything if you don't have stories;" as a way of "bringing us together, keeping this whole together, keeping this family together"—past, present,

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Barbara A. Babcock is Regents Professor of English at the University of Arizona. She is known for her scholarship in folklore, literary theory, anthropology, and cultural studies. For sixteen years, she worked with Helen Cordero, a potter from Cochiti Pueblo and inventor of the now well known storyteller figures. In addition to *The Pueblo Storyteller: Development of a Figurative Ceramic Tradition* (1986), co-authored with Guy and Doris Monthan, Babcock has published numerous essays analyzing Cordero's work in terms of gender and cultural production, as well as reproduction, power, and other issues embodied in Pueblo "potteries" and the representation thereof. Her work also includes such edited collections as *The Reversible World: Symbolic Inversion in Art and Society* (1978); *Pueblo Mothers and Children: Essays by Elsie Clews Parsons, 1915–1924* (1991); and, with Marta Weigle, *The Great Southwest of the Fred Harvey Company and the Santa Fe Railway* (1996).

and yet unborn. Silko tells us, “when Aunt Susie told her stories, she would tell a younger child to go open the door so that our esteemed predecessors might bring their gifts to us. . . . ‘Let them come in. They’re here, they’re here with us *within* the stories.’” And in Pueblo culture, the spider’s web is, like the tree of life in Eva’s stories, the root metaphor, the genealogical model. What both Leslie and Eva tell us, as Joanne points out, is that stories embody the individual as well as the cultural “generativity” and “chaining” that both folklorists and psychologists talk about.

**MULCAHY:** I appreciate how Barbara points out the critical dimension that stories play in all cultures: the ways “root” metaphors form a central core for meaning and reproduce culture through stories. Her comments also reminded me of how deceptively simple it can sound to say, as Silko does, “You don’t have anything if you don’t have the stories.” The meaning of stories, how they are told and retold, is shaped very specifically to meet cultural needs. When Aunt Susie opened the door to let the ancestors bring their gifts, she revealed the different contours of the Pueblo universe. Similarly, when Eva tells me how her mother healed with the mesquite bark and her faith, I cannot collapse her narrative into one more familiar to me. Stories have their own integrity, but through metaphor—the spider’s web; the tree and its root, bark, and branches—we can go beyond logic and inhabit, even briefly, a world different from our own.

**BABCOCK:** When I read Joanne and other women scholars working to tell the stories and the lives of other women, I am struck by the complexities of intersubjectivity; by the ways in which the spaces between women of different worlds, different cultures, different ages, etc. are mediated by stories; and by the ways in which both the relationships and the stories change and reshape each other over time. And then there is the story of the relationship itself which is very rarely told, which most of us were trained not to tell, or in cases like this, to regard as gossip, as “girl stuff,” and this is probably the most important story of all.

**MULCAHY:** Yes, these are the levels of stories that are not deemed important enough to tell. For years, feminist scholars have worked to break down the distinctions between men’s sanctioned, often public, stories and the less visible and frequently derided stories women tell. It’s ironic that after nearly four decades of major feminist contributions, the relationship between feminist scholars and

our subjects remains one of the last taboos: “girl’s stuff,” as Barbara says, is too embarrassing to discuss. This taboo crosses over into the realm of writing, genre, and our own academic storytelling. We need new literary forms as well as a voice to convey “intersubjectivity.” I want to bring readers’ attention to Barbara’s recently published essay, “Bloomers, Bingos, the Orange 914, and Helen’s Dress: Stories from the Field I Have to Tell You,” in *Anthropology and Humanism Quarterly* [2005] that addresses these issues by telling personal stories. We need many more such leaps into creative experimentation.

BABCOCK: At the same time that I read Joanne’s revised essay, I read Elena Poniatowski’s wonderful introduction to *Here’s to You, Jesusa!* [2001], which vividly captures this difficult yet increasingly indispensable business of women telling and writing the stories of other women. In addition to the aforementioned intersubjectivity, her description of Jesusa’s reaction to the tape recorder, which she described as an “animal,” and which Elena stopped using, made me realize that we probably need to say more than we have about both the circumstances of telling and the methods of recording. I could never, for example, walk into Helen’s house and turn on a recorder or take photos. Whether or not there is an “animal” in the room obviously makes a difference.

MULCAHY: The “animal” in the house that Barbara references from her own fieldwork with Helen Cordero and from Poniatowski’s story raised important questions for me. How much do we reveal about our fieldwork? For Eva, tape recorders and other devices are not an impediment; she has worked as a fieldworker for the Oregon and Idaho Folk Arts Programs. However, Barbara’s questions raise another issue about our relationships with the people whose stories we’re recording. Does the “animal” in the room detract from our focus on the two people who are working together? Do we neglect the interpersonal for the focus on “getting the story?” We need to record the process of our work as well as the story itself.