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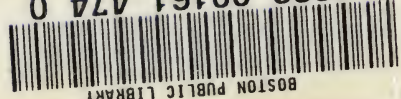
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**NEW  
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Voices  
of  
WAH'KON-TAH**

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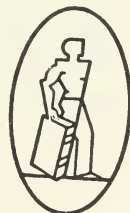


**NEW  
and  
OLD  
Voices  
of  
WAH'KON-TAH**

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**Edited by Robert K. Dodge and Joseph B. McCullough  
With a foreword by Vine Deloria, Jr.**

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*Wab'Kon-Tab* is the "Great Mystery," the sum total of all things, the conception of an impersonal, spiritual and life-giving power. The Dakotas believe that there are two kinds of songs: songs made by people, and songs that come in visions through the spirits of *Wab'Kon-Tab*. It is from the voices of *Wab'Kon-Tab* that people gain spiritual power and wisdom.

There are many other names among the various Indian peoples—*Wakonda*, *Wakan-tanka*, *Nesaru*, *Manito*—that signify the same meaning as *Wab'Kon-Tab*.

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R.D., J.M.  
June, 1985

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## Foreword

American Indians have been denied the chance to pass through the decades of history as an experiencing community of souls capable of transforming themselves into the possibilities which confront them. The Indians of today, the intrepid spirits who captured Alcatraz and defied the greatest military power on earth at Wounded Knee, remain as ghosts with little or no immediate identity, hidden in the shadows of the past. As they gather for a final stand the clouds of warriors past, Chief Joseph, Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Geronimo, Dull Knife, blot them out from the hundreds of anthologies that gallop past in the noon sun of popularity.

Denied the inherent right of national existence, American Indians can only do what the forgotten peoples of the past have done and preserve in song and poetry the suffering and strife of their existence. It is thus that we have this book, this effort to grasp from the fantasy-land of the white man's mind, a sense of historical being. In the poetry of the modern Indian we find a raging sense of having been and a desperate pronouncement of future being, an effort beyond nobility that calls for recognition of the humanity and nationality of Indian existence. In poetry the broken treaties and countless betrayals are overcome and the twisting coils of the law are transcended so that if there is to be no tangible existence there will be spiritual existence.

Indian poetry, like Indian art, has struggled to emerge from the stereotypes imposed on it by non-Indians who wished to see the simple and childish recitations and drawings of a creature not yet civilized but containing that possibility. The poetry of this book is not that taught in the schools and does not follow the patterns of formal existence. It is no more and no less than what would have naturally emerged from the experience of Indian existence had there been no white man to confront. It is awareness tempered with reflection and the holiness of history as it has been experienced.

Indian poetry may not say the things that poetry says because it does not emerge from the centuries of formal western thought. It is not, one can easily discern, descriptive. It has no formula for living. It is hardly chronological and its sequences relate to the integrity of the circle, not the directional determination of the line. It encompasses, it does not point.

One faces, in fact, a desperation in presenting a foreword to any book of Indian poetry because of the experiences of the past. The white man, it seems, refuses to make that final transition from his European past and to confront the continent and its people. He rather extracts what he feels is not harmful



to himself or what can be profitably used, and hurriedly passes on, unable to lay down roots, unable to reflect, and most tragically of all, unable to savor experiences.

It is with great and tragic pleasure, therefore, that I write a foreword to this book. My greatest fear is that it will be taken as books on Indians by Indians are taken—as “quaint.” Within this poetry by the best of the young Indian poets is contained a fearful effort to bridge the gap between Chief Joseph and Russell Means, the leader of the Wounded Knee protest. It is a lyrical attempt to provide a transition between the glorious past with which we all agree and the desperate present which Indians know and which the white man refuses to admit. Our poets are the only ones today who can provide this bridge, this reflective statement of what it means and has meant to live in a present which is continually overwhelmed by the fantasies of others of the meaning of past events.

No essay, no slogan, no policy, no pronouncement can rescue the American Indian from his banishment to the realms of mythology by the non-Indian. Only the poet in his frightful solitude and in his ability to transcend chronological existence can build that spiritual bridge which enables individuals to travel the roads of man's experiences. Thus while we struggle with the institutions and structures of modern life and the headlines run red with anger and frustration, it is only the poets who will tell us how the battle came to its conclusion.

With the poems of this book, then, the reader is invited to savor the Indian experience. It is only in savoring that the full integrity of experience is allowed to present itself. One should not gulp one's food for it is not for energy and vitamins alone that food is eaten. It is eaten as much for future remembrances and for this reason it is savored. Once savored this poetry may brush away the years and tell you more about the Indian's travels in historical experience than all the books written and lectures given. That may be the reason that poetry seems to survive where everything else expires. That may be why these Indians still sing their songs of poetry for us.

Vine Deloria, Jr.



## Introduction

As much as any other racial or ethnic group, the American Indians have been the subject of stereotypes and myths that fail to perceive them in their real humanity. Deep seated prejudices and persecutions have been real dangers to their ability to survive as well as to their ability either to fully integrate into U.S. society or to preserve their own life style.

As perceived by white America the cultural image of the American Indian has been filtered through at least two important stereotypes or myths. One stereotype sees the Indian as a Noble Savage, the other as a red devil.

The stereotype of the Indian as a devil had its real beginning among the Puritans of Massachusetts, although there are foreshadowings of it in John Smith's account of Virginia, as there are also foreshadowings of the Noble Savage myth in Smith's portrayal of Pochahontas.

The Puritans saw their colonization of Massachusetts as a sacred mission. Standing in the way of that mission were dark savages who worshipped strange gods and who lived in the heart of dark forests, out of reach of the light of the sun as well as of the light of God's grace. The Puritans concluded that whatever stood in the way of their sacred mission was an obstacle set up by Satan, and that these dark men were agents of the devil. Seeing Indians at worship, the Puritans also decided that they were worshippers of Satan.

Such an image of the Indian allowed the Puritans to look upon the Pequod war, a war in which a combined force from Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay surrounded a camp of sleeping Indians, set fire to the dwellings, killed all they could (including women and children) during the battle, killed all the captive males over the age of adolescence after the battle, and enslaved everyone else, as a mark of God's special providence. After all, this was a battle against Satan and drastic measures were called for.

The myth of the Noble Savage, on the other hand, although foreshadowed in Smith's story of Pochahontas, did not come into full flower in America until the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was a time of slowed westward expansion, the idea of Manifest Destiny had not yet taken hold of the American imagination and there was relatively little contact between whites and reds. When such contact did take place on the frontier, it led to events similar to the Pequod war, as a history of the Paxton Boys would show.

The Noble Savage myth began in Europe and spread to the cities and settled parts of America. Most of those who believed in it had seen few if any Indians.

It led to the spectacle of princes, historians, writers and others travelling to the plains to ride in the buffalo hunts and to observe the pure savage. The myth, of course, grew out of the romantic tradition, and perceived the Indian as one of the few uncorrupted humans then existing.

Today, these myths still exist, and still influence the perceptions of white Americans who observe American Indians. To some extent, these myths even affect the Indians' perceptions of themselves. For the readers of this book, it is important to realize that these two myths have their manifestations in white America's view of native American literature. Both myths tend to devalue the importance and the ability of native American writers.

Marlon Brando, most recently, has pointed out that we have all seen motion pictures in which the most intelligent comment made by an Indian (usually, of course, a white man pretending to be an Indian) was "Ugh!" Subtler directors or writers have more advanced Indians who are able to articulate more complex ideas such as "How?" and even "Me want firewater" and "That plenty right, *Kemo sabe*."

Such misconceptions of Indian speech are probably related to the myth of the Indian as a savage devil. Supposedly the Indians were "silent, sullen people incapable of articulate expression."<sup>1</sup>

However, according to Gerald W. Haslam, such misconceptions also result from the large differences between European and most Indian languages. Most Indian languages are agglutinative, and are pronounced relatively low and back in the mouth. The sounds, according to Haslam, have "a deep, throaty quality."<sup>2</sup>

It is easy to see, then, that to a European, a person speaking such a language would appear to be saying "Ugh," over and over, but it is important to remember that the languages of the American Indians are, in fact, capable of making the kind of distinctions that we expect of other languages.

At the other extreme, related to the myth of the Noble Savage, as well as to other misconceptions concerning Indian languages, is the belief that all American Indians are poetic. In *The Way*, Shirley Hill Witt and Stan Steiner demonstrate one of the results of this myth:

A student at the Institute of American Indian Arts, in Santa Fe, New Mexico, was praised for his poetry. He objected: *In my tribe we have no poets. Everyone talks in poetry.* If poetry is the magical use of symbols and rhythm "to make life," as the Greeks defined it, or "to remake life," as the Cherokees say, his romanticism was realistic, at least in part. For in no segment of our society are poetry and song as religiously vital as among tribal traditionalists and modernists alike, as (the young Indian poets) attest.<sup>3</sup>

To be sure, in a tribal society there is a more intimate relationship between each person and the various functions of society, including the making of

poetry, but to assert that everyone talks poetry is to deny what poetry really is. It is also to deny distinctions that American Indians make between poetry and prose.

A. Grove Day attempts to distinguish between Indian poetry and Indian prose.<sup>4</sup> Such a distinction suggests that Indians like whites do not always speak in poetry. To believe that they do diminishes the value of the poetry that they do write or chant. The writing of poetry, as Mrs. Terry Allen, long in charge of the creative writing department at the Institute of American Indian Arts, seems to have successfully taught many of her students, is a difficult task that involves the measuring of rhythms, the choice of words and symbols and the shaping of it all into a unity. It is a task that many Indian poets do well.

This is not to say that poetry does not play a large part in the everyday lives of many tribes. William Brandon points out that multivolume collections of ancient songs and chants "have been made from tiny Indian communities of only a few hundred persons."<sup>5</sup> Obviously, for such poems to have survived in an oral tradition within such small communities, they must have been considered important. Day points out that most of such songs and chants were religious in nature. "They attempted to get hold of the sources of supernatural power."<sup>6</sup>

There were special songs for baking bread, for chanting over a new baby or when making its cradle, for chanting while preparing to plant seed, to indicate only a few. Thus, the integration between religion, poetry and everyday life was great, but these songs still had been already composed, committed to memory and chanted as the occasion arose.

They were not made up, or talked, on demand. Thus, until the early 1970's, the two predominant attitudes toward American Indians had helped to make their poetry practically invisible to white America. Where such poetry had been observed, it had been largely the songs and chants that originated in a former day rather than the poetry of contemporary Indians.

Before the publication of the first edition of *Voices from Wab'Kon-Tah* three whites of some influence had helped in the development of a contemporary Indian poetry and in bringing that poetry to the attention of some white Americans. John Milton, editor of the *South Dakota Review*, had devoted two issues to the art and literature of contemporary American Indians, and Terry Allen had been director of the creative writing program at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) since 1963. Her students made up about half of the poets anthologized in the first edition. Brother Benet Tvedten, editor of *The Blue Cloud Quarterly*, had been publishing American Indian writers since 1967.

The poems that came out of the IAIA appeared to share the purpose of transforming the style of chants and songs into modern poetry, keeping in touch with their heritage through traditional forms. Such poets as Donna



Whitewing, Calvin O'John, Ronald Rogers, Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell and Phil George were represented in the first edition by poems that used forms derived from traditional chants and songs. They all achieved some degree of success in combining the ancient art form with the moderns. In this way Terry Allen's work at IAIA was rewarding.

The other poets represented in the first edition shared a concern for a connection with their Indian heritage, but most of the others let their subject matter show their heritage and drew their forms from the poetic forms of modern western poetry. The poems of James Welch, Simon Ortiz, Ray Young Bear, Fred Redcloud, Scott Momaday and others appeared more familiar to white readers for that reason. Yet, few of these poets had achieved any notice among white editors or readers, except for editors Brother Benet Tvedten and John Milton and their readers.

Since the Publication of *Voices from Wab'Kon-Tab* [1974], American Indian poetry has gathered its strength and is beginning to flourish. According to Andrew Wiget, more than one hundred books of Indian poetry have been published, mostly by small presses.<sup>7</sup> That is about four times as many as were published before our first edition.

Also, more editors of mainstream periodicals are beginning to publish Indian poets. To take one example, Roberta Hill Whiteman has published in *Poetry Northwest*, *The American Poetry Anthology*, *The Nation* and *The North American Review* as well as in other periodicals.

Carroll Arnett (Gogisgi) provides an example of another kind. Before 1974 Arnett had published five books of poetry and was establishing a reputation as an academic poet. His poems, however, did not appear to reflect his Indian heritage. There is, of course, no reason why a Cherokee poet has to write about Indian subjects, but in 1976 Arnett published *Tsalagi*, a book of poems that do reflect his Cherokee heritage. It was also about this time that he added the parenthetical (Gogisgi) to his name. Perhaps most important, since the publication of *Tsalagi*, we believe Arnett has strengthened an already strong poetic voice.

Today, many more poets are finding ways of expressing their Indian heritage in poetic forms, some by continuing to experiment with forms derived from chants and songs, and nearly all by finding poetic subjects derived from their Indian heritage.

We would like to think that *Voices from Wab'Kon-Tab* made some contribution to the changes that have taken place since its first publication, and, while it is probably true that *Voices* was a result of many of the same conditions that produced these changes, it is also true that it was the first anthology of Native American poetry that attempted to be comprehensive, and it may have been helpful in the strengthening of Native American poetry.

The poets added to this edition represent the best writers who have had

time to become somewhat established. Other poets may soon become as important.

Like the poetry included in the first two editions, the added poems help to break down the stereotypical views of the American Indian. Those who wish to continue thinking of Indians in terms of racial stereotypes should not read their poetry. Those who wish to get to know Indians will find these poems provide a beginning, and getting to know someone is the surest way to beat down whatever stereotypes may have stood between you.

Finally, as Thomas Sanders and Walter Peek remind us, "to listen for the voice out of Wah'Kon-Tah that drifts through the English phrasings is to hear language enriched beyond spiritual bounds."<sup>8</sup>

*Las Vegas, Nevada*  
*August, 1985*

ROBERT K. DODGE  
JOSEPH B. McCULLOUGH

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gerald Haslam, ed. *Forgotten Pages of American Literature* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1970), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

<sup>3</sup>Shirley Hill Witt and Stan Steiner (eds.) *The Way* (New York, Vintage, 1972), p. 132.

<sup>4</sup>A. Grove Day, *The Sky Clears* (Lincoln, Nebraska, University of Nebraska Press, 1970), p. 4.

<sup>5</sup>William Brandon, *The Magic World* (New York, Morrow, 1971), p. xi.

<sup>6</sup>Day, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup>Andrew Wiget, "Sending a Voice: The Emergence of Contemporary Native American Poetry," *College English*, 46 (October, 1984), 598-609.

<sup>8</sup>Thomas E. Sanders and Walter W. Peek (eds.) *Literature of the American Indian* (New York, Glencoe Press, 1973), p. 449.



**Voices  
of  
WAH'KON-TAH**

---





Paula Gunn Allen

LAMENT OF MY FATHER, LAKOTA

O many-petaled light where  
 stands traitorous the sign of fall,  
 weave basket-symbols on the autumn skull of Old Coyote.<sup>1</sup>  
 Night no longer stays the hand of cause.  
 What innocence could now behold our days secure,  
 or light could move beyond the budding tears,  
 (woman sign that clings to eyes  
 no longer comforted by grief.)

Now come to us our broken victories,  
 hawks mounted on the tortured wings of kill;  
 old age sits upon the frozen window sills  
 too alien for our age-dimmed sight.  
 And fleshless fingers touch  
 the careful cobwebs of our days  
 that hold the butterfly called morning—  
 turned now into the owl song of night.

I have heard it said  
 that such poor creatures move in every land  
 and cast their shadow sign on every wintered skull.  
 Coyote and this night  
 be still.  
 I wonder how a man can cling to life.

<sup>1</sup> Coyote, the trickster-creator, who called himself the first man, is a frequent figure in Indian mythology. According to one myth, the people discovered that the Sun must be placated by human death, or he could not move. Coyote, interpreter of signs, told the people that everyone must die. From this came the belief that death would come quickly to those who glared on the faces of the dead.

## Carroll Arnett

## OUT IN THE WOODS

It must've been a dream.  
I couldn't and still can't  
believe the sonofabitch,  
a sport, raised and  
aimed a shotgun at me.

When his rifled slug  
ripped the underbrush  
on my left, my right  
hand swung the lever,  
arm set the bead, finger  
squeezed a thump against  
the shoulder to start  
more thumps in the chest.

Scared shitless, I watched  
him run like a true  
madman for the road a  
quarter mile off.

I couldn't and still can't  
believe his jaunty red  
hat lying in the thin  
snow, the 150-grain  
leaded crease in its  
insulated crown.

Only one inch lower.  
A sorry trophy.  
He could be my brother.  
It's not real.

## THE STORY OF MY LIFE

Down there where I was  
born and reared on

a whirling wind came  
out of the east, took

my grandfather drank  
up, gambled away, land

woman he married—an  
only memory of her in her

the floral design on  
her dinner plate—that wind

to California to dive-bomb  
cigarette butts, to fight

whorehouses *semper*  
*fidelis, semper*—another

north to go drunk, go to  
school, study long-range

with a cold beer bottle  
between one's legs, to think of

knowing that's as good as  
you're going to feel all

the pure-dee truth of  
a friend's saying,

who waits for someone  
else to set him free—

to make a name (there stood  
Jesus laughing to beat all,

Oklahoma red dirt,

me from the land

he stole from the Cherokee

near blindness scraping

carried me all the way

the Battle of Tijuana

dry wind took me

genetic effects of driving

waking in the morning

day long, knowing

A slave is anyone

took me north

saying, man, you sure

got your work cut out  
for you)—sentenced to

grant learneries by  
way of Missouri at whose

had signed autographs  
for 10¢ apiece, being

for his own self—then  
back east to Maine

those living on it are  
too good to be true,

all through the night—again  
north among Ojibwe women

“If ya don’t be real real  
good, Grandmother Spider’ll

and put medicine on ya.”  
Yet further on to Pig’s Eye,

trials of Dennis and Russell  
U.S. marshals wear

diamond-shaped lapel pins  
and get a hardon each

jounce snug against their  
hips. Not wanting to

I have never been  
a homeowner, have

will always be  
a tenant and hold

upper midwestern land-

World’s fair Goyathlay

allowed to keep half

where both the land and

though progress throbs

who still tell children,

come down from Canada

Minnesota, where at the

small green and yellow

time the .357 Magnums

travel, I have traveled.

always been a tenant,

as much as I can.

Liz Sohappy Bahe

ONCE AGAIN

Let go of the present and death.  
Go to the place nearest the stars,  
gather twigs, logs;  
build a small fire,  
a huge angry fire.

Gather nature's skin,  
wet it, stretch it,  
make a hard drum,  
fill it with water  
to muffle the sound.

## THE PARADE

The light glows bright  
as the parade begins.  
Not everyone has come,  
only the old ones.  
The Eastern tribes came far,  
dressed in cloth, wearing silver.  
From the southeast trailed teared travelers  
of the Five Civilized Tribes.  
From the plains came buffalo hunters  
dressed in beaded, fringed buckskin.  
The light glows brighter  
as each tribe passes.

It was such a long time ago  
when he was first sighted,  
running through the forest  
like a frightened, swift lean deer.  
When he danced in bird feathers,  
dancing frenzied around blue ashes.  
In the twilight of dawn, again he dances.  
Drums thunder over creeks  
to the swishing grasses on the plains.  
Chants echo across the land of yellow maize,  
along the paths of the sacred buffalo.

The years flow like running water.  
Grasses grow yellow, rocks crumble to crust  
as old ones come, they pass.

Charles G. Ballard

NAVAJO GIRL OF MANY FARMS

Navajo girl of Many Farms  
You ride on blue wings  
Why do you fear?  
The drop of sun  
Is but my hands  
Resting at your door  
The desert wind  
Is but my voice  
Saying you are slim  
Saying you are strong  
The morning light  
Is but my song  
Singing soft to you  
Ride, ride away with me  
On your bright, blue wings  
We will never return  
Navajo girl of Many Farms

## YOU NORTHERN GIRL

You northern girl, be yet  
The fine sand along the River Platte  
Blue flames along hickory logs  
Above the ground where dancers dance

South to the yellow world  
The amber world of morning lakes  
Long-stemmed stillness that seldom breaks  
Nor disturbs the sun's resting place

Small birds have not the wings for this  
The flight across time and unlocked rhythms  
Nor are they as pebbles in a stream  
With colors drawn deep from wintry days

You northern girl, speak yet  
Of a time of many trees, many camps of the strong  
Mountain peaks that guard the fertile land  
The purer light now lost to man

Though in the furnace of the Southlands  
Deep in the city's web we meet  
We will wing our way to the River Platte  
Toward the fires of our Indian world



## THE MAN OF PROPERTY

Let's let the good man sign the bill  
That deprived the Indian of his will  
Let's build his house upon the hill  
And bring to him our misery

His children will attend the finest school  
His wife will live by the golden rule  
His workers for him will play the fool  
And take to him our misery

His name will be on the cornerstone  
He will find it proper to loan  
Proper to forget the ones who groan  
And take to him our misery

His fences will stretch across the land  
His constituents will clap and stand  
The lights will burn along the strand  
Far removed from our misery

But then will come a certain day  
Brothers will link arms along the way  
The raging night will come to stay  
And he will know our misery

## DURING THE PAGEANT AT MEDICINE LODGE

*During the pageant at Medicine Lodge*

One bright line this—recollected but passing away,  
 like a leaf that escaped the fire; it  
 appears still golden, life-inhabited,  
 imbued with light, with the filtered hush  
 of deep forests.

*During the pageant at Medicine Lodge*

Later it seemed that the redman had been only a dream  
 on paper, an elegant falsehood strutting  
 before pioneers, a dancing image fading  
 deeper into the forests, into the wild streams,  
 into earth itself. They were never real!  
 They sang—bird-like, bear-like, like wind,  
 rustle of trees, crickets—and were no more.

*During the pageant at Medicine Lodge*

Conversational scraps and ideas. "A few might have  
 survived," I said. I wanted to say,  
 "You and I." But why stab at thin air.  
 The past survives in the mind. On that  
 particular day in southern Kansas *no Indians*  
*were there*. It was a jolly ride, it was dusty  
 and hot, it was fun, but the Indians,  
 whoever they were, did not arrive.

## CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Why do you hold the flag so high  
Old fellow of the Sac and Fox?  
Those stars were never in your sky

From times past we have gone to war  
Now the young are speaking new words  
So be it. They have done so before

And it must come to them, the flag  
If they take it from these useless hands  
It must still be there, high up and strong

Grandfather, or whatever you are  
You have spoken your sold-out words  
To your strength I cannot reply

I know only that the time has come  
When gratitude for treachery is gone  
When kisses for the greedy are unclean

When I take the flag, old man  
It will be but to honor the forgotten dead  
Those who died for the Indian dream

Let no more be said, my son  
On this matter we are of one mind  
In my old time way I pass it on to you

## TIME WAS THE TRAIL WENT DEEP

Time was the trail went deep  
From the granite ledge of the Verdigris  
On west to rivers flat  
And a rolling sea of grass

We followed the Arkansas to New Town  
Of the Creeks and veered off  
To low hills in the north  
Where we camped in those final days

Having walked to never look back  
Having talked to carry through  
We disbanded and were no more  
To choose finally is the Indian way

But time was the trail went deep  
Into a green and vibrant land

## NOW THE PEOPLE HAVE THE LIGHT

Now the people have the light  
But time must pass, days of autumn  
While the deer drink at the pool

Visions gathered by proud men  
Will not affect the light, the summer rains  
Must fall on a world of leaves

The swarms of small life on wings  
Must find the lake, the evening birds  
Bring back the songs of youth

Steaming riverbeds on the Great Plains  
Must sigh for the lizard and receive  
In dark sand the wayward stars

Mountain peaks high over the land  
Must keep the watch through all the years  
For now the people have the light

## Jim Barnes

### CONTEMPORARY NATIVE AMERICAN POETRY

For one thing, you can believe it:  
 the skin chewed soft enough to wear,  
 the bones hewn hard as a totem  
 from hemlock. It's a kind of scare-

crow that will follow you home nights.  
 You've seen it ragged against a field,  
 but you seldom think, at the time,  
 to get there it had to walk through hell.

### AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FLASHBACK: PUMA AND POKEWEED

I've spoken of home before and spotted crows  
 older than my hair. I generalize: home  
 is where hard is. And know it true. The crow  
 is constant color: his caw can crack a stone.

You keep your crows alive as best you can:  
 you remember a puma and pokeweed and trees  
 quick with wings and wind, tell yourself the fear  
 you felt along your fingertips would freeze

your sanity now, if you were child again,  
 free to feel again leaves upon your head,  
 to break off shoots of poke for supptime,  
 to dream the cry of a puma one time heard.

Your memory is rocked by things you have  
 neglected; your stoned eyes are hard with world  
 you are late to see. And even now you know  
 the facts are wrong, as random and whorled

as fingerprints on records you've tried to keep  
 or the circling crows that blot your inland sky.

## THE CHICAGO ODYSSEY

Looking north you try to break through the sky  
 with your bad eyes. You want to map the town.  
 The lake and leaden sky are one, a blank  
 canvas on which you'd like to sketch a face.  
 The artist in you tells you to wait for dream.  
 You wait and nothing comes. You try museums,  
 their rigid worth, view mummies and other  
 wonders hardly half as strange as this place,  
 this time. A gauze of snow spirals up your spine.  
 You tell yourself the ice age now begins  
 and you alone must escape to tell the tale:  
 the horror of his and hers fleshed in frost,  
 the scream caught suddenly in mid-flight,  
 the running child quick-frozen in the park,  
 towers iced in reverse, the el turned  
 easy slope for otters.

All as the world turns  
 the other way. You turn and traffic whirs.  
 The astronomy is wrong: there are no stars,  
 moon breaks crystalline, the only zodiac  
 is flake on flake, a kaleidoscope of air.  
 You swore you'd know this town and now you don't.  
 Something has tipped the day and up is down;  
 you're trying your best to leave while there's still  
 a time. From each corner comes a siren's song.  
 Every street's a cliff you tack away from,  
 cotton in your ears against the damning wind  
 you never thought could be so cold, so insistent  
 on its icy trade, that barter would mean  
 the loss of teeth. You'll suck your eyes back in  
 your head, lean hard into the coming night.  
 lie always, go native, and by God survive.

## Peter Blue Cloud

### SWEETGRASS

Sweet rains of summer  
remembered in wintertime  
in drying sweetgrass.

The fragrance is a sweet warmth  
as soft as a blossom's promise  
as I early morning huddle  
by the woodstove dreaming,  
berries ripe there were  
scattered in their seasons  
on tree and bush and nesting  
in grasses tall, waving,  
calling in scented voice  
to pleasure the day, to dream  
undisturbed by outward signs  
of traffic or throngs scuttling  
to frantic destinations.

And pulling gently, one by one  
the long whispers of grass  
and hearing frog song and  
watching a cattail bending  
to the weight of a light question  
a red-wing blackbird asks  
observing the brilliant passage  
of a silent snake, or  
the dipping, turning swift  
hunger in a swallow's flight.



I add a piece of wood  
to the singing of the stove  
and drift my mind to feel  
again the hot sun on shoulders  
the sweat on brow, the rich  
feel of fertile soil I sink to  
upon my knees resting  
gathering with mind's fingers  
a meadow of grasses  
a hillside of forest  
a clear brook curving  
and widening to reflect  
a white roundness of cloud.

I curve my mind to rhythms  
touched and tasted back then  
here on winter's shelf  
I sort memories and moods  
and dwell on yesterday  
and all because my body  
brushed, in passing,  
the bunches of sweetgrass  
hanging in winter's house.

## Joseph Bruchac

### CANTICLE

Let others speak  
of harps and  
heavenly choirs  
I've made my decision  
to remain here  
with the Earth

if the old grey poet  
felt he could turn and  
live with the animals  
why should I be too good  
to stay and die with them

and the great road of the Milky Way,  
that Sky Trail my Abnaki ancestors  
strode to the last Happy Home  
does not answer my dreams

I do not believe  
we go up to the sky  
unless it is  
to fall again  
with the rain

## NOT A THING OF PAINT OR FEATHERS

It was said by the Reverend  
William Beauchamp that the way  
of Handsome Lake, in his day,  
was fast dying out  
and that was in 1907.

And Arthur Parker,  
whose father was Seneca,  
told of the grief  
of an Onondaga Teller of the Gai'wiiio  
over the passing of the old way  
and that was in 1913.

And each of those who have written  
of the Iroquois have clearly seen  
that those old people  
who knew the chants, the medicines,  
the songs, the stories  
have been growing fewer.

Yet the songs grow stronger  
each Midwinter and those who come  
to the Longhouses to hear  
The Good Message  
know that their belief  
is not a thing of paint or feathers  
but of the heart.

## FROM AN INMATE RULE BOOK

Know your number  
and cell location  
if you forget  
look in the mirror  
and read them  
in your eyes

when you have eaten  
drop your spoon  
into the bucket  
beside the door  
there are no knives  
allowed in here  
aside from those  
in the Captain's smile

walk near the walls  
they are the only  
friends you can  
always depend upon  
to guard your back

wash as often  
as they allow  
try to convince  
yourself the water  
which falls  
from the showerhead  
is not some  
invisible indelible paint  
to mark you for  
the rest of your life

## Barney Bush

### LEAVING OKLAHOMA AGAIN

for the  
Creek Comet  
Joy

wishing I had hitchiked  
instead of busing it thinking  
about Joy back in  
Oklahoma City that we are  
real close closer than  
brother and sister closer than  
lovers  
closer than just being tribal  
people close as bones in  
the earth  
Part of it is this night  
leaving  
already through Tulsa and  
watching the halfmoon dip into  
an Oklahoma horizon how we ve  
both seen it before through  
greyhound windows airplanes  
trains and in its perfect  
angle from the roadside  
thumbing

Buses are americas last  
stagecoaches the saddest  
farewells last escapes from  
boyfriends girlfriends  
army posts parents isolation  
Abandoned elders leave yankee  
winters

sometimes trailing renegade  
children to Florida or  
Phoenix to cramped trailer homes  
Inside the bus there is only  
arctic winter or sahara summer  
incredible body stench and  
kids crying all night and  
the little blond kid that  
bus companies must hire to  
squirm its ungendered body through  
the seats onto my lap and  
notebook Juan always  
smiles from across the aisle  
passing me his brown paper bag  
which I never refuse  
Tequila was made for  
bus trips so are bolo ties  
and plastic turquoise  
Two 95 for a hamburger no  
refills on coffee the bus  
station gestapo gruffly informs  
as if we had just arrived from  
skidrow on our way to Dachau  
The little blond kid always  
has a mother who comes from the  
bathroom fresh fragrant  
not a hair out of place  
smiling serenely as her kid plops  
its yet dirty face and unkept  
body on the stool next to mine  
Momma smiles again for me to  
acknowledge her reshuffled deck  
I smile back sadly everytime  
feeling my tequila and  
leaving Oklahoma again.

## Ramona Carden

### THE MOCCASINS OF AN OLD MAN

I hung you there, moccasins of worn buckskin.  
 I hung you there and there you are still.  
 I took you from the hot flesh of a swift buck.  
 I took you to my woman.

She tanned you with buck brains.  
 She cut and sewed and beaded.  
 I wore you with pride.  
 I wore you with leaping steps over many grounds.

Now, I sit here and my bones are stiff with many winters.  
 You hang there and I shall sit.  
 We shall watch the night approach.

### TUMBLEWEED

I stood in the shelter of a great tree,  
 Hiding from the wind that galloped over the land.  
 Robbing, and wrecking, and scattering. It soared.  
 I was earth bound.  
 It tugged at the leaves,  
 At the grass, at things not tied.  
 At me.  
 Urging, pulling, laughing in my ear.  
 I listened but stood.  
 Flitting away, it spied a tumbleweed  
 and coaxed it from its roots.  
 The brown weed soared  
 and became part of the wind.  
 Suddenly, with a wild yearning,  
 I ran stumbling, with arms outstretched.  
 It flew on beyond me.  
 It stopped.  
 The wind flew around me,  
 Leaving me there.



## Martha Chosa

## DRUMS

Throbbing—all I can hear!  
Why can't there be bells,  
with floating voices  
over all our dry land?  
Is it going to rain?  
Or is that my people  
need to dance more often?  
Perhaps the Sky  
is watching us with anger.  
Are people talking behind his back?  
Suppose he's sad  
of not having enough power  
to drop blessing on the land,  
on my people,  
on my crops,  
on my animals?  
People! People! People!  
Brothers and sisters!  
Let us give pride to the Sky;  
help him to send  
blessing for our needs.  
Leave your drums.  
Let him be proud of his powers.  
Great Spirit!  
Now is the time to have joy.

Great Sky!  
It is time to see drops  
of rain and of blessing  
on our dry land.

## Grey Cohoe

### THE FOLDING FAN

The wild beauty of an eagle, once born to virgin sky  
now held in a sacred fan.

Beaded feathers  
stiffen the grasp, the fingers that curled  
to ease the cold soul but let the agony tear,  
for the heart will weep all the same.  
Never again is life made vivid  
or for who else the kind warmth?  
Maybe this I know, that it is for the dying,  
whose ending breaths I hear not, as the wisdom  
will come no more,  
only to grave, olden with age.  
Eternity flies now on the wings of the gone soul,  
never to be seen.

Listen,  
a drum I hear, distance, yet;  
it's from the folding fan.  
The preying bird of death is waiting,  
calling.

**Anita Endrezze-Danielson****SHAMAN/BEAR**

He sniffs the autumn air,  
fur bristling, rippling, like a red robe  
of falling leaves. He looks for me.  
I am a tamarack this time  
my fingers yellow as meadow  
grass changing in the light:  
now thick with pine-dark dew,  
now frost black as his snout. He rises  
pawing stumps slashed by lightning  
before I was born. He remembers  
the hard heat splitting the air  
clouds deep in his throat summers ago  
the sun smoking in a tree.  
Now he eats ashes, making spells  
in a tongue few Indians speak.

He knows I'm here, legs trembling, cheeks red  
as kinnikinic berries. It is time.  
The Moon of Popping Trees has darkened  
the gold birches. I dream of the season  
His spell will cause my belly to swell  
child heavy my womb full  
as a Salmonberry moon.

Louise Erdrich

JACKLIGHT

*The same Chippewa word is used both for flirting and hunting game, while another Chippewa word connotes both using force in intercourse and also killing a bear with one's bare hands.*

—R. W. Dunning

(1959) *Social and Economic Change Among the Northern Ojibwa*

We have come to the edge of the woods,  
out of brown grass where we slept, unseen,  
out of knotted twigs, out of leaves creaked shut,  
out of hiding.

At first the light wavered, glancing over us.  
Then it clenched to a fist of light that pointed,  
searched out, divided us.  
Each took the beams like direct blows the heart answers.  
Each of us moved forward alone.

We have come to the edge of the woods,  
drawn out of ourselves by this night sun,  
this battery of polarized acids,  
that outshines the moon.

We smell them behind it  
but they are faceless, invisible.  
We smell the raw steel of their gun barrels,  
mink oil on leather, their tongues of sour barley.  
We smell their mothers buried chin-deep in wet dirt.  
We smell their fathers with scoured knuckles  
teeth cracked from hot marrow.  
We smell their sisters of crushed dogwood, bruised apples,  
of fractured cups and concussions of burnt hooks.

We smell their breath steaming lightly behind the jacklight.  
We smell the itch underneath the caked guts on their clothes.  
We smell their minds like silver hammers  
cocked back, held in readiness  
for the first of us to step into the open.

We have come to the edge of the woods,  
out of brown grass where we slept, unseen,  
out of leaves creaked shut, out of our hiding.  
We have come here too long.

It is their turn now,  
their turn to follow us. Listen,  
they put down their equipment.  
It is useless in the tall brush.  
And now they take the first steps, not knowing  
how deep the woods are and lightless.  
How deep the woods are.

## THE STRANGE PEOPLE

*The antelope are strange people . . . they are beautiful to look at, and yet they are tricky. We do not trust them. They appear and disappear; they are like shadows on the plains. Because of their great beauty, young men sometimes follow the antelope and are lost forever. Even if those foolish ones find themselves and return, they are never again right in their heads.*

—*Pretty Shield, Medicine Woman of the Crows,*  
transcribed and edited by Frank Linderman (1932)

All night I am the doe, breathing  
his name in a frozen field,  
the small mist of the word  
drifting always before me

And again he has heard it  
and I have gone burning  
to meet him, the jacklight  
fills my eyes with blue fire;  
the heart in my chest  
explodes like a hot stone.

Then slung like a sack  
in the back of his pickup,  
I wipe the death scum  
from my mouth, sit up laughing,  
and shriek in my speeding grave.

Safely shut in the garage,  
when he sharpens his knife  
and thinks to have me, like that,  
I come toward him,  
a lean gray witch,  
through the bullets that enter and dissolve.

I sit in his house  
drinking coffee till dawn,  
and leave as frost reddens on hubcaps,  
crawling back into my shadowy body.  
All day, asleep in clean grasses,  
I dream of the one who could really wound me.

## THE LADY IN THE PINK MUSTANG

The sun goes down for hours, taking more of her along  
than the night leaves her with.

A body moving in the dust  
must shed its heavy parts in order to go on.

Perhaps you have heard of her, the Lady in the Pink Mustang,  
whose bare lap is floodlit from under the dash,  
who cruises beneath the high snouts of semis, reading  
the blink of their lights. *Yes, Move Over. Now.*  
or *How Much*. Her price shrinks into the dark.

She can't keep much trash in a Mustang,  
and that's what she likes. Travel light. Don't keep  
what does not have immediate uses. The road thinks ahead.  
It thinks for her, a streamer from Bismarck to Fargo  
bending through Minnesota to accommodate the land.

She won't carry things she can't use anymore.  
Just a suit, sets of underwear, what you would expect  
in a Pink Mustang. Things she could leave anywhere.

There is a point in the distance where the road meets itself,  
where coming and going must kiss into one.  
She is always at the place, seen from behind,  
motionless, torn forward, living in a zone  
all her own. It is like she has burned right through time,  
the brand, the mark, owning the woman who bears it.

She owns them, not one will admit what they cannot  
come close to must own them. She takes them along,  
traveling light. It is what she must face every time  
she is touched. The body disposable as cups.

To live, instead of turn, on a dime.  
One light point that is so down in value  
Painting her nipples silver for a show, she is thinking  
*You out there. What do you know.*

*Come out of the dark where you're safe. Kissing these  
bits of change, stamped out, ground to a luster,  
is to kiss yourself away piece by piece  
until we're even. Until the last  
coin is rubbed for luck and spent.  
I don't sell for nothing less.*



Phil George

OLD MAN, THE SWEAT LODGE<sup>1</sup>

“This small lodge is now  
 The womb of our mother, Earth,  
 This blackness in which we sit,  
 The ignorance of our impure minds.  
 These burning stones are  
 The coming of new life.”  
 I keep his words near my heart.

Confessing, I recall my evil deeds.  
 For each sin, I sprinkle water on fire-hot stones,  
 The hissed steam is sign that  
 The place from which Earth's seeds grow  
 Is still alive,  
 He sweats,  
 I sweat.

I remember, Old Man heals the sick,  
 Brings good fortune to one deserving.  
 Sacred steam rises;  
 I feel my pores give out their dross.  
 After I chant prayers to the Great Spirit,  
 I raise the door to the East.  
 Through this door dawns wisdom.

<sup>1</sup>The sweat lodge was almost universal for all tribes north of Mexico. It was usually a small round house made of sod, sticks or hide; an individual entered and hot rocks and water were placed inside to cause steam. After remaining for a time, he would then plunge into snow or cold water. The sweat lodge was used for religious purposes, to purify oneself as well as to cure disease. Special rituals were also conducted there.

Cleansed, I dive into icy waters.  
Pure, I wash away all of yesterday.  
“My son, Walk in this new life.  
It is given to you!  
Think right, feel right,  
Be happy.”  
I thank you, Old Man, the Sweat Lodge.

### ASK THE MOUNTAINS

Here I stand  
For centuries watching  
Moccasined trails  
Wear down into  
Paved highways.  
Innumerable winter snows  
Have robed me and  
My sister—  
Mother Earth.  
To this moist  
Green valley,  
The Land of Winding Waters—  
I give the beauty of  
Purple peaks pointing.  
From long ago  
I have towered—  
Unafraid.

Guarding ancient  
Bits of wisdom  
Learned by men and creatures.  
To all inhabitants of this  
New Switzerland,  
The Mighty One  
Smiles sunshine—  
Together in happiness  
We protect, provide.  
In gaiety, liberty,  
I saw the Nez Perce  
Freely worship.  
Pure as my  
Glacial Waters,  
Proud as the bull Elk  
They lived—  
Seeking to survive  
Within my shadow.  
I helped establish these  
Intelligent, ritualistic  
People—a powerful race.  
I admire their  
Love for life.  
From tribal burial grounds,  
I have seen  
Peace die and  
Violence invade,  
I know all truth.  
I am Wallowa of the  
Blue Mountains.

## NIGHT BLESSING

Sleep plays hide-and-seek with darkness.  
In reverence  
All earth stands, head bowed.  
Long-needled evergreens cease to  
Proclaim hushed hymns of awe.  
Between praise stanzas,  
Night birds pause to listen,  
While sending their magnetic fragrance,  
The sweetness for this royalty,  
Spring flowers in carpet hues  
Halt their prancing dance.  
Stars shoot through space  
To herald Full Moon's entrance.

Within my tepee  
I cannot remain on robes and blankets.  
Far out into the still of night,  
My heart goes forth.  
I must stand in honor, respect,  
One beside a tepee shadows  
Gazing toward snow-capped mountains.  
I turn to face the East,  
Waiting to receive  
Her blessing.  
"Oh, Ruler of the Night,  
May I so live that all I do in time  
Is preparation for lasting peace."

Soon Dawn's mystic gaze  
Moves toward me,  
Falling upon each creature.  
I raise yearning arms  
And stand naked

Within Her sacred view.  
 Devotion surges in me  
 Overflows my littleness  
 And I must praise  
 In song and dance.  
 I am clothed in joy.  
 I am warmed, protected.  
 Content, I sleep.

### BATTLE WON IS LOST

They said, "You are no longer a lad."  
     I nodded.  
 They said, "Enter the council lodge."  
     I sat.  
 They said, "Our lands are at stake."  
     I scowled.  
 They said, "We are at war."  
     I hated.  
 They said, "Prepare red war symbols."  
     I painted.  
 They said, "Count coups."  
     I cringed.  
 They said, "Desperate warriors fight best."  
     I charged.  
 They said, "Some will be wounded."  
     I bled.  
 They said, "To die is glorious."  
     They lied.

## Janet Campbell Hale

## TRIBAL CEMETERY

I lay my hand  
Upon  
The coldness of the smooth  
White stone,  
My fingers touch the words,  
I read again:  
My father's name,  
Date of birth,  
Date of death,  
Veteran of  
World War I.

"This is your  
Grandfather's grave,"  
I tell my children,  
Wishing I could tell them,  
That they would understand,  
That the man  
Who was my father,  
Was of that first generation,  
Born on old land  
Newly made reservation,  
That at twelve,  
He went to Mission School,  
To learn to wear shoes,  
To eat with knife and fork,  
To pray to the Catholic God,  
To painfully  
Learn English words,  
English meanings,  
White ways of thinking,

English words,  
To speak,  
To think,  
To write,  
English words,  
When we,  
My children  
And I  
Know no others.

I lay my hand  
Upon  
The cold white  
Stone,  
My daughter,  
Who is four,  
Gathers small rocks,  
With which she  
Fills her pockets,  
She sings to herself  
As she goes along.

My son,  
Who is ten,  
Stays with me awhile,  
Beside my father's grave,  
asks me about my  
Childhood,  
About the others,  
Lying buried here,  
In Campbell-labeled  
graves.  
Then he leaves me,  
And goes about  
The cemetery,  
Reading tombstones,  
For unusual names,  
Looking for people,  
Who lived  
One-hundred years,  
Or more—  
He's found five.



## Joy Harjo

### THE WOMAN HANGING FROM THE THIRTEENTH FLOOR WINDOW

She is the woman hanging from the 13th floor window. Her hands are pressed white against the concrete moulding of the tenement building. She hangs from the 13th floor window in east Chicago, with a swirl of birds over her head. They could be a halo, or a storm of glass waiting to crush her.

She thinks she will be set free.

The woman hanging from the 13th floor window on the east side of Chicago is not alone. She is a woman of children, of the baby, Carlos, and of Margaret, and of Jimmy who is the oldest. She is her mother's daughter and her father's son. She is several pieces between the two husbands she has had. She is all the women of the apartment building who stand watching her, watching themselves.

When she was young she ate wild rice on scraped down plates in warm wood rooms. It was in the farther north and she was the baby then. They rocked her.

She sees Lake Michigan lapping at the shores of herself. It is a dizzy hold of water and the rich live in tall glass houses at the edge of it. In some places Lake Michigan speaks softly, here, it just sputters and butts itself against the asphalt. She sees other buildings just like hers. She sees other women hanging from many-floored windows counting their lives in the palms of their hands and in the palms of their children's hands.

She is the woman hanging from the 13th floor window on the Indian side of town. Her belly is soft from her children's births, her worn levis swing down below her waist, and then her feet, and her heart. She is dangling.

The woman hanging from the 13th floor hears voices. They come to her in the night when the lights have gone dim. Sometimes they are little cats mewling and scratching at the door, sometimes they are her grandmother's voice, and sometimes they are gigantic men of light whispering to her to get up, to get up, to get up. That's when she wants to have another child to hold onto in the night, to be able to fall back into dreams.

And the woman hanging from the 13th floor window hears other voices. Some of them scream out from below for her to jump, they would push her over. Others cry softly from the sidewalks, pull their children up like flowers and gather them into their arms. They would help her, like themselves.

But she is the woman hanging from the 13th floor window, and she knows she is hanging by her own fingers, her own skin, her own thread of indecision.

She thinks of Carlos, of Margaret, of Jimmy.  
 She thinks of her father, and of her mother.  
 She thinks of all the women she has been, of all the men. She thinks of the color of her skin, and of Chicago streets, and of waterfalls and pines.  
 She thinks of moonlight nights, and of cool spring storms.  
 Her mind chatters like neon and northside bars.  
 She thinks of the 4 a.m. lonelinesses that have folded her up like death, discordant, without logical and beautiful conclusion. Her teeth break off at the edges.  
 She would speak.

The woman hangs from the 13th floor window crying for the lost beauty of her own life. She sees the sun falling west over the grey plane of Chicago. She thinks she remembers listening to her own life break loose, as she falls from the 13th floor window on the east side of Chicago, or as she climbs back up to claim herself again.

## "ARE YOU STILL THERE"

there are sixty-five miles  
of telephone wire  
between acoma  
and albuquerque  
i dial the number  
and listen for the sound  
of his low voice  
on the other side  
"hello"  
is a gentle motion of a western wind  
cradling tiny purple flowers  
that grow near the road  
towards laguna  
i smell them  
as i near the rio puerco bridge  
my voice stumbles  
returning over sandstone  
as it passes the cañocito exit

Patty Harjo

MUSINGS

Walk proud, walk straight, let your thoughts race  
with the blue wind, but do not bare your soul to  
your enemies.

The black mountain lion called night devours the  
white rabbit of day. And the icy wind blows  
over the still-warm, brown earth.

In restless dreams I called out his name,  
Waking, I do not remember.

In my score of years  
I have known not love  
except wind, earth and darkness.

## Lance Henson

### WARRIOR NATION TRILOGY

1

from the mountains we come  
lifting our voices for the beautiful  
road you have given

we are the buffalo people  
we dwell in the light of our father sun  
in the shadow of our mother earth

we are the beautiful people  
we roam the great plans without fear  
in our days the land has taught us oneness  
we alone breathe with the rivers  
we alone hear the song of the stones

2

oh ghost that follows me  
find in me strength to know the wisdom  
of this life

take me to the mountain of my grandfather  
i have heard him all night  
singing among the summer leaves

3

great spirit (maheo)

make me whole  
i have come this day with my spirit  
i am not afraid  
for i have seen in vision  
the white buffalo  
grazing the frozen field  
which grows near the full circle  
of this  
world

## EIGHT POEMS FOR AUGUST

face grown inward  
 a stone over which water  
 has passed many  
 years

climbing into evening  
 i am  
 bone  
 chipped  
 by  
 light

telling which way to go  
           gaze of the  
 river

soft rain prints  
                   the earth into memory

crow out of early  
 darkness  
 asks  
                   who is  
                   left

against a grey sky  
 sparrows

pieces of us shiver  
 in their  
 light

each shadow is someone  
 dreaming

quiet as dew  
 down inside of a leaf  
 we raise up  
 again

Linda Hogan

CELEBRATION: BIRTH OF A COLT

When we reach the field  
she is still eating  
the heads of yellow flowers  
and pollen has turned her whiskers  
gold. Lady,  
her stomach bulges out,  
the ribs have grown wide.  
We wait,  
our bare feet dangling  
in the horse trough,  
warm water  
where goldfish brush  
our smooth ankles.  
We wait  
while the liquid breaks  
down Lady's dark legs  
and that slick wet colt  
like a black tadpole  
darts out  
beginning at once  
to sprout legs.  
She licks it to its feet,  
the membrane still there,  
red,  
transparent  
the sun coming up shines through,  
the sky turns bright with morning  
and the land  
with pollen blowing off the corn,  
land that will always own us,  
everywhere it is red.



## Bruce Ignacio

### LOST

I know not of my forefathers  
nor of their beliefs  
For I was brought up in the city.  
Our home seemed smothered and surrounded  
as were other homes on city sites.  
When the rain came  
I would slush my way to school  
as though the street were a wading pool.  
Those streets were always crowded.  
I brushed by people with every step,  
Covered my nose once in a while,  
Gasping against the smell of perspiration on humid days.  
Lights flashed everywhere  
until my head became a signal, flashing on and off.  
Noise so unbearable  
I wish the whole place would come to a standstill,  
leaving only peace and quiet

And still, would I like this kind of life? . . .  
The life of my forefathers  
who wandered, not knowing where they were going,  
but just moving, further and further  
from where they had been,  
To be in quiet,  
to kind of be lost in their dreams and wishing,  
as I have been to this day,  
I awake.

**Maurice Kenny****WILD STRAWBERRY**

For Helene

And I rode the Greyhound down to Brooklyn  
where I sit now eating woody strawberries  
grown on the backs of Mexican farmers  
imported from the fields of their hands,  
juices without color or sweetness

my wild blood berries of spring meadows  
sucked by June bees and protected by hawks  
have stained my face and honeyed  
my tongue . . . healed the sorrow in my flesh

vines crawl across the grassy floor  
of the north, scatter to the world  
seeking the light of the sun and innocent  
tap of the rain to feed the roots  
and bud small white flowers that in June  
will burst fruit and announce spring  
when wolf will drop winter fur  
and wrens will break the egg

my blood, blood berries that brought laughter  
and the ache in the stooped back that vied  
with dandelions for the plucking,  
and the wines nourished our youth and heralded  
iris, corn and summer melon

we fought bluebirds for the seeds  
armed against garter snakes, field mice;  
won the battle with the burning sun  
which blinded our eyes and froze our hands  
to the vines and the earth where knees knelt  
and we laughed in the morning dew like worms  
and grubs; we scented age and wisdom

my mother wrapped the wounds of the world  
with a sassafras poultice and we ate  
wild berries with their juices running  
down the roots of our mouths and our joy

I sit here in Brooklyn eating Mexican  
berries which I did not pick, nor do  
I know the hands which did, nor their stories . . .  
January snow falls, listen . . .

## CORN-PLANTER

I plant corn four years:  
ravens steal it;  
rain drowns it;  
August burns it;  
locusts ravage leaves.

I stand in a circle and throw seed.  
Old men laugh because they know the wind  
will carry the seed to my neighbor.

I stand in a circle on planted seed.  
Moles burrow through the earth  
and harvest my crop.

I throw seed to the wind  
and wind drops it on the desert.

The eighth year I spend planting corn;  
I tend my fields all season.  
After September's harvest I take it to the market.  
The people of my village are too poor to buy it.

The ninth spring I make chicken-feather headdresses,  
plastic tom-toms and beaded belts.  
I grow rich,  
buy an old Ford,  
drive to Chicago,  
and get drunk  
on Welfare checks.

## King D. Kuka

### “A TASTE OF HONEY”

True: nor love or loving is ultimate.  
 A doe, free in the valley,  
     that but her head concealed by green,  
     hoofs cleansed by artesian waters,  
 Is harnessed by love that shuns her.  
 While beauty slumbers, tonight love travels afar.

Love is nay but thatching in a storm,  
     for a wind tears damp and cold,  
     cruel and ruthless.  
 A fallen traveler like weather-beaten gaff  
     shall sink, rise, sink, rise, thrice sink,  
     rise ne'er from love experienced in icy depths.  
 The thickened lung is so with breath,  
 Not satisfaction of love.

Love is peace, yet it is mortal.  
 Plead release.  
 Console yourself with sorrow;  
 Tantalized you shall be by love.  
 Treasure love's memory.  
 Sell it to tears, regret, self-pity.  
 Love's outstretched arms seek to destroy you.

Love is the venom of a reptile;  
 A wasp, fitter to kill than keep.

Within the venom dwells death;  
 Without is honey.  
 Gamble carelessly venom's deadly game  
     and you'll be dealt a losing hand.  
 Carefully give, and in return  
 Will be “a taste of honey.”

## Littlebird

### DEATH IN THE WOODS

Corn swaying in the rhythm of the wind—  
     Graceful ballerinas,  
     Emerging at the edge of the forest.  
 All dip and dance;  
     Wind tunnels through long silken hair,  
     Golden teeth-seeds.  
 Trees chatter nervously  
     Awakening sky in fright,  
     Pointing at Woodman.  
 A mighty thud! Blow leaves deep scar;  
     He strikes again . . .  
 Corn mourns, golden tears,  
     Bows, praying for fallen brother.  
 Jay mocks the greedy beast  
     Who has doomed majestic brother,  
     His life home.  
 Wind tosses leaves aside as  
     Woodman tramps on his way,  
     Ax dripping oak's blood.  
 The forest, damp and silent,  
     Mourning for lost Oak.  
     And now remains but a  
     Chirp of a lonely cricket and

Silhouette of Woodman,  
 Diminishing,  
     beyond the  
     saddened hill  
     as the far  
     sun sinks.

Charles C. Long

YEI-IE'S CHILD<sup>1</sup>

I am the child of the Yei-ie.  
 Turquoise for my body, silver for my soul,  
 I was united with beauty all around me.  
 As turquoise and silver, I'm the jewel  
     of brother tribes and worn with pride.  
 The wilds of the animals are also my brothers.  
 The bears, the deer, and the birds are a part  
     of me and I am a part of them.  
 As brothers, the clouds are our long, sleek hair.  
 The winds are our pure breath.  
 As brothers, the rivers are our blood.  
 The mountains are our own selves.  
 As brothers, the universe is our home and  
     in it we walk  
 With beauty in our minds,  
 With beauty in our hearts, and  
 With beauty in our steps.  
     In beauty we were born.  
     In beauty we are living.  
     In beauty we will die.  
     In beauty we will be finished.

<sup>1</sup> Yei or Yeibichai is one of the most ancient of the Navajo gods. Like the gods of the ancient Greeks, they are conceived of as partly human.

## Alonzo Lopez

## DIRECTION

I was directed by my grandfather  
To the East,  
    so I might have the power of the bear;  
To the South,  
    so I might have the courage of the eagle;  
To the West,  
    so I might have the wisdom of the owl;  
To the North,  
    so I might have the craftiness of the fox;  
To the Earth,  
    so I might receive her fruit;  
To the Sky,  
    so I might lead a life of innocence.

## I AM CRYING FROM THIRST

I am crying from thirst.  
I am singing for rain.  
I am dancing for rain.  
The sky begins to weep,  
    for it sees me  
    singing and dancing  
    on the dry, cracked  
    earth.



## THE LAVENDER KITTEN

Miles and miles of pasture  
    rolled on before me.  
Covered with grass and clover  
    dyed pink, white, and blue.  
At the edge of the fluctuating  
    sea of watercolors  
Sat a lavender kitten.  
Its fur glinted from an oscillating  
    ray of pink.  
Quivered gently at the touch of a  
    swirling blue breeze.  
Its emerald eyes glittered  
And gazed blindly at the lighting  
    and fading sky of hazy red,  
Yellow, white, and blue.  
My heart knocked within my chest.  
I must have the lavender kitten!  
I ran across the multi-colored field,  
    my arms reaching forward.  
Time slowed.  
I tried to run faster  
    but moved twice as slowly.  
The blue breeze circled and tightened  
    around me,  
Holding me back.  
The kitten rose and stretched  
    sending lavender mist  
Swimming in every direction.  
It turned and started away  
    in huge, slow strides.

I followed and,  
    by a shimmering prism lake,  
I came within reach of the kitten.  
I offered my hand  
    and the kitten edged away,  
Farther and farther.  
The lake turned from crystal  
    to deep purple.  
I looked around.  
The colors began to melt.  
The red sun turned to dull gray.  
The color-filled sky turned to black.  
The grass and clover began  
    to wither and die.  
I looked down into the pool before me,  
There, at the bottom of  
    the orchid glass cage,  
Lay the lavender kitten.

David W. Martinez

NEW WAY, OLD WAY

Beauty in the old way of life—  
The dwellings they decorated so lovingly;  
A drum, a clear voice singing,  
And the sound of laughter.

You must want to learn from your mother,  
You must listen to old men  
    not quite capable of becoming white men.  
The white man is not our father.  
While we last, we must not die of hunger.  
We were a very Indian, strong, competent people,  
But the grass had almost stopped its growing,  
The horses of our pride were near their end.

Indian cowboys and foremen handled Indian herds.  
A cowboy's life appealed to them until economics and  
    tradition clashed.  
No one Indian was equipped to engineer the water's flow  
    onto a man's allotment.  
Another was helpless to unlock the gate.  
The union between a hydro-electric plant and  
Respect for the wisdom of the long-haired chiefs  
Had to blend to build new enterprises  
By Indian labor.

Those mighty animals graze once more  
    upon the hillside.  
At the Fair appear again our ancient costumes.  
A full-blood broadcasts through a microphone  
    planned tribal action.  
Hope stirs in the tribe,  
Drums beat and dancers, old and young, step forward.

We shall learn all these devices the white man has,  
We shall handle his tools for ourselves.  
We shall master his machinery, his inventions, his skills,  
    his medicine, his planning;  
But we'll retain our beauty  
And still be Indians!

## THIS IS TODAY

This is today,  
 Within walking distance of the waterhold,  
 Oil wells pump around the clock,  
     and it is less than a day's drive  
     to where factories build missiles  
     and rockets and space-age hardware.

This is today  
     but it has not yet come to those Navajos  
     who take their domestic water  
     from waterholes, and haul it  
     in horse-drawn wagons  
     to mud-walled hogans.

This is today.  
 It makes a beautiful picture  
     Provided the viewer's water  
     is piped into his home,  
     and the vehicle that brings him  
     to Navajo land  
     is pulled by a three-hundred-horse-power  
     engine.

This is today.  
     but the Navajos are not to be pitied  
 They who drink the brown water  
     and ride the wagons  
     find beauty in this scene.

This is their wealth  
 This is today.

## Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell

## MIRACLE HILL

I stand upon my miracle hill,  
    Wondering of the yonder distance.  
Thinking, When will I reach there?

I stand upon my miracle hill.  
The wind whispers in my ear.  
I hear the songs of old ones.

I stand upon my miracle hill.  
    My loneliness I wrap around me.  
It is my striped blanket.

I stand upon my miracle hill  
    And send out touching wishes  
To the world beyond hand's reach.

I stand upon my miracle hill.  
    The bluebird that flies above  
Leads me to my friend, the white man.

I come again to my miracle hill.  
    At last, I know the all of me—  
Out there, beyond, and here upon my hill.

From *Miracle Hill: The Story of a Navaho Boy*, by Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell and T.D. Allen. Copyright 1967 by the University of Oklahoma.

## THE NEW DIRECTION

This vanishing old road,  
     Through hail-like dust storm,  
 It stings and scratches,  
     Stuffy, I cannot breathe.

Here once walked my ancestors,  
     I was told by the old ones,  
 One can dig at the very spot,  
     And find forgotten implements.

Wasting no time I urged on,  
     Where I'd stop I knew not,  
 Startled I listened to the wind,  
     It whistled, screamed, cried,  
 "You! Go back, not this path!"

Then I recalled this trail  
     Swept away by the north wind,  
 It wasn't for me to follow,  
     The trail of the Long Walk.<sup>1</sup>

Deciding between two cultures,  
     I gave a second thought,  
 Reluctantly I took the new one,  
     The paved rainbow highway.

I had found a new direction.

<sup>1</sup>The Long Walk refers to one of the most tragic and pathetic episodes in the history of Anglo-Indian relations. Under the direction of General James Carleton and Colonel Christopher "Kit" Carson, the Navajo Indians of New Mexico were pursued, rounded up and driven to a wretched reservation on the banks of the Rio Pecos, in east-central New Mexico—the infamous Bosque Redondo.

## THE PATH I MUST TRAVEL

Within the curved edge of quarter moon  
I was told there is a road  
I must travel to meet the divine one,  
On this glittering crescent.

Awed, I tremble, enfolding tobacco  
The Almighty has given us,  
To put forth our faith prayers  
Rolled in the precious smoke.

I wait in patience for the light,  
Gazing at glowing galaxies  
Beyond the curve of risen silver bow.  
Silent, I sit listening.

Before me I see wrinkled old man,  
Torch in his right hand for me.  
I breathe in burning leaf smoke.  
I hear waterdrum and a rattle.

Fasting through the long hours,  
I stand before the universe  
I hold forth my hands four times,  
I see the Mighty One!

Within the whirling mist smoke,  
The drifting scent of cedar,  
The fluffy eagle feather wakes me.  
I step out into blinding space.



## THE FOUR DIRECTIONS

A century and eight more years,  
    Since Kit Carson rode from four directions,  
Deep into the heart of nomadic Navahos,  
    Burning, ravishing the Land of Enchantment.

Prairie grasses are once more  
    Growing as high as the horse's belly.  
Cradles of wrapped babies in colors  
    Of the rainbow again span the land.

I know my people will stand and rise again.  
    Now it is time.  
Pollen of yellow grain,  
    Scatter in the four directions.

## N. Scott Momaday

## THE BEAR

What ruse of vision  
escarping the wall of leaves,  
rending incision  
into countless surfaces,

would cull and color  
his somnolence, whose old age  
has outworn valor,  
all but the fact of courage?

Seen, he does not come,  
move, but seems forever there,  
dimensionless, dumb,  
in the windless noon's hot glare.

More scarred than others  
these years since the trap maimed him,  
pain slants his withers,  
drawing up the crooked limb.

Then he is gone, whole,  
without urgency, from sight,  
as buzzards control,  
imperceptibly, their flight.

## ANGLE OF GEESE

How shall we adorn  
 Recognition with our speech?—  
 Now the dead firstborn  
 Will lag in the wake of words.

Custom intervenes;  
 More than language means,  
 We are civil, something more:  
 The mute presence mulls and marks.

Almost of a mind,  
 We take measure of the loss;  
 I am slow to find  
 The mere margin of repose.

And one November  
 It was no longer in the watch,  
 As if forever,  
 Of the huge ancestral goose.

So much symmetry!  
 Like the pale angle of time  
 And eternity.  
 The great shape labored and fell.

Quit of hope and hurt,  
 It held a motionless gaze,  
 Wide of time, alert,  
 On the dark distant flurry.

EARTH AND I GAVE YOU TURQUOISE<sup>1</sup>

Earth and I gave you turquoise  
                   when you walked singing  
 We lived laughing in my house  
                   and told old stories  
 You grew ill when the owl cried  
 We will meet on Black Mountain

I will bring corn for planting  
                   and we will make fire  
 Children will come to your breast  
                   You will heal my heart  
 I speak your name many times  
 The wild cane remembers you

My young brother's house is filled  
                   I go there to sing  
 We have not spoken of you  
                   But our songs are sad  
 When Moon Woman goes to you  
 I will follow her white way

Tonight they dance near Chinle  
                   by the seven elms  
 There your loom whispered beauty  
                   They will eat mutton  
 and drink coffee till morning  
 You and I will not be there

I saw a crow by Red Rock  
                   standing on one leg  
 It was the black of your hair  
                   The years are heavy  
 I will ride the swiftest horse  
 You will hear the drumming hooves

<sup>1</sup> Turquoise has long occupied a prominent place in the mythology and folklore of the Indians of the Southwest. Indian tradition attributes many virtues to it, such as possessing the mystic power to help, protect and bring good fortune to the wearer.

## PIT VIPER

The cordate head<sup>1</sup> meanders through himself:  
 Metamorphosis. Slowly the new thing,  
 Kindled to flares along his length, curves out.  
 From the evergreen shade where he has lain,  
 Through inland seas and catacombs he moves.  
 Blurred eyes that ever see have seen him waste,  
 Acquire, and undiminished: have seen death—  
 Or simile—come nigh and overcome.  
 Alone among his kind, old, almost wise,  
 Mere hunger cannot urge him from this drowse.

<sup>1</sup>Heart shaped

BUTEO REGALIS<sup>2</sup>

His frailty discrete, the rodent turns, looks.  
 What sense first warns? The winging is unheard,  
 Unseen but as distant motion made whole,  
 Singular, slow, unbroken in its glide.  
 It veers, and veering, tilts broad-surfaced wings.  
 Aligned, the span bends to begin the dive  
 And falls, alternately white and russet,  
 Angle and curve, gathering momentum.

<sup>2</sup>Buteo refers to any of a genus of large, broad-winged, soaring hawks that prey on rodents. The Buteo Regalis is one of two species of the rough-legged hawk.

## Duane Niatum

## A TRIBUTE TO CHIEF JOSEPH (1840?-1904)

Never reaching the promised land in Canada,  
HIN-MAH-TOO-YAH-LAT-KET: "Thunder-rolling-in-the-mountains,"  
the fugitive chief sits in a corner  
of the prison car headed for Oklahoma,  
chained to his warriors,  
a featherless hawk in exile.

He sees out the window  
geese rise from the storm's center  
and knows more men died  
by snow blizzard  
than by cavalry shot.

Still his father's shield  
of Wallowa Valley deer and elk  
flashes in his eyes  
as coyote runs the circles  
and a cricket swallows the dark.

How many songs this elder  
sang to break the cycle  
of cold weather and disease  
his people coughed and breathed  
in this land of drifting ice.

Now sleepless as the door-guard,  
the train rattles like dirt in his teeth,  
straw in his eyes.  
Holding rage in the palm of his fist,  
his people's future spirals to red-forest dust.

leaves his bones on the track,  
his soul in the whistle.

THE WATERFALL SONG  
(for Rona)

From their first dawn, he embraced the night sensations;  
she who danced with him into the burning words.  
He wanted to feel her turn as the river turns,  
she who danced with him into the burning words.

He stepped toward the song she offered in the dark;  
she whose voice could stir the sparrow's heart.  
He asked for her hand because his life was there.  
She whose voice could stir the sparrow's heart.

He landscaped her home with the rarest stone;  
she planted the seeds that brought the wild to bloom.  
He carved her a bird the water filled with spirit.  
She planted the seeds that brought the wild to bloom.

He saw from her eyes the waterfall was blue;  
and it was she that changed the seasons of the wind.  
And in their solitude he gave nakedness the field,  
since it was she who kept the colors in the fall.

## THE OWL IN THE REARVIEW MIRROR

It was a miracle he glimpsed an owl sway  
sideways through his eye. He watched it roll  
back from the hills, hills ebbing like glaciers;  
swing across the sky like a pendulum.  
Does it follow stars through wheat fields  
because hunger calls, or moon is luminous?  
Does it tell him, not to ram the oak?  
As is, the bird seems content to shift his roots,  
plant him like a sapling in snow. For it  
pulls him into the back seat and out the window  
by the power of its agile, silent wing.  
He is the mouse paralyzed by its shadow dance.  
So he goes further, lets it drive him home,  
leave his soul soaring for the yellow sky.



## SONG FROM THE TOTEM MAKER

Why not view your family's past  
 from a less weathered shore?  
 You have a chance to forgive your wounds.  
 For you were the boy who often wished  
 he had burned his ancestors' longhouse  
 to the ground. Besides, you could never  
 blame the village shaker;  
 it was his stories that brought you comfort.

They showed how to see the owl  
 settle in the four directions, hear  
 the river run for salmon's way.  
 They cleared the path to where First People  
 circled until your feelings had wings,  
 to ease the morning's weight on your eyelids,  
 bury your pride in confusion's cave.

And I offered you when young a light  
 burden, seven days of rain, and another storm.  
 You saw the water dreamers run away with hope:  
 Thunderbird because he's entombed in clay,  
 teeth, and shell; Raven because it can't see  
 the sun touch the crocus beneath the ferns  
 without laughing so hard it thunders.

The water dreamers also ran away  
 because bluejay watched the people miss his  
 humor, his praise to the women who swam  
 the river; whale because it's now desert dust.  
 Beaver because his last dam demolished  
 the rainbow that held up the stars.  
 Since beaver didn't keep his nose to the current.

the winter floods took his dam to another country.  
 And you never appreciated the time wolf  
 roamed through your terror of the forest's  
 destruction. But he'll stop when you stop  
 running from the dead and the cave drummers.  
 So the next dawn wolf calls to you,  
 listen to his rattle that shakes you to shore,

as it was your ignorance that started the tremor  
 that led the sharks to your dying village,  
 the dwindling stream inching toward the breakers.

## Calvin O'John

## DANCING TEEPEES

Dancing teepees  
High up in the Rocky Mountains,  
Dancing teepees  
Dance on the grassy banks of Cripple Creek  
With laughing fringes in the autumn sun.  
Indian children  
Play with bows and arrows  
On the grassy banks of Cripple Creek.  
Indian women  
Gather kindling  
To start an evening fire,  
Dancing teepees  
Dance against fire-lighted autumn trees.  
Braves returning  
Home from raiding,  
Gallantly ride into camp  
With horses, scalps, and ornaments.  
Dancing teepees,  
Sleep now on the grassy banks of Cripple Creek  
High up in the Rocky Mountains.

Simon Ortiz

TEN O'CLOCK NEWS

berstein disc jockey  
telling about indians  
on ten o'clock news  
o they have been screwed  
i know everybody's talking  
about indians yesterday  
murdering conquest the buffalo  
in those hills in kansas  
railroad hustling progress  
today maybe tomorrow in  
ghost dance dreams we'll  
find out berstein doesn't know  
what indians say these days  
in wino translations  
he doesn't know that and even  
indians sometimes don't know  
because they believe in trains  
and what berstein tells them  
on ten o'clock news

## THIS PREPARATION

these sticks i am holding  
i cut down at the creek.  
i have just come from there.  
i listened to the creek  
speaking to the world,  
i did my praying,  
and then i took my knife  
and cut the sticks.  
there is some sorrow in leaving  
fresh wounds in growing things,  
but my praying has relieved  
some of my sorrow. prayers  
make things possible, my uncle said.  
before i left i listened again  
for words the creek was telling,  
and i smelled its smell which  
are words also. and then  
i tied my sticks into a bundle  
and came home, each step a prayer  
for this morning and a safe return.  
my son is sleeping still  
in this quietness, my wife  
is stirring at her cooking,  
and i am making this preparation.  
i wish to make my praying  
into these sticks like gods have taught.

## SMOKING MY PRAYERS

now that i have lighted my smoke  
 i am motioning to the east  
 i am walking in thought that direction  
 i am listening for your voices  
 i am occurring in my mind  
     this instance that i am here  
 now that i have breathed inwards  
 i am seeing the mountains east  
 i am travelling to that place of birth  
 i am aware of your voices  
 i am thinking of your relationship with me  
     this time in the morning that we are together  
 now that i have breathed outwards  
 i am letting you take my breath  
 i am moving for your sake  
 i am hearing the voices of your children  
 i am not myself but yourself now  
     at this time your spirit has captured mine  
 now that i am taking breath in again  
 i have arrived back from that place of birth  
 i have travelled fast and surely  
 i have heard what you wanted me to hear  
 i have become whole and strong with yourself  
  
     this morning i am living with your breath.

## RELOCATION

don't talk to me no words  
 don't frighten me  
 for i am in the blinding city  
 the lights  
 the cars  
 the deadened glares  
     tear my heart  
     and close my mind  
 who questions my pain  
 the tight knot of anger  
 in my breast  
 i swallow hard and often  
 and taste my spit  
 and it does not taste good  
 who questions my mind

i came here because i was tired  
 the BIA taught me to cleanse myself  
 daily to keep a careful account of my time  
 efficiency was learned in catechism  
 the sisters spelled me good in white  
 and i came here to feed myself  
 corn and potatoes and chili and mutton  
 did not nourish me it was said  
 so i agreed to move  
 i seem walking in sleep  
 down streets down streets grey with cement  
 and glaring glass and oily wind  
 armed with a pint of wine

i cheated the children to buy  
 i am ashamed  
 i am tired  
 i am hungry  
 i speak words  
 i am lonely for hills  
 i am lonely for myself

Agnes Pratt

DEATH TAKES ONLY A MINUTE

Agonies of change  
 can be heard  
 in the lonely silence  
 of a single raindrop  
 bending a leaf downward.

All this is distant  
 and will fade further back  
 when my relatives assemble to haggle  
 over the price of dying.

EMPATHY

Our glances spin silver threads,  
 Weaving a web of closeness;  
 Catching, holding  
 A love too tenuous for words.  
 Woven and remembered  
 In silence, those hours  
 When time had something  
 To do with the moon.

Stay, or flee  
 As you must—  
 Uncountable the ways  
 We seek ourselves  
 I will keep  
 The interwoven strands of you  
 As I keep the enduring moon  
 And its web of shadow.

## Fred Red Cloud

### A TALE OF LAST STANDS

His hair was yellow and long  
and shone like singing hills  
There were times when he  
spoke as our friend  
and waved the branch of peace.

But the night in the Metropolitan Hotel  
when he wrote the unremembered  
truth that his ambition  
trampled old words into dust,  
the night he threw splinters  
of justice onto the floor and  
promised death to Sitting Bull,

That night he lost his name  
of honor with my people.  
What was to be his ambush  
of us, turned out to be  
our ambush of him.

Now the tumbleweeds blow down  
cemetery rows of Indian  
and trooper. Little streams  
wander restlessly in the  
low hills and yesterdays  
blur into sluggish tomorrows.



Rain and wind and sun  
float leisurely over the  
land of the Little Big Horn  
and the wild duck's cry  
drifts down from eternal heights.

My people felt the shock of  
national defeat in battles  
that followed. Our war shirts  
were hung on prison walls,  
and reservations fused us into  
a sleep-muddied people.

The heel of time walked on  
and now the white man  
watches the mountain waters  
crash against his empire.

I sit with eyes like brown wounds  
and remember a yellow-haired laugh  
in a place where  
tumbleweeds blow  
and I think of Dien Bien Phu,  
and Belgian Congo, other Aryan  
last stands, sacrificial totem games,  
and a bitter laugh  
sprawls across my memory-wrinkled face.

Now . . . others ride the black-bones  
horse of sorrow  
as I watch from the shadows of time.

MACHU PICCHU, PERU<sup>1</sup>

A railroad suddenly hops out of the quartz mountain. Edges of time explode at the eyes, painful as a child's nightmare. Double-jointed rivers stretch toward purple, cantilevered mountains honed by the leather sky as the steam engine coughs like a widow in church. 12,000 feet. Cuzqueno Indian babies sit straight as daisies. An airplane stutters overhead. A net of sky falls on the hardness of speed here, near the fabled Bridge of San Luis Rey.

Below . . . a stone shelf holding an offering, a small inn, fragile as first frost. The sky becomes a beggar, leans forward and holds out an alms bowl. My ears crack with the sharpness of a spine of clay in a Lima potter's hand. Height soaks away. We are where lizards play in the ruined stone of Machu Picchu. Smells of history. are copper at the nose, here, where Angels fall. My feet touch the 3000-stone path of Inca princes and fairy tales dribble from the mouths of the betel-stained guides.

<sup>1</sup> An ancient fortress city in the Peruvian Andes, about 50 miles northeast of Cuzco.

## Carter Revard

## THE COYOTE

There was a little rill of water, near the den,  
 That showed a trickle, all the dry summer  
 When I was born. One night in late August it rained;  
 The thunder waked us. Drops came crashing down  
 In dust, on stiff blackjack leaves, on lichened rocks,  
 Rain came in a pelting rush down over the hill,  
 Wind puffed wet into the cave; I heard sounds  
 Of leaf-drip, rustle of soggy branches in gusts of wind.

And then the rill's tune changed: I heard a rock drop  
 And set new ripples gurgling in a lower key.  
 Where the new ripples were, I drank, next morning,  
 Fresh muddy water that set my teeth on edge.  
 I thought how delicate that rock's poise was:  
 The storm made music, when it changed my world.

## ON THE BRIGHT SIDE

When the green grass rose in the spring  
     our Jersey's milk turned yellow  
     with cream and tasted musky  
     with different weed-flavors; and she'd  
     be bellowing to be milked  
 before the sun got up—which was all right,  
     it gave us longer days, especially weekends.  
 One disadvantage though  
     of getting up so early

was that we'd generally watch the sun come up,  
 and mornings when it was red and slow  
 we'd make a game of staring at its rising  
 until our eyes were filled with slow  
     blood-bubbles and  
     gold balloons floating  
 transparently over meadows with  
     birds winging darkly through them—  
 this blinded us of course  
     to other things,  
     so when we went to breakfast  
 inside the flyspecked house the air was dim  
     as a cathedral, with white glasses  
     of milk standing calmly  
     for hands to reach and bring  
     their creamy coldness up  
 to dazzled eyes and mouth,  
     and the chunk of butter melting  
     into the bowl of hot oatmeal  
     swam out of focus like  
     a tiny sun as we poured  
 flurries of sugar-crystals down from spoons upon it  
     and stirred in Jersey cream, then  
     crumbled the toast-with-butter in it  
 and spooned up crunch-chewy pieces  
     like morning sunlight  
     while the roaches went scrambling for crumbs  
     on threadbare oilcloth and our fledgling  
     wild goldfinch chirruped, waiting  
 for the fattened roaches we'd bring him on pins as soon  
     as the sun got out of our eyes  
     and into our hungry bellies.

## Ronald Rogers

### TAKING OFF

1

Barely did the dust settle  
huddle down  
than the wind blew  
kicked it up  
slapped me right in the eyes.

“Oh, Hell,” I said.

2

The dust sits on everything  
everyone  
on the streets  
on everyone  
I blow (whew)  
to clean them off.

They cloud up.

3

I stuff my bag  
full of clothes  
the road is dusty  
the road sign is dusty  
my thumb is dusty  
I blink.

Somebody gives me a ride.

4  
The car starts up  
we're off  
the road is smooth  
zump zump zump  
go the white paint lines  
beneath us.

I feel superior.

5  
The driver asks me  
"Where are you going?"  
"Beg pardon?" I say  
The driver laughs  
slaps my back  
the dust blooms up  
I cough.

I tell him to stop the car.

6  
I am sitting on my bag  
I sigh  
I put out my thumb  
zzem  
goes a car.  
The dust swirls up.

## KINDERGARTEN

In my kindergarten class  
 there were windows around the room  
 and in the morning we all took naps.  
 We brought our own rugs and crayons  
 because that was responsibility  
 and we learned to tell the colors apart.

Sometimes we read stories  
 about wrinkled old pirates with parrots  
 who talked about cities of gold.  
 And then we'd talk about cities of gold  
 with streets of silver  
 and we'd laugh and laugh and laugh.

The floors were all made of wood  
 in long, long strips—  
 brown wood with un-peely wax.  
 One day the toughest kid in school  
 got mad and yelled at the teacher  
 and we smiled when he went to the principal.

The principal had a long black whip  
 studded through with razor blades  
 and nine lashes on it.  
 The principal wore a black suit  
 and smoked Pall Malls  
 and wrote bad notes to your father.

In my kindergarten class  
 there were windows around the room  
 and in the morning we all took naps.  
 We brought our own rugs and crayons  
 because that was responsibility  
 and we learned to tell the colors apart.

## Wendy Rose

CAGED WINGS: FIRST IMPRESSIONS FROM THE BOAT  
ALCATRAZ ISLAND/INDIAN LAND, 1970

Broken plaster wings,  
loose feathers in a dance  
together, bend encaged  
the vision  
of western eyes tight  
and cold into walls  
that stink of humanity  
pulstate forbidden  
life; in the plaster  
charred places, pomegranate paint  
dripped to the floor  
from graffiti and ice  
thin enough to skip  
on the edge of the fog.  
We must not be walking here  
heavy-footed, merely human,  
for we need to fly  
this one time and  
be drumming our wings  
close together, clouding our eyes  
with ourselves and  
not be led away.



The rain comes little  
by little each day  
and the mist  
thins and billows  
beneath the steel bridge.  
There is a song at our center  
and a campfire crackling  
with the rags and branches that built it  
to keep out the Coast Guard, make bright  
the night that would hide  
helicopters and guns. At midnight  
the singers shine  
and beat the drum of  
a new kind of sun.

## Wendy Rose

## I EXPECTED MY SKIN AND MY BLOOD TO RIPEN

“When the blizzard subsided four days later (after the massacre), a burial party was sent to Wounded Knee. A long trench was dug. Many of the bodies were stripped by whites who went out in order to get the ghost shirts and other accoutrements the Indians wore . . . the frozen bodies were thrown into the trench stiff and naked . . . only a handful of items remain in private hands . . . exposure to snow has stiffened the leggings and moccasins, and all the objects show the effects of age and long use. . . .” There follows: Moccasins at \$140, hide scraper at \$350, buckskin shirt at \$1200, woman’s leggings at \$275, bone breastplate at \$1000.

*Plains Indian Art: Sales Catalog by Kenneth Canfield, 1977*

I expected my skin and my blood  
 to ripen  
 not be ripped from my bones;  
 like green fruit I am peeled  
 tasted, discarded; my seeds are stepped on,  
 and crushed  
 as if there were no future. Now  
 there has been  
 no past.           My own body gave up the beads  
 my own arms handed the babies away  
 to be strung on bayonets, to be counted  
 one by one like rosary stones and then  
 to be tossed to each side of life  
 as if the pain of their burning  
 had never been.

My feet were frozen to the leather,  
pried apart, left behind—bits of flesh  
on the moccasins, bits of papery deerhide  
on the bones. My back was stripped  
of its cover, its quilling intact; was torn,  
was taken away, was restored.

My leggings were taken like in a rape  
and shriveled to the size of stick figures  
like they had never felt  
the push of my strong woman's body  
walking in the hills.

It was my own baby whose cradleboard I held.  
Would've put her in my mouth  
like a snake  
if I could, would've turned her  
into a bush or old rock  
if there'd been enough magic  
to work such changes. Not enough magic  
even to stop the bullets.  
Not enough magic  
to stop the scientists.  
Not enough magic  
to stop the collectors.

Norman H. Russell

THE EYES OF THE CHILD DO NOT SEE ME

i look into the eyes of the child  
the eyes of the child do not see me  
the eyes of the child look somewhere else

i look down at the sand  
the child has a stick in his hand  
the child makes pictures in the sand

what do the pictures mean?  
what do the eyes of the child see?

i speak to the child  
i ask him what he draws in the sand  
the child looks at me and says nothing

the child arises and runs into the forest  
i sit still looking a long time at his pictures  
something in the sand is speaking to me.

## THE WORLD HAS MANY PLACES MANY WAYS

in the forest hearing  
the anger of the black and yellow  
wasp in the old tree going  
down the sky to the eating  
mouth of the earth i walk  
a new path around i cannot  
speak friend words to  
this creature who  
only speaks war

in the black night coming  
out of the black lake water  
mists of mosquitoes seeking  
blood of my body i cover  
myself with the blanket waiting  
the sun of the morning which sends  
the night creatures flying  
into the trees and the waters  
their secret homes to hide

one goes his way with wise feet  
one walks with open eyes  
one sleeps in his own places  
the man has his place in the world  
the world has many places many ways  
only the creature who leaves his own place  
only the creature who walks another's way  
will be killed will be eaten.

## THE GREAT WAY OF THE MAN

the eagle's eye is the strongest eye  
the arm of the bear is the strongest arm  
nothing flies so well as the swallow  
nothing swims so fast as the fish  
nothing runs so quick as the deer  
nor leaps so far as the panther  
the wolverine's teeth are the strongest teeth  
the yellow wasp has the greatest poison  
every animal has its one thing  
every animal has its one great way

which is the great way of the man?  
what is the thing that he does?

the man goes everywhere and does everything  
the man sees almost as well as the eagle  
the man runs almost as fast as the deer  
the man swims almost as fast as the fish

the man is more cunning than the fox  
the man is more cunning than all the animals  
the gods of the man are more powerful  
than the gods of the animals.

## CLERK'S SONG II

what does the forest do monday through friday?  
i was a boy; i knew; now i have forgotten  
all my dreams are dying  
all my dreams are dead

i leave at night i return at night  
what does the world do during the day  
the world works the world works  
all my dreams are dying

young girls lie on beaches young boys play  
this is what the world does during the day  
i read my newspaper  
all my dreams are dying

i am going to a white hell there will be  
typewriters typing file cases standing  
secretaries with spread legs  
all my dreams are dying

when i turn the television off silence comes  
like a black cloak and holds me  
trembling trembling  
all my dreams are dead.

## Bruce Severy

## POEMS

my poems  
 are the sounds  
 of pigeons  
 feathering the moonlight.

feathering the twitch  
 in the eye  
 of a hawk  
 heavy with hoot sleep.

## DESERTED FARMS POEM

alone hunting.  
 on the hill behind  
 a deserted farm gone awry.  
 junk strewn about.  
 wrecked by vandals.  
 by Tyrkir, a mercenary, a German.  
 by Thorhall, later lost.  
 by Eirik the Red.  
 found Vinland: old way of saying.  
 astragalus.  
 oxytropis, maydelliana.  
 vetch.  
 locoweed.  
 a cow's jaw on the prairie.  
 teeth of the old ships  
 scattered around.



## OPENING DAY

I hear ghosts of grouse  
in wheat stubble  
or late barley.

grouse ghosts  
eat buffalo berries  
and cluck.

but they never fly out.

I walk all day.

I hunt.

I hear shots banging out of empty guns.

until the sun  
goes back to the lake.

I have many birds  
inside me  
already.

## STRUGGLE FOR THE ROADS

prairie grass:

new sprouts  
in the tire ruts  
of the dirt roads.

trucks and buses  
roll out the roads  
like dough:

trucks and buses  
and the seasons  
of new dust.

but night creatures  
keep reseeding  
from invisible bags of seeds.

and sky gods water  
from secret ponds  
hidden in the stars  
of the upper limbs  
of the cottonwoods.

## FIRST AND LAST

as the first congress  
 was called:  
 assembly of elders,  
 assembly of soldiers:

as the first issue of debate  
 was debated  
 against Kish, first given  
 after the flood:

as the first vote  
 was taken:  
 Gilgamesh voted there:

as the first sanction of war  
 was passed down:  
 and: as the war  
 was lost:  
 as all wars have been lost:

as I, chronicler,  
 inscribe this  
 in the lasting clay  
 of the banked Tigris:

the river that flows  
 first and last:  
 through the uneven land  
 of our memory.



## Soge Track

## INDIAN LOVE LETTER

Lady of the crescent moon  
 tonight I look at the sky  
 You are not there  
 You are not mad at me, are you?  
 "You are angry at the people,  
 Yes, I know."

they are changing  
 be not too hard

If you were taken to  
 the mission school,  
 not because you wanted,  
 but someone thought it best for you  
 you too would change.

They came out of nowhere  
 telling us how to eat our food  
 how to build our homes  
 how to plant our crops.  
 Need I say more of what they did?  
 All is new—the old ways are nothing.

they are changing  
 be not too hard

I talk to them  
 they turn their heads.  
 Do not be hurt—you have me  
 I live by the old ways  
 I will not change.

Tonight—my prayer plumes in hand  
with the white shell things—  
to the silent place I will go  
(It is for you I go, please be there.)  
Oh! Lady of the crescent moon  
with the corn-silk hair—I love you!  
                  they are changing  
                  be not too hard

<sup>1</sup> According to Navajo mythology, Hasjelti and Hostjoghon were the children of Ahsonnutli, the turquoise, and Yolaikaiason (white-shell woman, wife of the Sun). Ahsonnutli placed an ear of white corn and Yolaikaiason an ear of yellow corn on the mountain where the fogs meet. The corn conceived, the white corn giving birth to Hasjelti and the yellow corn to Hostjoghon. These two became the great song-makers of the world. They gave to the mountain of their nativity (Henry Mountain in Utah) two songs and two prayers; they then went to Sierra Blanca (Colorado) and made two songs and prayers and dressed the mountain in clothing of white shell with two eagle plumes placed upright upon the head.

Also, according to myth, when the Indians see the silk on the cornstalk they are reminded of the beautiful woman with long light hair who has not forgotten them.

## Winifred Fields Walters

### NAVAJO SIGNS

How can you know, or understand, our loss  
 The rough-edged feel of poverty that came  
 to us in broken treaties' scourging hour?  
 Your skin is much too pale, or else too black  
 (Though white or colored skin is not the point).  
 You never lived with legend, ancient tales,  
 Told many times around a hogañ fire  
 While bitter winter sapped the very flames.  
 You never slept an infant's passive sleep  
 Bound in a cradleboard, handcarved and laced  
 The way the Holy Ones taught us in days  
 Long past, beyond our farthest memory.  
 You never tended sheep in lambing time  
 Nor watched lambs frolic, stiff-kneed, in the rain.  
 You never knew serenity of life  
 In tune with nature's balanced give and take,  
 That total, grateful sense of solitude,  
 That prayer of thanks breathed out for hunter's skill,  
 A prayer which reaches silently to the  
 Great Source, as close in red rock canyons as  
 In rich and hallowed chapels made by men.  
 To you, tradition seems a binding thing,  
 But there are those of us who turn ourselves,  
 At least within our hearts, to that which was,  
 And was so handsomely; reluctant still  
 To lay away such beauty and such peace,  
 As brotherhood beyond the clan or tribe,  
 That precious dignity in which a people walked  
 The pollen path: that timeless way,  
 So simple, so complex, so nearly gone.

## Archie Washburn

### HOGAN

Hogan  
 Sitting against  
 The flying dust of wind.  
 Here and there flows the old raggy  
 Long johns.

### UNKNOWN SMOKE

Out in the far distance away  
 I saw a cloud of smoke  
 Flowing into the gentle air,  
 Wondering what it was from here  
 Where I was standing all puzzled up,  
 With a sway of clean fresh air  
 Blowing through my black crisp hair.

Not knowing what it really was I stood  
 With strong sorrow break-down,  
 With many known and unknown voices  
 In the background of my image.  
 Looking around with astonishment it looked on my  
 Face among the crowds with many unknown  
 And known faces of the crowd.

Wishing what was happening  
 In the far distance in the west,  
 Everything turned out clear with a siren  
 Sounding through the town going towards west.  
 The siren sounded loud and turned out with faded sound  
 In the distant far away.  
 Still the smoke floated around in the clear day.  
 Wondering what was happening in the distance,  
 I only know that it's an unknown smoke in  
 The far distance in the west.



## James Welch

### HARLEM, MONTANA: JUST OFF THE RESERVATION

We need no runners here. Booze is law  
 and all the Indians drink in the best tavern.  
 Money is free if you're poor enough.  
 Disgusted, busted whites are running  
 for office in this town wise enough  
 to qualify for laughter. The constable,  
 a local farmer, plants and the jail with wild  
 raven-haired stiffs who beg just one more drink.  
 One drunk, a former Methodist, becomes a saint  
 in the Indian church, bugs the plaster man  
 on the cross with snakes. If his knuckles broke,  
 he'd see those women wail the graves goodbye.

Goodbye, goodbye, Harlem on the rocks,  
 so bigoted, you forget the latest joke,  
 so lonely, you'd welcome a battalion of Turks  
 to rule your women. What you don't know,  
 what you will never know or want to learn—  
 Turks aren't white. Turks are olive, unwelcome,  
 alive in any town. Turks would use  
 your one dingy park to declare a need for loot.  
 Turks say bring it, step quickly, lay down and dead.

Here we are when men were nice. This photo, hung  
 in the New England Hotel lobby, show them nicer  
 than pie, agreeable to the warring bands of redskins  
 who demanded protection money for the price of food.  
 Now, only Hutterites out north are nice. We hate  
 them. They are tough and their crops are always good.  
 We accuse them of idiocy and believe their belief all wrong.

Harlem, your hotel is overnamed, your children  
are raggedy-assed but you go on, survive  
the bad food from the two cafes that peddle  
your hate for the wild who bring you money.  
When you die, if you die, will you remember  
The three young bucks who shot the grocery up,  
locked themselves in and cried for days, we're rich,  
help us, oh God, we're rich.

### THE MAN FROM WASHINGTON

The end came easy for most of us.  
Packed away in our crude beginnings  
in some far corner of a flat world,  
we didn't expect much more  
than firewood and buffalo robes  
to keep us warm. The man came down,  
a slouching dwarf with rainwater eyes,  
and spoke to us. He promised  
that life would go on as usual,  
that treaties would be signed, and everyone—  
man, woman and child—would be inoculated  
against a world in which we had no part,  
a world of wealth, promise and fabulous disease.

## DREAMING WINTER

Don't ask me if these knives are real.  
I could paint a king or show a map  
the way home—to go like this:  
wobble me back to a tiger's dream,  
a dream of knives and bones too common  
to be exposed. My secrets are ignored.

Here comes the man I love. His coat is wet  
and his face is falling like the leaves,  
tobacco stains on his Polish teeth.  
I could tell jokes about him—one up  
for the man who brags a lot, laughs  
a little and hangs his name on the nearest knob.  
Don't ask me. I know it's only hunger.

I saw that king—the one my sister knew  
but was allergic to. Her face ran until  
his eyes became the white of several winters.  
Snow on his bed told him that the silky tears  
were uniformly mad and all the money in the world  
couldn't bring him to a tragic end. Shame  
or fortune tricked me to his table, shattered  
my one standing lie with new kinds of fame.

Have mercy on me. Lord, really. If I should die  
before I wake, take me to that place I just heard  
banging in my ears. Don't ask me. Let me join  
the other kings, the ones who trade their knives  
for a sack of keys. Let me open any door,  
stand winter still and drown in a common dream.

## ONE MORE TIME

## 1.

Where he really hung, there  
on the tree, a promising star  
and great child of wonder,  
I sit in memory of yellow lights,  
the fantasies of lovely aunts  
at Christmas time. The Eve  
astounds itself with a pale snow.

Children in their socks rush by me,  
bent on odd deliveries—the promise  
a child made them years ago  
before we felt the twinge  
of common guilt. How far  
we have come, how sacred is the snow  
that eats like cancer at our bones.

## 2.

How many women say, Child, wrap me  
in your camel robe, lay me down,  
spread in the straw and chaff  
of all my poor loves' salvation.  
Tender me, Child, one quick kiss  
before your terrible road strikes off  
the broad fantasies of your mother's way.

## 3.

I am basking in the white rain  
of my father's seed. I do not wish  
to come, to coat the limbs of my  
father's tree a second time.  
The salvation's in my bones like cancer  
and I wish to die like men.

Roberta Hill Whiteman

STAR QUILT

These are notes to lightning in my bedroom.  
A star forged from linen thread and patches.  
Purple, yellow, red like diamond suckers, children

of the star gleam on sweaty nights. The quilt unfolds  
against sheets, moving, warm clouds of Chinook.  
It covers my cuts, my red birch clusters under pine.

Under it your mouth begins a legend,  
and wide as the plain, I hope Wisconsin marshes  
promise your caress. The candle locks

us in forest smells, your cheek tattered  
by shadow. Sweetened by wings, my mothlike heart  
flies nightly among geraniums.

We know of land that looks lonely,  
but isn't, of beef with hides of velveteen,  
of sorrow, an eddy in blood.

Star quilt, sewn from dawn light by fingers  
of flint, take away those touches  
meant for noisier skins,

anoint us with grass and twilight air,  
so we may embrace, two bitter roots  
pushing back into the dust.

## OVERCAST DAWN

This morning I feel dreams dying.  
One trace is this feather  
fallen from a gull,  
with its broken shaft,  
slight white down,  
and long dark tip  
that won't hold air.  
How will you reach me  
if all our dreams are dead?  
Will I find myself  
as empty as an image,  
that death mask of a woman  
reflected in car windows?  
Help me, for every bird  
remembers as it preens  
the dream that lifted  
it to flight.  
Help me, for the sky  
is close with feathers,  
falling today  
from sullen clouds.

## VARIATIONS FOR TWO VOICES

## I

Where do we live?

Underneath sunset.

How long have we been here?

Since your grandfather's death  
when war came without effort  
and hearts didn't own  
a tear or a victory.

We stand in a stranger's field  
beyond pardon.

What do we do?

We hide. We bargain.

We answer each question  
with a difficult anger,  
map the future for heartache  
and rattle old bones.

When is it time?

Time is that beggar  
living in the basement.

He dictates to us  
when to move, how to dream.  
Run and he'll be there  
waiting at crossroads,  
with pitch for your ribcage  
and pins for your eyes.

Who'll come to save us?

No one, Nothing.

Yet when the wind stirs

I hear voices call us  
inside the snow drift.

I've heard it those nights  
when snow writhes before Spring.

Don't ever listen.

Don't ever listen.

Don't listen. What  
it can bring!

## II

Where do we live?

Inside this morning.

How long have we been here?

Only the lakes remember  
our arrival. Go there at dawn  
when reeds ride the slow wash.

An answer will come  
from the small world of crayfish.

What do we do?

Balance our shadows  
like oaks in bright sunlight,  
stretch and tumble  
as much as we're able,  
eat up the light  
and struggle with blindness.

When is it time?

Time is a thrush  
that preens in the wood  
and sings on a slender branch  
in your ribcage. Listen  
to what comes on invisible wings  
darting above the blue roots  
of flowers. Fly, Dragon  
fly. Now the bird sings.

Who'll come to save us?

For some, it's the rattling  
cloud, the air before evening.

Come, take my hand,  
for all that it's worth.

Our hearts learn  
much too soon  
how to speak like mountain  
stones.



Donna Whitewing

AUGUST 24, 1963—1:00 A.M.—OMAHA

Heavy breathing fills all my chamber  
Sinister trucks prowls  
    down dim-lit alleyways.

Racing past each other,  
    cars toot obscenities.

Silence is crawling in open windows  
    smiling and warm.

Suddenly,  
    crickets and cockroaches  
    join in the madness:  
    cricking and crawling

Here I am!

A portion of some murky design.

Writing,  
    because I cannot sleep,  
    because I could die here.

## A VEGETABLE, I WILL NOT BE

Who would suspect, or even know  
 the ivory-white innocence  
 of steaming hot cake:

Not you?  
 Let me tell you something.  
 Wheat grows a pure gold coat.  
 Grazing is plush green plunder.

Well,  
     it ought to be splendid!  
 Wheat, fed on bones  
     for its white flesh,  
     ate gold teeth from skulls  
     scattered through the yard,  
     for a coat.

Green grasses:  
     from green flesh at full moon.  
 Harvesting wheat,  
     a man fell dead from heart attacks.

To the Sod!  
 This hot cake is moist  
     and steams of three tablespoons milk—  
     from a dying cow.

When time stretches me to nothing,  
     read instructions of my burial carefully.

It's all taped to the bottom  
     of an oatmeal box—  
     third cupboard to the left as you enter the kitchen,  
     bottom shelf.

It reads:

“Lay me low in the wheat yards.  
 Fill my head with gold teeth.  
 I could not risk grassing to cows for milk;  
 Cows dry up sometimes.  
 I'd rather be a hot cake.  
 I will not be a bowl.  
     of peas!”

## Ray Young Bear

### WRONG KIND OF LOVE

he placed the medicine  
over the skillet  
which held glowing ashes.  
then with a blanket  
he formed himself  
into a small hill.  
it grew each time  
he inhaled. a song  
followed making everything  
complete: the girl who  
possessed him would soon  
realize the powers of  
the northern medicine men.

### WARRIOR DREAMS

he said, i want to be wrapped  
inside the american flag.  
there will be small kettles  
of food my mother prepared  
around my body. i will be  
so proud you will feel as  
if it was really intended.  
my brothers are flag toles  
and soon songs will flow  
me into them. no one is going  
to cry because they never  
really knew me. when the old  
men lower me into the earth  
one tear will appear on  
a side of my eye. it will  
roll a little ways and then stop.

## EMPTY STREAMS OF AUTUMN

A bible opens then closes real hard  
down the dirt road. The wind from the slam  
tells a story of a preacher who mumbles far  
away from the Church because he has read  
the good words to his children  
and he listened.

Indians at the gathering sing songs  
so that young boys are protected from  
death on lands across the oceans.  
Six who died stand and whisper  
these words songs never crossed the oceans. . . .

The red fox hears this and turns running  
with his front feet over his eyes  
so the sun does not blind him.  
In the morning he will drown  
under the icy waters of the river  
that was not there four days ago.

They said a naked brown baby  
without arms crawled from under  
the flag and shouted obscenities  
to the cloudless grey sky.

The thin bird flew high above  
the reaching old tree starving for wind.  
A small boy began to chop the tree  
because the shack needed firewood  
so his mother would die in warmth.

The fences shivered throughout the night  
and on the wire were hawks that  
flew after the sun.  
In the morning  
the thin bird cried when he  
found corn under the wet snow. . . .

## ONE CHIP OF HUMAN BONE

One chip of human bone.

it is almost fitting  
to die on the railroad tracks.  
i can easily understand  
how they felt on their  
staggered walks back.

there is something about  
trains, drinking, and being  
an indian with nothing to lose.

## THE LISTENING ROCK

the blueness of night  
grows quietly whispering  
at each thought  
you have heard of the rock  
which lies over fog.  
we are almost so magic  
and i breathe wings  
that brush the smoke  
disappearing inside bodies.  
below the river is day  
clear and rushing faster.  
it swallows the meaning  
of moon and people  
quiet within the pines  
killing four sleeping robins.  
a body wrapped in a flag  
was never seen as glory  
until our father asked us  
to help even when we were  
dying. he knew of these  
colors and never asked for  
reasons. earth heard them  
talking to themselves  
far away and always spoke  
back: you are home.  
the morning came while she  
peeled the potatoes for  
breakfast and it was then  
i felt as a part blending  
beautifully but not knowing  
where to go. the rock ate  
before us it was given  
words by her reminding  
our grandfathers to  
search for us when the  
rain falls and we do not hear.

## Biographical Sketches

Paula Allen, a Sioux-Laguna, was born in Cubero, New Mexico, in 1939. After receiving an M.F.A. from Oregon and a Ph.D. from the University of New Mexico, she went on to teach at Fort Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, then became Chairman of Native American Studies at San Francisco State. "Lament of My Father, Lakota" previously appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, 1973.

Carroll Arnett/Gogisgi was born in Oklahoma City in 1927 of Cherokee-French ancestry. After serving in the Marine Corps, he went on to study at the University of Oklahoma, Beloit College, and the University of Texas. He is currently Professor of English at Central Michigan University. He is the author of several volumes of poetry. "Out in the Woods" and "The Story of My Life" appeared in *Tsalagi* (The Elizabeth Press, 1976).

Liz Sohappy Bahe was given in 1969 her Palouse name, Om-na-ma, which was that of her great-grandmother on her father's side. She says of this: "My Indian name has made a great difference in my life. I really felt like a floating body until I received my name. My grandmother said that is how it was to be—no one is here on earth until he has an Indian name." Liz attended the Institute of American Indian Arts for most of two years and then studied art in Portland, Oregon, for a time. "Once Again" appeared previously in *The South Dakota Review*.

Charles G. Ballard is a Quapaw-Cherokee scholar. He taught English at the Chilocco Indian School for seven years and for three years at Northern Oklahoma College, Tonkawa. He is now at Idaho State University. He received his B.A. and M.A. from Oklahoma State University at Stillwater.

Jim Barnes was born in Oklahoma in 1931 of Choctaw descent. He received his B.A. at Southeastern State College in Oklahoma, before going on to complete his M.A. and Ph.D. at the University of Arkansas. He currently teaches at Northeast Missouri State University. "Contemporary Native American Poetry" originally appeared in the *Mississippi Valley Review*; "The Chicago Odyssey" appeared in *Shantih*; and "Autobiographical Flashback: Puma and Pokeweed" appeared in the *Long Pond Review*. All three poems were reprinted in his *The American Book of the Dead* (U. of Illinois Press, 1982).



Peter Blue Cloud/Aroniawenrate, a member of the Turtle clan, Mohawk Nation, was born at Caughnawaga Reserve in Quebec in 1927. A poet, carpenter and wood carver, he is also a former editor of *Akwesasne Notes*. "Sweetgrass" previously appeared in *White Corn Sister* (Strawberry Press, 1977).

Joseph Bruchac, Abenaki on his mother's side, was born in Saratoga Springs, New York, in 1942. He received a B.A. from Cornell University and an M.A. from Syracuse University. Widely published in anthologies and journals and author of several volumes of poetry, he is also the founder/editor of the *Greenfield Review*. "Not a Thing of Paint or Feathers" previously appeared in *The Good Message of Handsome Lake* (Unicorn Press, 1979); "Canticle" appeared in *Flow* (Cold Mountain Press, 1975); and "From An Inmate Rule Book" appeared in *There are No Trees Inside the Prison* (Blackberry Press, 1978).

Barney Bush, Shawnee-Cayuga, was born in Saline Co., Illinois in 1946. After studying art at the Institute of American Indian Arts, he finished a degree in humanities at Ft., Lewis College in Durango, Colorado, and earned a Master's degree in English and Fine Arts from the University of Idaho. "Leaving Oklahoma Again" previously appeared in his *Petroglyphs* (Greenfield Review Press, 1982).

Ramona Carden is a member of the Colville tribe. After elementary and high school in Washington, she spent her senior year at the Institute of American Indian Arts. She received her B.A. from Eastern Washington State College. "The Moccasins of An Old Man" and "Tumbleweed" previously appeared in *The Whispering Wind*, ed. T. D. Allen, 1972.

Martha Chosa is from the Pueblo at Jemez. "Drums" previously appeared in *The South Dakota Review*.

Grey Cohoe, Navajo, was born at Shiprock, New Mexico, and attended school there and at Phoenix Indian High School. During his two years at the Institute of American Indian Arts, 1965-67, he won many awards in painting, graphics, and writing. He was granted a scholarship and studied one summer at the Haystack Mountain School of Arts, Deer Isle, Maine. Since then, he has attended the University of Arizona. Grey has been given a one-man show at the university and has been included in many exhibits in this country and in Europe. His etchings and prints are notable for their action and clarity of line. His poem, "The Folding Fan," won first place in the Fifth Annual Vincent Price Awards at the Institute.

Anita Endrezze-Danielson, Yaqui, was born in 1952 in Long Beach, California. After graduating with honors from Eastern Washington State College,



she received an M.A. in creative writing from that school. Her poems have appeared in numerous magazines. "Shaman/Bear" previously appeared in *The Third Woman: Minority Writers of the United States*, ed. by Dexter Fisher (Houghton Mifflin, 1980).

Louise Erdrich was born in 1954 and grew up in Wahpeton, North Dakota. She is of German and Chippewa descent, and belongs to the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. Her stories have appeared in numerous magazines, and she recently won The National Book Critics Circle Award for Best Work of Fiction of 1984 for her novel *Love Medicine*. "Jacklight," "The Lady in the Pink Mustang," and "The Strange People" appeared previously in *Jacklight* (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1984).

Phillip William George, after two years in Vietnam and a long year on the California desert as an Army dental technician, attended Gonzaga University and the University of California, Santa Cruz. He is a member of the Nez Perce Nation at Lapwai, Washington. He spent much of his early life with his maternal great-grandmother, living and learning the ways of his ancestors. He arrived at the Institute of American Indian Arts in the fall of 1964, a graduate of Coulee Dam High School. He was a well-known Indian dance champion of the Pacific Northwest. "Night Blessing" and "Ask The Mountains" previously appeared in *The Whispering Wind*, ed. T. D. Allen, 1972.

Janet Campbell Hale is a Coeur d'Alene, born January 11, 1947. She grew up on the Yakima and Coeur d'Alene reservations. After leaving IAIA, she went to San Francisco. She is married, has two children, and graduated with honors in 1972 from the University of California, Berkeley, where she also earned her Master's degree in journalism the following year. She taught in the Department of Native American Studies for a time, and later worked as an editorial assistant for Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. "Tribal Cemetery" was published here for the first time, but later appeared in her first volume of poetry published by Greenfield Review Press, *Custer Lives in Humboldt Country*.

Ioy Harjo, Creek, was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma, in 1951. After attending high school at the Institute of American Indian Arts, she received her B.A. from the University of New Mexico, and her M.F.A. from the Iowa Writers Workshop. She has taught Native American Literature and Creative Writing at IAIA and Arizona State University. Author of three collections of poetry, she currently lives in Santa Fe, New Mexico. "Are You Still There" previously appeared in *The Last Song* (Puerto Del Sol, 1975); "The Woman Hanging from the Thirteenth Floor Window" previously appeared in *She Had Some Horses* (Thunder's Mouth Press, 1983).

Patty Harjo is Seneca-Seminole, was born December 29, 1947 in Miami, Oklahoma, and studied at the Institute of American Arts. "Musings" previously appeared in *The South Dakota Review*.

Lance Henson, a Cheyenne from Calumet, Oklahoma, was born in 1944. He is an ex-Marine, a member of the Cheyenne Dog Soldier Warrior Society, and the Native American Church. He earned a Master's degree in creative writing from the University of Tulsa, and he is the author of several volumes of poetry. "Warrior Nation Trilogy" previously appeared in his *Naming the Dark: Poems for the Cheyenne* (Point Riders Press, 1976); "Eight Poems for August" appeared in *Mistah* (Strawberry Press, 1977).

Linda Hogan, Chickasaw, was born in Denver, Colorado, in 1947 and grew up in Oklahoma. "Celebration: Birth of a Colt" previously appeared in *Calling Myself Home* (Greenfield Review Press, 1978).

Bruce Ignacio was born on the Utah and Duray Reservation in Ft. Duchene, Utah. He attended the Institute of American Indian Arts for three years where he majored in creative writing and jewelry. He exhibited jewelry at the Scottsdale Indian Arts Exhibit in 1971 where he won first prize for his work. He is presently employed in Ft. Duchene, Utah. "Lost" previously appeared in *The South Dakota Review*.

Maurice Kenny is a Mohawk, born in 1929 in Watertown, New York. Formerly poetry editor of *Akwesasne Notes*, he is co-editor of *Contact II* and publisher of Strawberry Press. Author of several volumes of poetry, he is also widely published in numerous journals. "Wild Strawberry" and "Corn-Planter" previously appeared in *Dancing Back Strong the Nation* (Blue Cloud Quarterly Press, 1979); "Corn-Planter" previously appeared in *The Smell of Slaughter* (White Pine Press, 1981).

King D. Kuka was born in Browning, Montana. A member of the Blackfeet tribe, he attended high school in Valier, Montana. In 1963 he transferred to the Institute of American Indian Arts, where he studied painting, sculpture, and creative writing. He has won recognition for both his poetry and paintings and sculptures. He is currently attending the University of Montana. "A Taste of Honey" previously appeared in *The Whispering Wind*, ed. T. D. Allen 1972.

Harold Littlebird is a full-blooded Indian of Santo Domingo and Laguna tribal descent. Born in Albuquerque, New Mexico, he attended public schools in California and Utah. From grades nine through twelve he was a student at

the Institute of American Indian Arts, from which he was graduated in 1969. "Death in the Woods" previously appeared in *The American Indian Speaks* (Dakota Press: U. of South Dakota, 1969).

Charles C. Long. "Yei-ie's Child" previously appeared in *The Writer's Reader*, ed. T. D. Allen (Institute of American Indian Arts, Santa Fe, New Mexico.)

Alonzo Lopez, Papago, was born in Pima County, Arizona, and attended Sells Consolidated School before entering the Institute of American Indian Arts as a sophomore. He was accepted for an interim year at Yale University when he left the Institute. He successfully completed his work at Yale and was admitted for regular college work, but he elected to transfer to Wesleyan University because curriculum offerings in American Indian Studies at Wesleyan included the Navajo language and other subjects that he desired. "Direction" and "I am Crying from Thirst" previously appeared in *The South Dakota Review*; "The Lavender Kitten" previously appeared in *The Whispering Wind*, ed. T. D. Allen, 1972.

David Martinez. "New Way, Old Way," and "This is Today" both previously appeared in *Anthology of Poetry and Verse* by American Indian Art Students (Department of Interior, BIA).

Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell was born in a hogan. He attended school at Ignacio, Colorado, until his junior year in high school when he transferred to the Institute of American Indian Arts. His father had died in service in World War II. His maternal grandparents cared for him and gave him his early training in the Navajo way. Barney attended Fort Lewis College, Durango, Colorado, for one year and transferred to Navajo Community College, Many Farms, Arizona. He is now teaching Social Science at the Round Rock School. "I'm really teaching Navajo culture," he says, and he is teaching in the Navajo language which he enjoys. "Miracle Hill" and "The New Direction" previously appeared in *The South Dakota Review*.

N. Scott Momaday is the son of a Kiowa father and Cherokee mother. Besides Vine Deloria, Jr., Momaday is probably the most widely read Indian author. He won the Pulitzer prize in 1969 for his widely acclaimed novel, *House Made of Dawn*. He also published *The way to Rainy Mountain* in 1969. He holds his Ph.D. from Stanford and is currently a professor in the English department at Stanford University. "Angle of Geese" appeared previously in *Southern Review*; the others printed in this volume all appeared previously in the *New Mexico Quarterly*.



Duane Niatum has written four volumes of poetry. *Songs for the Harvester of Dreams* (Univ. of Washington Press, 1981) won an American Book Award from the Before Columbus Foundation in 1982. In June, 1983 he was an invited participant in Rotterdam's International Poetry Festival. He edited a Harper & Row anthology, *Carriers of The Dream Wheel* (1975), which has become among the most widely read and known books on contemporary Native American poetry. He is presently working on a new anthology for Harper & Row. Niatum was born and lives in Seattle, Washington. He is of mixed-blood and a member of the Klallam Nation of Washington State. It is a Salishan tribe of salmon fishermen. The name means "strong people." His most recent teaching job was at the University of Washington in the winter of 1985. He has also published short fiction and essays. His work has been translated into many languages, including Dutch, Italian and Russian.

Calvin O'John, Ute-Navajo, was born in Denver, Colorado. He attended elementary school in Colorado before going to the Institute of American Indian Arts, where he was graduated in 1967. Besides being a poet, he is a widely exhibited painter, lauded by such authorities as the Curator of the Museum of Modern Art, N. Y. "Dancing teepees" previously appeared in *The Whispering Wind*, ed. T. D. Allen, 1972.

Simon Ortiz is of the Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico, and he is editor of the Navajo *Rough Rock News*. He spent a year studying at the University of Iowa in the International Writing Program. "Ten O'Clock News," "This Preparation" and "Smoking My Prayers" appeared previously in *The South Dakota Review*; "Relocation" appeared in *The Way: Anthology of American Indian Literature* (Vintage Books, 1972).

Agnes Pratt, Suquamish, was born at Bremerton, Washington. She attended North Kitsap Elementary School at Pouso, Washington, and three different high schools: North Kitsap; St. Euphrasia High, Seattle Washington; and the Institute of American Indian Arts Santa Fe, New Mexico. She stayed on at the Institute for two years of graduate work. "Death Takes Only a Minute" and "Empathy" previously appeared in *Literary Cavalcade*, 1969.

Fred Red Cloud, a Denver businessman, is Seneca by descent. He is one of the editors of *The Mustang Review*, a semi-annual poetry magazine. "A Tale of Last Stands" appeared previously in *Prairie Schooner*, 1970; "Machu Picchu, Peru" appeared in *Epoch*, 1971.

Carter Revard, Osage on his father's side, was born in Pawhuska, Oklahoma, in 1931. He earned degrees from the University of Tulsa, Oxford (on a Rhodes Scholarship), and Yale. He presently teaches at Washington University in St.

Louis. His poems have appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies. "The Coyote" and "On the Bright Side" previously appeared in his *Ponca War Dancers* (Point Riders Press, 1980).

Ronald Rodgers was born at the Indian Hospital in Claremore, Oklahoma. He is a member of the Cherokee Nation. At fifteen, he entered the Institute of American Indian Arts as a sophomore. His major interest became writing, particularly short stories. He also developed an aptitude for drama and acted several major roles in school and community performances. In his junior year at IAIA, Ron won a second place in the nationwide Scholastic Awards and his short story, "The Good Run," appeared in *Cavalcade* magazine for January, 1967. Ron attended San Francisco State College during the 1968-69 Haya-kawa-hiatus year, wrote on his own one term, and transferred mid-term, 1970, to UCLA. He thereafter transferred to the University of California at Santa Cruz. "Taking Off" appeared previously in *The South Dakota Review*; "Kindergarten" previously appeared in *The Whispering Wind*, ed. T. D. Allen, 1972.

Wendy Rose was born in Oakland, California, in 1948 of Hopi-Miwok-Cornish parents. She currently teaches at the University of California at Berkeley. Author of several volumes of poetry, she also edits *The American Indian Quarterly* and was the recipient of a 1982 NEA Fellowship. "Caged Wings" previously appeared in *What Happened When the Hopi Hit New York* (Contact II Publications, 1982); "I Expected My Skin and Blood To Ripen" previously appeared in *Academic Squaw: Reports to the World from the Ivory Tower* (Blue Cloud Quarterly Press, 1977).

Norman Russell is of Cherokee ancestry and is Vice President of Academic Affairs at Central State College, Edmund, Oklahoma. His first book of poems, *At the Zoo*, was published in 1969. "The World Has Many Places, Many Ways" and "The Eyes of the Child Do Not See Me" appeared previously in *Southwest Review*; "The Great Way of the Man" and "Clerk's Song II" appeared in the *South Dakota Review*.

Bruce Severy was born in Santa Monica, California. He did undergraduate work at Washington State University before graduating from the University of California, Long Beach. He also did graduate work there. Severy has been widely published in such journals as *Dakotah Territory*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Cafe Solo*, *Measure*, *Pinache*, *the Outsider*, and others. He is currently teaching English, Journalism and Drama at Drake High School in Drake, North Dakota.

Loyal Shegonee is from Potawatomi tribal group. "Loneliness" appeared previously in *The South Dakota Review*.

Soge Track is a Sioux-Pueblo from Taos. She was a student at the Institute of American Indian Arts. "Indian Love Letter" appeared previously in *The South Dakota Review*.

Winifred Fields Walters is part Choctaw, but says that she knows the Navajo, Zuni and Hopi much better than her own tribe. She lives in Gallup, New Mexico. "Navajo Signs" appeared previously in *The South Dakota Review*.

Archie Washburn was born at Shiprock, New Mexico. He is of Navajo ancestry. He was a student at Intermountain School in Brigham City, Utah. "Hogan" and "Unknown Smoke" appeared previously in *The South Dakota Review*.

James Welch was born on a Blackfoot reservation in Browning, Montana. His father is Blackfeet and his mother is Gros Vendre. He received his B.A. from the University of Montana. He has worked as a laborer, a forest service employee, an Indian firefighter, and a counselor for Upward Bound at the University of Montana; he now devotes full time to writing. He has published in several magazines, including *Poetry*, *Poetry Northwest*, the *New Yorker*, *New American Review*, *The South Dakota Review*, and has also had several works anthologized. *Riding the Earthboy*, 40, his first book of poems, was published in 1971. "One More Time" and "The Man from Washington" appeared previously in *The South Dakota Review*: "Dreaming Winter" and "Harlem, Montana" appeared in *Poetry*.

Roberta Hill Whiteman is a member of the Oneida Tribe and grew up around Oneida and Green Bay, Wisconsin. She earned a B.A. from the University of Wisconsin and an M.F.A. from the University of Montana. She currently teaches at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. "Star Quilt," "Overcast Dawn," and "Variations for Two Voices" previously appeared in *Star Quilt* (Holy Cow! Press, 1984).

Donna Whitewing was born in Sutherland, Nebraska. Her father was a farm hand and migrant worker during most of her growing-up years. The family roaded from South Dakota to Nebraska. Donna attended various elementary schools in Nebraska and, on leaving St. Augustine's Indian Mission at Winnebago, received a scholarship to attend Assumption Academy, Norfolk, Nebraska. Donna continues to write as well as work in the Children's Theatre in Winnebago. "August 24, 1963" appeared previously in *The South Review*; "A Vegetable, I Will Not Be" previously appeared in *The Whispering Wind*, ed. T. D. Allen, 1972.

Ray Young Bear was born in Tama, Iowa. His tribe is Sauk and Fox. The poems printed here all appeared previously in *Pembroke Magazine*.

Biographical material for: Liz Sohappy Bahe, Ramona Carden, Grey Cohoe, Phillip William George, Patty Harjo, Bruce Ignacio, King D. Kuka, Harold Littlebird, Charles C. Long, Alonzo Lopez, David Martinez, Emerson Blackhorse Mitchell, Calvin O'John, Agnes Pratt, Ronald Rogers, Loyal Shegonee, and Dona Whitewing is used by permission of T. D. Allen and the Institute of American Indian Arts, Sante Fe, New Mexico, a Bureau of Indian Affairs School.







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