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Studies in American Indian Literatures

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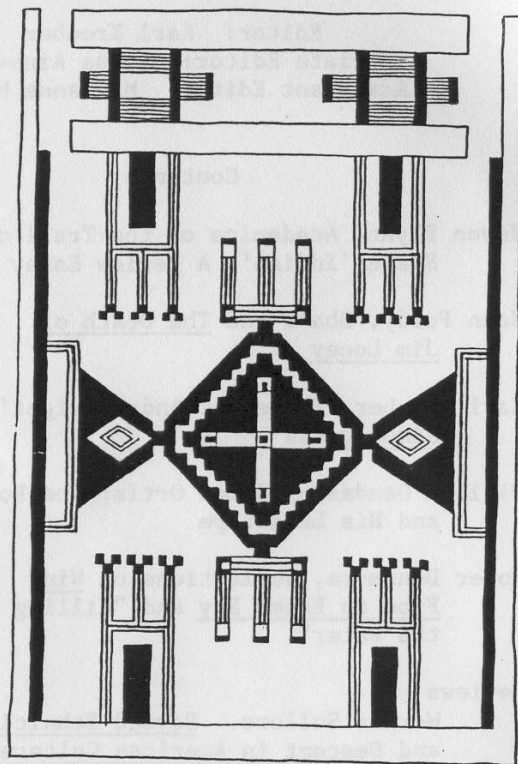
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Academics on the Trail of The Stage 'Indian': A Review Essay

Theatre historians have preserved for scholars of 'Indian' and white interaction some colorful glimpses of audience reaction when popular dramas about 'Indians' were the evening's entertainment. Edwin Forrest's appearance in Metamora, or The Last of the Wampanoags on tour in Augusta, Georgia, met with suspicion and hisses; Georgians busily dispossessing the Cherokees were outraged that Forrest really believed "in that damned Indian speech," the defiant final oration of the 'Indian' patriot Metacomet or King Philip (Grimstead 217). In Boston, Forrest's declaiming the death speech of Metamora was apparently so effective that the audience joined in: visiting 'Indians' from western nations rose and chanted a funeral dirge in honor of the dead hero (Mulvey 133). Edwin Forrest was the most famous actor to make his fortune impersonating the American 'Indian' in the formula Indian play that dominated American popular stages in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, and John Augustus Stone's Metamora, while an artistic horror, became the most popular drama of native resistance to the invasion of Europeans and European culture. The final battle of the Wampanoag leader and the destruction of his people were events echoed in dozens of popular scripts about American 'Indians', many of which are now lost. The attractiveness of the 'Indian' leader/warrior as protagonist was not diminished by the inevitable gesture with which he betrays his own nation's customs, by sparing white civilians who remind him of his family, ending a custom such as the torture of prisoners, or forming an emotional alliance with a European individual despite his determination to resist political domination by

the newcomers. The paradigm of the doomed male 'Indian' warrior found a counterpart in the nonconfrontational vanishing through assimilation pattern assigned the 'Indian' heroine of the period--always young, noble, and inexplicably drawn to the newly arrived Europeans, a projection that the folklorist Rayna Green has described as "the Pocahontas perplex" (Green, *Good Indian*; Green, Pocahontas 698-714). Both scenarios held sway through the mid-nineteenth century, until the movement toward realism in the theatre and the changing circumstances of the nation replaced the heroic 'Indian' on stage with a new stereotype: the degenerate and alcohol-prone male 'Indian' on the edges of frontier settlement life.

The fascination that these nineteenth-century plots had for their contemporary audiences has been matched by their appeal to twentieth-century scholars of American culture. Numerous studies have been made of the so-called "Indian plays," most of these in the form of master's theses in theatre and drama programs (Dockstader). Located at the intersection of popular culture and ethnic studies, the dramas have benefited from the growth of each field within American cultural studies. In the last twelve years, the analysis of the role of the stage Indian (let alone his descendant the film 'Indian') in the romantic period and after has generated six full-length studies, five doctoral dissertations and one short book, in addition to articles, sections of books and dissertations on other subjects, and studies of the 'Indian' as literary subject in other genres.¹ It may be useful to assess for educators in American studies the relative usefulness of the abundance of

survey material on the subject and to suggest to scholars interested in researching the area alternatives to reinventing the wheel.

Most of the early studies of the 'Indian' in American drama were too limited in the number of plays discussed, a shortcoming perhaps due to library limitations, to make a thorough study of the topic at hand, though writers made a valiant attempt.² Beginning with Paul R. Cox's "The Characterization of the American Indian in American Indian [sic] Plays 1800-1860 As a Reflection of the American Romantic Movement" (New York University doctoral dissertation, 1970), scholars with increased resources have tried more systematic assessments. Cox's study sifts each of the dramas he considers for a list of "romantic" attributes, a mechanical survey that does not convey most of the aspects that account for the dramas' stage success with audiences, and his body of primary sources for the romantic period is far from complete. But the attempt to arrange the texts and analyze for larger patterns rather than merely to describe and comment on the most lively scenes was under way.

Marilyn Jean Anderson attempted such a project in "The Image of the American Indian in American Drama: From 1766 to 1845" (University of Minnesota doctoral dissertation, 1974), but Anderson's efforts to provide a full context for the small number of plays discussed (36 scripts, some by English authors) result in a lengthy and diffuse study. An introduction titled "Scope of the Study" is itself sixty-one pages long, and the chapters endeavor to discuss too many secondary topics, from primitivism and anti-primitivism in early Christian authors through the

image of the Indian in fiction and the graphic arts and in some English dramas. (While Anderson rightly points out the difficulty in distinguishing between English and American contributions to the American formula Indian play, she nevertheless develops no clear criteria for inclusion of the English texts discussed.) Yet despite elaborate development of their literary context, Anderson presents the dramas in an only partially defined political context, especially in the case of the Indian play's relation to government Indian removal policy (368, 380 et al.). Anderson's dissertation is very helpful on previous critical work done on the Indian character in American fiction, but supplies no evaluation of the critical literature to date on her own topic, incorporating the Sitton and Cox dissertations and previous literary studies of the Indian but omitting Richard Moody's important analysis of Indian material and American theatrical romanticism in America Takes the Stage: Romanticism in American Drama and Theatre, 1750-1900 (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1955).

The next full-length attempt to evaluate the romantic dramas about 'Indians' was also a New York University doctoral dissertation, Kathleen A. Mulvey's "The Growth, Development, and Decline of the Popularity of American Indian Plays before the Civil War" (1978). Mulvey makes no reference to Cox's study or to previous scholarship on the subject of 'Indians' in drama other than Benjamin Bissell's The American Indian in English Literature of the Eighteenth Century (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1925), Albert Keiser's The Indian in American Literature (New York, Oxford University Press, 1933), Constance Rourke's American Humor: A Study of the National

Character (1931; rpt. New York, Doubleday Books, 1953), and Roy Harvey Pearce's Savagism and Civilization, second edition (Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1967), each of which devotes a section to drama; Richard Moody's America Takes the Stage: Romanticism in American Drama and Theatre, 1750-1900 (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1955); and several popular articles. She underestimates the number of extant scripts as twenty-four (223), but presents useful close readings of those used, interpreting them as necessary attempts at shaping a new non-English identity and as a mythic construct in the best Rourke manner. Mulvey's study significantly increases the understanding of the dramas in context by examining not only their link to other forms of literary nationalism, but their life in the theatre, through the use of reviews from sixty early nineteenth-century newspapers and magazines.

Also made available through University Microfilms in 1978 was Brenda J. Anderson's "The North American Indian in Theatre and Drama from 1605 to 1970," a University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign) doctoral dissertation. In an introduction, conclusion, and six chapters, each of which is divided into at least four subsections, Anderson attempts "to discover any line or development or patterns which may exist in the treatment of the Indian during this time (1). The research involved is extensive and smoothly presented. In addition to primary and secondary works including many contemporary theatre reviews, Anderson organizes the data concerning play titles into two appendices very useful to a reader in search of a sample text to be read or taught: a chronological listing, day by day, of

New York productions featuring Indian characters according to George Odell's Annals; and a chronological list of "plays, operas, musicals and theatrical pieces with Indian characters" recorded through Sam Shephard's Operation Side-winder (1970), with surviving playscripts marked with an asterisk. The discussion of the plays within the text of the study is thoughtful and endeavors to supply the contemporary reaction through newspaper reviews and information on the actors and actresses involved; chapters five and six on late nineteenth-century portrayals present a well-organized survey of the 'Indian' in frontier and realistic dramas, including discussions of popular plays not previously discussed in other critical literature. Anderson makes an occasional error, as in the case of her remark in the conclusion that "As yet no Indian playwright has appeared to dramatize Indian life for white audiences" (232). Aside from dramas and dramatized rituals created for Native American audiences by Native American authors, Lynn Riggs was writing plays like Cherokee Night, apparently intended for non-Native American as well as native audiences in the thirties. The Kiowa playwright Hanay Geiogamah's work was introduced in New York in 1972 through the Native American Theatre Ensemble. In addition, her work ignores the frequent treatment of 'Indian' subject matter in outdoor historical dramas beginning with Paul Green's The Lost Colony in Manteo, North Carolina in 1937. Anderson's dissertation is the most ambitious over-all survey to date, even though her attention is focused on individual dramas and she ultimately finds no larger pattern of development in the stage portrayals over the four centuries studied (232, 236).

Burl Donald Grose's "'Here Come the Indians: An Historical Study of the Representation of the Native American upon the North American Stage, 1808-1969" (University of Missouri-Columbia dissertation, 1979) is more inclusive in its coverage of twentieth-century American playscripts about Indians, devoting two chapters, "The Indian Idealized and Forgotten, 1913-1932" and "The Buckskin Curtain, 1933-1969" to the period. Though some outdoor drama scripts are discussed, others by the same playwrights (Paul Green and Kermit Hunter) are omitted without explanation. Grose's dissertation features a systematic introduction placing his work in the context of previous scholarship and outlining his methodology for assessing "the codification of Native American stage representations into stereotype categories" (8). Grose analyzes the nearly 120 scripts according to several criteria (8-9) and ultimately reduces the "fragmentation of the noble savage" in contact with whites to three plot structures: "willing victimization, acculturation, and extermination" (282). Grose thus presents larger patterns in terms of which most of the playscripts in his bibliography can be discussed.

Just such an attempt at the whole picture of the plays' effect on their audiences, at least during the romantic period, is attempted by Priscilla F. Sears in A Pillar of Fire to Follow: American Indian Dramas, 1808-1859 (Bowling Green, Ohio, Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1982). Sears is interested in the dramas' content as it relates to myth, in her definition "those compelling complexes of images, symbols and stories which determine our sense of reality and divinity" (1). Although the title does not

indicate the limitation, Sears focuses on heroic dramas and their myth of extinction, neglecting the co-existing Pocahontas/intermarriage dramas with their myth of reconciliation. This leads to curious misstatements, for example the comment on Lewis Deffebach's Oolaita, or The Indian Heroine: "Only in Oolaita . . . does a woman hold the central and title part" (43). Naramattah (1830), The Indian Wife (1830), The Indian Girl (1838), and Lamora, or The Indian Wife (1849) aside, Sears herself lists four non-burlesque Pocahontas plays in her appendix "Indian Dramas Included in This Study": The Indian Princess, or La Belle Sauvage (1808), Pocahontas or The Settlers of Virginia (1830), Pocahontas, A National Drama (1837), and The Forest Princess or Two Centuries Ago (1848); the same appendix gives incorrect dates for the last three titles (130).

The appendix itself indicates the book's major shortcoming: perhaps because of space (the work itself is only one hundred-and-forty pages including index), the author bases her study on only fourteen plays. Given that more than a hundred scripts involving 'Indians' were performed during the same period, this would appear to be an inadequate sample, even allowing for the numerous lost scripts. Unfortunately, Sears has no notion of the perimeters of her own subject, in terms of original numbers, surviving scripts, and microfilm availability. The most harmful piece of misinformation is its underestimation of the influence and accessibility of the dramas, near-ubiquitous in their day:

Fewer than half of the forty Indian dramas written after 1820 and before 1860 are extant and many of these exist in single

copies so fragile that they cannot be microfilmed. All but three of those remaining are included in this study. (10)

Though Sears's book had the admirable intention of describing the myths contained in the plays and setting those myths in context, identifying "the psychological needs and historical forces that determined their character" (8), the book's limitations in primary and secondary research make it unreliable. (Though A Pillar of Fire To Follow was published in 1982, it makes no mention of Richard Moody's lengthy discussion on 'Indian' themes on the American stage in America Takes the Stage (1955), nor the 1974-1978 doctoral dissertations on the same subject, though all were available from University Microfilms.)

Equally perfunctory in terms of appraising work already done in the chosen subject area is Eugene H. Jones' "Native Americans As Shown on the Stage, 1753-1916," a 1984 theatre dissertation completed at the City University of New York. Although several older dissertations are included in the bibliography, the work of Mulvey, both Andersons, and Sears is completely ignored. The author states that the purpose of the study is

to examine the attitudes toward Native Americans as demonstrated in the ways they were characterized by white playwrights, and to show how these characterizations apparently masked the white man's fear of Indians as obstacles to the fulfillment of his desire to settle in the New World. The desire was complicated by the white man's assumption that the Indian might be his

equal or even, in some ways, his superior.
(1)

Jones' study includes some factual errors, such as the identification of a 1753 French play Le Père Indien as the "first play about Native Americans written and performed in America" (8), a date nearly a century and a half after Marc Lescarbot's Le Théâtre de Neptune (1606). His dissertation covers the same time span, minus fifty years, as Anderson's previous work, yet with little sophistication concerning the larger cultural context in which the dramas were performed. Most startling in a survey of a popular genre in terms of colonial intentions is the omission of Francis Jennings's The Invasion of America: Indians, Colonialism, and the Cant of Conquest (New York, W.W. Norton and Company, 1976); the bibliography of secondary sources is extremely brief. Jones includes no bibliography of primary sources consulted, only a "chronological checklist of plays and other theatre pieces featuring Native American characters," an appendix that does not specify either which dramas were used in the dissertation, which were published, or which survive, since no publication information is included in the entries. On the positive side, Jones is aware of late twentieth-century treatments of 'Indian' subject matter in the outdoor symphonic drama movement that is Paul Green's legacy to the American theatre and in the dramas of history and contemporary 'Indian' life by Hanay Geiogamah. But his work on the 1753-1916 dramas offers few conclusions and little research not already available in the Anderson study.

The eighties have produced other works of interest to the scholar of theatrical images of the American 'Indian.' Several articles have contributed concrete information concerning individual pieces of the picture.³ A facsimile edition of two Pocahontas dramas, James Nelson Barker's The Indian Princess (1808) and Robert Dale Owen's Pocahontas, A National Drama (1837), was edited with a critical introduction by Charles M. Lombard as the second volume of The Romantic Indian: Sentimental Views from Nineteenth Century American Literature (Delmar, New York, Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1981). The impact of American dramas of the 'Indian' is finally receiving serious attention for its contribution to the American self-image. Two recent books, both by German scholars, have considered the 'Indian' dramas against the background of various ethnic and regional images (Yankee, Indian, frontiersman, Black) that contributed to the evolving American identity in the nineteenth century. Jürgen Wolter's Die Suche nach nationaler Identität: Entwicklungstendenzen des amerikanischen Dramas vor dem Bürgerkrieg (Bonn, Bouvier, 1983) devotes a chapter to projections of the Indian by American playwrights, outlining three types: the foster-mother Pocahontas, the heroic male noble savage, and the barbarous, scalping "inhuman fiends" (153-188). Werner Sollors' Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture (New York, Oxford University Press, 1986) interprets the idealized 'Indian' plays of the early nineteenth century as a dramatization of "the conflict between legitimacy and republicanism," a vehicle that allows the socio-political theme to be expressed while "integrated into a family drama" (104). Sollors' discussion of the non-burlesque 'Indian' dramas is confined

to the chapter on "Romantic Love, Arranged Marriage, and Indian Melancholy," but is maximized by several illustrations in that chapter and the following interlude. Die Suche nach nationaler Identität includes extensive notes that cite extensive secondary sources on the 'Indian' in American drama, including the dissertations discussed above; Beyond Ethnicity cites neither Wolter's discussion nor any of the previous studies of the American 'Indian' in American plays.

As American dramatists' employment of 'Indian' characters and subject matter becomes of interest to a wider spectrum of scholars, the definitive history of the 'Indian' in American drama remains to be written, perhaps because the project spans several methodologies and fields: bibliographical and stage history, literary criticism, comparative literature and the history of ideas, popular culture, ethnic relations, and, of course, Native American Studies. But there is no doubt that progress has been made, and that such administrative and mechanical aids as inter-library loan networks, microcard editions of early American dramas, and user-friendly computers are beginning to make the project feasible. The sheer entertainment value of the texts to their audiences should never be overlooked. Their real significance, however, is located somewhere on the continuum the director/theorist Richard Schechner has envisioned between entertainment and ritual,⁴ here the multi-ethnic ritual encounter that dominates American life and literature.

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Notes

¹ The work of social scientists such as Gary Nash, Thomas F. Gossett, and Frances Jennings in exploring the intercultural dynamics of 'Indian'/European interaction in North America has made possible a richer understanding of the white-authored written works of literature dealing with the Native American. Brian Dippie's research on "The Vanishing Indian: Popular Attitudes and American Indian Policy in the Nineteenth Century," first available as a University of Texas doctoral dissertation, has also helped to set the stage for new studies of theatrical productions against the historical context of contemporary federal relations with 'Indian' nations. 'Indian' dramas have often been included in dissertations on larger topics, for example, Gaylan Collier's "The Five Major Dialect Stereotypes in American Drama" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Denver, 1957), or Thomas Lyttle's "An Examination of Poetic Justice in Three Selected Types of Nineteenth-Century Melodrama: The Indian Play, the Temperance Play, and the Civil War Play" (Ph.D. dissertation, Bowling Green State University, 1974).

² Authors of early theses focusing on the American 'Indian' in the American drama include Hazel B. Abbott, "And What of the Indian? His Literature and His Treatment in Our Dramatic Literature," M.A., Columbia University, 1924; Frances Paxson, "The Indian in American Drama," M.A. thesis, University of Iowa, 1927; Marjorie E. Switzer, "The Development of Indian Plays on the American Stage with Special Reference to the Pocahontas Story," M.A. thesis, University of

Chicago, 1929; Elizabeth A. Tracy, "The Indian in American Drama, 1766-1856," M.A. thesis, Smith College, 1932; Lois Y. Bryant, "The Pocahontas Theme in American Literature," M.A. thesis, University of North Carolina, 1935; Eloise W. Gill, "The Changing Attitude toward the Indian in American Literature," M.A. thesis, Louisiana State University, 1935; Margaret W. Stevenson, "A Century and a Half of the American Stage Indian," M.A. thesis, University of Washington, 1935; Grace M. Engel, "Pocahontas in American Literature," M.A. thesis, Columbia University, 1937; Mary F. Duke, "The Indian in American Literature since 1920," M.A. thesis, Southern Methodist University, 1942; Margaret L. Hopcraft, "Attitudes toward the Indian As Found in American Literature," M.A. thesis, University of New Mexico, 1943; Lois T. Harley, "Pocahontas Plays, 1808-1855," M.A. thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 1945; Josephine Fishman, "The Dramatization of the Novels of James Fenimore Cooper," M.A. thesis, Stanford University, 1951; William D. Young, "The Indian Character in American Plays, 1808-1860," M.A. thesis, Stanford University, 1952; Stuart W. Hyde, "The Representation of the West in American Drama from 1849 to 1917," Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1954; and Fred Sitton, "The Indian Play in American Drama, 1750-1900," Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1962. In an era when male graduate students outnumbered female graduate students, it is intriguing to speculate on the reasons for the preponderance of female thesis writers on this list (as well as in the body of the essay).

³ Space considerations do not allow a listing of the most recent articles, which include one on Forrest's Metamora and many on Arthur Kopit's Indians as well as other topics concerning the Indian image in drama and theatrical entertainments. The MLA International Bibliography lists such entries annually under "Native Americans. American literature. Drama." Other sources of information include the bibliographies and reviews of the ASAIL Notes edited by Andrew Wiget and of course the pages of this journal.

⁴ See Schechner's many writings on performance theory, the most recent volume of essays being The End of Humanism: Writings on Performance (New York, Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 77 ff.

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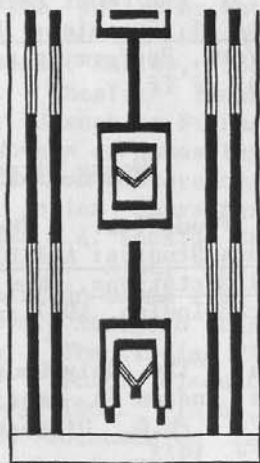
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Bha'a and The Death of Jim Loney

Readers and critics alike have been quick to point to the bleak ending of The Death of Jim Loney and bewail the loss of Native cultures, but few have recognized Loney's lonely stand as the creative act that Welch himself has called it. And of these few, only Kathleen Sands has carefully drawn the connections between Loney's actions and his Gros Ventre heritage. In "The Death of Jim Loney: Indian or Not?" Sands traces Loney's final hours and argues convincingly that his actions after Pretty Weasel's death are contemporary manifestations of those of a warrior in the Gros Ventre tradition. He gets the shotgun from his father (as the young warrior would get arms from his), tells him where he is going (which amounts to a public declaration), and prepares to meet his enemy--the police and the world they represent--in a place of his own choosing. "Like an ancient warrior, he [Loney] takes a position from which there is no retreat, and waits for the attack, even taunting his enemy and revealing his position" (Sands 8). Sands' insights are telling, and they fit clearly into the progression with which Welch has structured his novel. Despite Loney's seeming isolation and alienation from his mother's people and their ways, he is a man with a vision, and the novel depicts--as do oral literatures--the ways by which his vision is translated into action in a world that has changed vastly from that of his ancestors.

Although Welch purposefully shrouds Loney's affinity for his people, their land and its beings, his connections to them are continually suggested by two seemingly unrelated devices: Loney's physical appearance and his memories of

specific places in the landscape. Throughout the novel, Loney is described in wolf-like terms by various characters. The old Cree woman at the airport sees his face as "wolfish." Kate echoes that description when she arrives at the same airport. Pretty Weasel describes Loney's face as looking like a "hungry and predictable" mongrel (82). And Rhea--as she opens her door for Loney on his last visit after Pretty Weasel's death--sees "Loney's thin face in the moonlit night. His nose and cheekbones were silver and his eyes were dark caves" (151). His close identification with an animal is heightened by Loney's revelation, quite early in the book, that he believes his mother was a member of the Westwolf family. These associations are important because they imply an inherited relationship between Loney and the land beyond Harlem--the world "out there" as Loney's mother tells him in a dream--and therefore with the traditions that have always enlightened the Gros Ventre perception of their world.

Although the wolf may have a set of negative connotations for the "white" characters in the novel, including Kate and Pretty Weasel, it has a completely different set for the Gros Ventre. The Wolf Society is one of the two traditional soldier, or warrior, societies and as such, it has a respected place in the ceremonial life of the people; its members may gain knowledge and personal power through kinship with the wolf or through an intimate relationship with other power beings established by a vision quest. Sands' insights about Loney's warrior-like actions are accurate; however, the basis for the behavior she describes may be understood only if one recognizes his almost instinctual relation-

ship with traditional sources of power in the Gros Ventre world.

All the major characters, with the exception of Loney, want either to leave northern Montana or, like Pretty Weasel, transform the land into some personal image of what they think it should be. Loney, however, wants only to understand who he is, and although he realizes that memory--the past--is usually the way to one's identity, his memories seem to be dead ends. They are confused, incomplete, and chaotic; they have no central frame of reference to control them; however, as he thinks about his past he continually encounters memories of not just people, but of other beings and the land itself. They are intertwined somehow, and he tries to separate them. He believes that his memories of people hold the key to his present state, but gradually one sees that the landscape itself and certain animals who inhabit it are more a part of Loney's identity than he realizes. Just as Welch obscures the connection between Loney's movements and those of a traditional Gros Ventre warrior, he makes subtle connections through Loney's memories of Snake Butte (where he imagines his own face among the pictographs) and the Little Rockies, but most of all through the place he chooses to die. Mission Peak in the Little Rockies was at one time a source of Sweet Pine, a key ingredient for the Feather Pipe ceremony given to the people by Bha'a, sometimes called Thunderbird or Ruler of Storms. Bha'a also is said to inhabit the crags of mountain peaks, and the final scene of Welch's novel is set in the crags of Mission Canyon. But there is further evidence to mark the influence that Bha'a has on Loney's behavior.

Very early in the novel, Loney tries to think, to unravel his memories and identity, and alone, sleepless, and beyond drunk in his kitchen in the early morning, he has a vision. In several ways his isolation is reminiscent of the isolation practiced by the seekers of visions and power in the Blackfoot and Gros Ventre traditions. Like them, Loney's fasting, crying, smoking of tobacco and watchful waiting have the result of providing him with the enhanced perception necessary to communicate with forces in the world unavailable to most people:

And again, as he had that night after the football game, he saw things strangely, yet clearly. The candle, the wine bottle, the letter before him, all burned clearly in his eyes and they had no reality in his mind. It was as though there were no connection between his eyes and his brain. And he saw the smoke ring go out away from his face and he saw the bird in flight. Like the trembling, the bird was not new. It came every night now. It was a large bird and dark. It was neither graceful nor clumsy, and yet it was both. Sometimes the powerful wings beat the air with the monotony of grace; at other times, it seemed that the strokes were out of tune, as though the bird had lost its one natural ability and was destined to eventually lose the air. But it stayed up and Loney watched it until it reached into the darkness beyond the small candlelight. (20)

After it disappears, Loney reacts in the only way he knows how at this point in his life; he drinks a toast to "his" bird. Something is happening to

Loney; a significant event has occurred, but we are left as puzzled as Loney when he tries to interpret the event, to judge its significance and the appropriate way to react to it. The vision could be attributed to the wine--the bird a drunken hallucination--but if one recognizes that Loney's actions shadow those of a traditional vision quest, then another interpretation becomes available.

Loney later states that he has never seen a bird like his before in the surrounding country. The dark bird, however, bears a number of similarities to Bha'a, one of the most powerful beings in the world of the Gros Ventre. Like Coyote, or Sinchlep, of the Salish and Na'pi of the Blackfoot, he is the most powerful agent of the "Supreme Being," and as such his influence is far-reaching. He is most commonly associated with summer thunderstorms, and in this connection a ceremony and a story have evolved around him. The Feather Pipe--one of the two most powerful pipes in Gros Ventre ceremonialism--is said to have been given by Bha'a to a boy who was unlike any of the other children in his village. Although there are different versions of the story, they can be seen to relate to Loney. The boy who receives the pipe does not play with the other children, but instead stays to himself; he is told in a dream that he is going to be given something so he moves his lodge away from the others in the village; and he is visited by Bha'a who takes the boy's lodge and everything he owns, but leaves him with the pipe (Flannery 446). Isolation, alienation and vision are directly connected in the story to the power gift of Bha'a; the loss of material possessions and human companionship results in the gift of something

immensely more valuable for individual and community alike: knowledge of new ceremonial actions and power derived from a relationship with a supernatural being.

Like the boy, Jim Loney develops a personal relationship with a very powerful force. Quite often, this type of relationship--between a guardian or Helper and a man--emerges from a vision, may last a lifetime, and is present year-round. There are obvious parallels between Loney's actions and those of a vision quest, but there are also similarities between the boy in the story and Loney to account for his unintentional acquisition of a guardian. Moreover, there seems to be ample precedent: "While supernatural power was not explicitly sought from Bha'a he might occasionally on his own initiative have pity on a man and give him power to be a great warrior and even to make storms" (Flannery 12).

The actions that occur after the vision strengthen the identification of the bird with Bha'a, and Loney's association with him. As Sands demonstrates, Loney becomes a warrior after he is given the shotgun--as he foresaw in his vision--but he also becomes a maker of storms. When Loney walks to Rhea's later, she comments about the severity of the wind. Loney replies, "I think I might have something to do with it" (28). The possibility that he might be affecting the weather is never explored, at least overtly, but this slight and seemingly inconsequential statement says a great deal about Loney's vision of the bird, the image of which remains with him. As he stares into Rhea's fireplace, he sees it again, and either it, or his memory of it, arises

to direct his actions throughout the remainder of the novel. The novel ends, as does Loney's life, with a reference to his vision; the sense of complicity lingers, as does the sense that any distinction between Loney's vision of the bird and Loney himself has disappeared: "And he fell, and as he was falling he felt a harsh wind where there was none and the last thing he saw were the beating wings of a dark bird as it climbed to a distant place."

Loney's death may be, and has been, interpreted as a bleak statement about the plight and supposed fate of Native cultures. However, as is so often the case in contemporary Native American novels, one may also see in it an affirmation of the traditional relationship between a landscape and a people, and an age old way of perceiving the world through an understanding of the stories and traditions that speak of that relationship. Jim Loney takes control of his own life by responding instinctively to the forces that are told of in Gros Ventre literature, and although society at large may take Loney's death as suicide and therefore an act of desperation, one must consider the clearly deliberate and controlled ways that he works it. As Sands amply demonstrates, these are more than simple acts of an individual tired of his existence. As Welch once told Bill Bevis: "He [Loney] does orchestrate his own death . . . He creates it, he creates a lot of events to put himself on top of that ledge in the end . . . he knows how his death will occur. And to me, that is a creative act and I think all creative acts are basically positive" (Bevis 176). Creative acts spring from knowledge and insight, and these are the gifts that may be derived from a guardian like Bha'a.

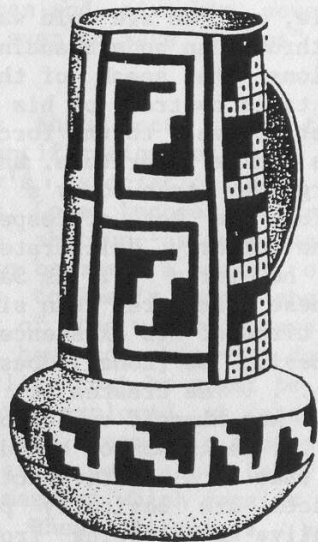
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Andrew Wiget. Simon Ortiz. Boise State University Western Writers Series No. 74. Boise, Idaho: Boise State University Press, 1986. \$3.95 pp. 53 pp.

Another fine addition to this valuable series. Wiget's criticism is shrewd and helpful for both prose and poetry. Although there is minimal biographical data, the judgment of Ortiz's political position is sound. Wiget sees Ortiz as "unabashedly political, but his criticism of America is not that it has failed, . . . it has yet to be really tried. What is wanting is the commitment and the humility that will give birth to hope." Included is a very good bibliography, from which we cite the references to poetry and fiction. For more exhaustive bibliography, see Studies in American Indian Literatures, 8:3/4 (1984), an issue devoted entirely to the work of Simon Ortiz.

Poetry:

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Karl Kroeber

* * *

Simon Ortiz: The Poet and His Landscape

In modern people, according to C. G. Jung, awareness of Mother Earth has been repressed deeply into the unconscious mind by the demands of an increasingly logical and materialist society. The repression has created the "earth archetype" where all maternal and feminine psychic projections find their source. For early people this specific repression did not exist, since their minds did not create a value system of absolute moral opposites which the mind of modern man has inherited from the Judeo-Christian traditions of Western Culture. While modern people draw distinctions between themselves and the natural world, between their mind and bodies, and between their unconscious and conscious minds, early people did not establish such a system of opposites, based on a moral precept of dualities, to support their rational thought. Nor did they carry the idea of mutually exclusive dichotomies to the point that they could logically objectify the particularities of the external world away from themselves. Rather, the polytheistic traditions of non-Western people, such as the American Indians, allowed them to understand that the universe was influenced by natural forces that mere logic could not explain nor mastery over the physical could control.

Consequently many tribal people relied on dream visions and spontaneous natural events for guidance in the world. In contrast, to establish an objective relationship with the world, the modern state of consciousness has come to concentrate its focus of attention to such a fine point that it has become unconscious of many of its other mental functions and the entities outside the scope of its illumination.

In contrast to modern man's high-focus, power-centered consciousness are peoples who have educated themselves to live in harmony with the land according to tribal ways in a rural environment, such as Ortiz's Acoma. These people's way of life consists in a reciprocal relationship between themselves and all creations of the earth. To "relocate" such peoples into an urban environment is to dislocate them into the kind of revulsion from urban life that is expressed in Going for the Rain. This is not merely an ethnocentric disdain for urban life; it is an attempt to preserve an identity and peace-of-mind.

In a world where the rational mind has polluted the air, earth, and water with its technology, an early people's awareness of their dependent relationship to the earth for their survival has much to teach modern people about living in harmony with the landscape, with their fellow people, as well as their own minds and bodies. Going for the Rain can be interpreted as advocating a re-evolution "back" from egocentric consciousness to a consciousness in balance with its unconscious, so mind and body, people and nature, and person and humanity may stand in balance to one another.

In Going for the Rain, the relationship between Simon Ortiz, an extraordinary poet from the Acoma Pueblo in New Mexico, and the land is built upon a reciprocity between tribal members, individually and collectively, and three landscapes: a) the roadside, b) the urban, and c) the tribal. From Acoma, one of the two oldest communities in the United States (the other being Old Oraibi at the Hopi Nation), Ortiz begins his roadside journey via car, bus, hitchhiking, walking, etc. into one of the most recent communities in the world, America. The journey takes him west to southern California, then east toward Florida. It also extends northward to places in Wisconsin and New York City. The poet travels the "barebone desert / parts of Arizona and California" (25) where he gains both insight into despair and reasons for resistance to the forces that can cause despair. His journey also covers the land of the Navajos, newcomers from the north just a few hundred years ago, who entered a land inhabited at least since the time of Christ.

When passing through Yuma, Arizona, the poet pointedly questions the small city developing with "motels, gas stations, schools, churches, and etc." (68). His question, "Do they really plan for survival this way?" directly addresses the very nature of the relationship between urban America and the land. It also implies an indigenous way of living closer to the earth. In Arkansas, however, the roadside suggests the primordial relationship of earth and birth:

I just want to cross the next hill
through that clump of trees

and come out the other side

and see a clean river,
the whole earth new
and hear the noise it makes
at birth. (62)

Thus a distant, rural landscape can take Simon Ortiz home to his source and his identity, and nourish him. Such a landscape provides him with what New York City and Yuma cannot provide him:

. . . food, words, wisdom, young memories
of places you ate at, drank cold spring
water,
or held somebody's hand,
or home of the gentle, slow dances,
the songs, the strong gods, the world
you know. (48)

Ortiz also turns our attention to other social realities, such as the place along Interstate 40 which used to run through Gallup, New Mexico, a town infamously known for claiming the title "Indian Capitol of the World." There he witnesses "brown people" who may have been reduced by alcohol to mere bodies "stumbling Sunday afternoon / northwards." Then he turns our attention to "horizons / and the rains / in the far distance" (59). He thus reminds us of the promise of purification and regeneration that rain can mean to the arid landscape, the lives of the communities there, and the spirit of the brown people stumbling north toward the Hopi and Navajo nations to begin the drudgery of the week on Monday morning.

Details of Ortiz's roadside images can be as unexpected as "A hawk / sweeping its wings / clear / through the whole sky," (8) or in the Southern landscape coloring the roadside: "I picked some flowers beside the highway / and put them with the same I got in Arizona" . . . "a few miles from the Florida line" (37). With another roadside subject he reminds us of the mundane qualities of a poor dog "mashed into the highway / east of Gallup" (50) and the ever-threatening reality of unexpected misfortune suffered and represented by that dog. But just a few pages later Ortiz lifts us from the temporal objects of the roadside to the utterly simple and once universally acknowledged difference between human and animal:

I wonder now
if the horse still stands
silent in the dark night,
dreamless and stifled,
having no recourses left
except hope his silence
will soon go away
and the meaningfulness enter. (56)

At Ocotilla Wells near the Navajo Reservation, the roadside illustrates the relationship of change and an unshakable endurance when he views the remains of the Southwest, and lush and tropical, in the arid landscape today:

These hills are pretty old.
Some have worn down the flat desert valley
Some stones remember being underwater
and the cool fresh green winds. (31)

The urban landscape is as antithetical to Simon Ortiz as New York City is to Acoma Pueblo isolated on top White Rock Mesa. Acoma's adobe homes without electricity and running water house a way of life in 1976 that New York City could not sustain, for all its electricity and water, a life where the people depend directly on each other and their land. In Going for the Rain the urban landscape both starts and ends with the "cold grey and hard" streets (26), and the "concrete" cliffs of Phoenix (70). In the cities Ortiz, like almost everyone in them, complains about "noises" and wonders if they were, like the street-sweeper, "only occurrences / in my dreams" (41). Yet, when the tiny nuisances of urban life, like the noises, subside, the silence is so unexpected that it causes alarmed but passive amazement:

. . . other times
there was more silence
than ever felt
in the streets before.
Acres and acres
of silence. (42)

The sterile noises and the alarming silence, two elements of urban life that represent in part what cities mean to Ortiz, cannot compare to the sounds and silences in "Crossing the Colorado River into Yuma," where

The evening sun glimmers across the desert.
Sound fills everything . . .
. . . the river is silent . . . (67)

It is tempting, and misleading, to reduce Ortiz's urban and rural landscapes to a dichotomy

of the good earth vs. the antagonistic city. But in both city and the countryside, the potential exists for both fulfillment and despair. Ortiz, nonetheless, represents the half-truth of this reductive line of reason by reminding us of the urban experience of a portion of the American Indian population in "Relocation" (which might be termed "dislocation" for people born and raised in a reservation environment):

I see me walking in sleep
down streets, down streets gray with cement
and glaring glass and oily wind,
armed with a pint of wine
I cheated my children to buy.

I am lonely for hills.
I am lonely for myself. (38)

The lights,
the cars,
the deadened glares
tear my heart
and close my mind. (37)

Ortiz does not, interestingly enough, delve into the economic and political factors contributing to the cultural devastation that he sees in certain American Indian groups facing urbanization and industrialization, something he does vigorously and movingly in later books like From Sand Creek and Fight Back: for the People, for the Land.

Ortiz's vision of the urban landscape is not reductive because for him it extends beyond the limits of the city, even to the Valley of the Sun near Phoenix and John Jacob's farm

. . . where the lettuce grows in such
sterile lines.
They are taking the water with machines
out of the river, in fact, setting the
course
of rivers, and they make artificial rain.

We look for life. Look, but there are only
lines
of lettuce converging at the far end. (69)

The abstract order and technology imposed upon the earth, moreover, is not limited to Phoenix and John Jacob's farm; this urbanization of the countryside in the twentieth century has become an intercontinental reality, in which consumer nations increasingly utilize technology in developing countries to extract raw resources becoming scarce in the consumer nations. Again it would be easy to reduce Ortiz's disdain for the urban landscape to a nostalgic yearning for the uncomplicated securities of rural life long ago: "good earth" against "antagonistic city." The reduction, however, would not take into account that, for Ortiz, wherever he is, the land can remind him of his home, or can transport him imaginatively back there, back to himself. For example, in San Diego on the way to the Alpine Mountains:

Handlettered signs
on apple cider roadside stands,
a small lake, lots of pine
and higher up twisted aspen
made me lonesome for Crystal
on Arizona-New Mexico line (40)

and in "Leaving America"

Going home,
it's got red and brown land,
sage, and when it rains,
it smells like pinon
and pretty girls at a Squaw Dance (60)

and of Kaweshtima Mountain

I have never seen a Mountain
that has stood so clearly
in my mind . . .
. . . my home. (92)

Ortiz's revulsion from urban life is best understood as an attempt to maintain identity in an antagonistic environment. The conservation of identity is especially crucial when one's sense of self is culturally founded on the land of one's birth.

From the very beginning of Going for the Rain the primary landscape is the tribal one, culture deriving from the primordial mother earth. In the first poem, "The Creation, According to Coyote," it is clear that Ortiz's earth is perceived as a maternal landscape and source of life. Coyote states simultaneously to the collective and individual audience that "you" are born

. . . from that body, the earth;
your black head burst from granite,

until it began to rain.

It turned muddy then,
and then green and brown things
came without legs. (3)

This poem, it should be remembered, is a version of the myth of creation as it is known by the Acoma people who, like all the Pueblo tribes of the American Southwest, emerged from the earth into this world of sunlight from an opening they called "sipapu."

Consequently, the landscape coyote speaks of is the earth that spreads out from the Acoma Pueblo itself. When Ortiz writes of going home in "Leaving America" and of being lonely for the hills and himself in "Relocation," therefore, he is not only speaking of the Pueblo and the landscape that extends from it to the surrounding landscapes. Rather, his identity and sense of origin are bound up with the landscapes of his past: "the memory of a boy / in Summer morning field" (73). This "memory" is to be understood as experiences of relationship during youth which can be remembered during poetic states of mind as the essential content of a poem. For instance, in "Valley of the Sun" memories are drawn up by familiar places:

Down through the mountain, a winding road,
recognizing places where I learned to
smoke,
consider enticing thoughts, to read,
explored and where I'd almost gotten laid
on a hillside in a barn, an old musty barn
with useless hay. (69)

And he writes of the Pueblo and its landscape in the context of tribal reciprocity, with the earth

as a source of identity, Ortiz shows modern people their primordial relationship to the land, of which, over the aeons, they have become more and more unconscious.

Ortiz's understanding of the primordial relationship between the Self and the earth did not come to him from books. The landscape of Ortiz's origins and his relationship to it represents this poet as a man who in childhood understood that his

. . . place is on the earth
among mountains, on ground,
by old water courses, in wind,
where your mother walked (4)

and that he is only

. . . one part
among many and all parts (89)

These lines imply that the place of all people on earth is comparable to a child to its mother. The self-centered desires of the child are, like a child itself, a part of a complex collection of human feelings in a still vaster world. This view of the landscape, I assume, is the one Ortiz learned as a child from the traditional ways of the Acoma people, and that he would pass on to modern people today.

To say that Simon Ortiz is "at one" with the landscape would simply reduce his humanity to the level of an animal, plant or mineral. This "oneness" would make Ortiz a non-cognitive creature within a purely material world. Ortiz's reciprocity with the earth is, rather, the an-

cient knowledge of being dependent on the earth for life-giving nourishment and also being responsible for preserving this source of sustenance. Ortiz's relationship to the landscape in Going for the Rain supports the idea that the one-to-one relationship of a People to the earth still exists in the United States. This one-to-one relationship implies an understanding that people, collectively and individually, have the responsibility of a reciprocal relationship with the earth from which they originate. This sense of relationship to the landscape deeply roots the consciousness of Going for the Rain in the earth --the womb of life--and, therefore, Ortiz implies, consciousness itself. Such a consciousness identifies itself with the land of its origins, which for Ortiz, is the land of the Acoma Pueblo: the Mother Earth.

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Wind From an Enemy Sky, D'Arcy McNickle's last book, published posthumously in 1978, is set among a fictional people, the Little Elk Indians, whose culture and place strongly resemble that of the Flathead Indians in western Montana, amongst whom McNickle grew up. He himself was not Flathead but a mixed-blood Cree (French and Irish).¹

Wind From an Enemy Sky is a rich book, as well it should be, for McNickle struggled more than 35 years to bring it into its published form. His letter to Dodd Mead in July of 1940 says of it:

It weighs on my mind in a heavily unsettling manner. I am beginning to have nightmares over it. Ideas for other books keep coming to mind, but I fight them off. I can't work on anything else until I get this off my chest . . . I do want you to understand I am desperately anxious to complete the manuscript and get it out of the way. (Emphasis added.)

It seems clear from a look at the early versions of the manuscript--over four hundred pages hand-written in pencil--why he couldn't finish it. The early drafts end far too happily to be true to what he knew was the reality of the Indians at that time, or for their fictional representatives, the "Little Elk" people: he had Feather Boy's medicine bundle safely returned to the Little Elk people; Bull, the hold-out, grateful to the agent for its return and happily plowing up the land as a potato farmer; Rafferty, the model agent, getting a field promotion from his bureau chief for his successful negotiation of Feather Boy's return; Smitty, the young, female anthropologist falling in love with Raf-

ferty in the process. No wonder the book gave McNickle nightmares!

The book we now have is a far cry from this charming romance. It is a complex tragedy that presents the disastrous encounter between the Little Elk people and their guardian-helper-destroyers in all of its painful reality. For McNickle shows how the structure of the encounter is such that even the best people on both sides, with the best of intentions (and here I mean Bull on the Indian side and Rafferty on the white), not only are unable to keep the tragedy from occurring, but in their best efforts at a reconciliation, actually help to precipitate it.

At the center of this tragic aspect of the story stands the sobering figure of Adam Pell. As Pell discovers that he has both killed the Indians' water through damming the river and destroyed their most powerful medicine bundle through collecting it and not caring for it, he is consumed by guilt. And what McNickle presents so tellingly at this point is that it is exactly this guilt that is one of the most deadly things members of the dominant society have turned onto Indian people. The preoccupation with absolving his guilt for killing the water and destroying the bundle blinds Pell. He becomes incapable of thinking of the Little Elks--who they are, what they may need or want--and can only think of some magnanimous gesture, some gift, that will make up for his destructions. McNickle tells us through Pell that there are some things that can't be made up for, such as killing the water and destroying by neglect the sacred medicine bundle heart of a people. These things are irreplaceable. No gift, no matter how valuable will

replace them. No amount of guilt or feeling sorry will replace them. And McNickle makes clear that Pell is more than one man among many. He represents a tendency within the dominant society. McNickle, like most Indians, knows this tendency well; there is some of Adam Pell in most of us. Wind From an Enemy Sky is a mirror into which we are asked to look, and look again, to recognize this fact.

II2

But I do not here wish to talk about that aspect of this fine novel. I came to talk about "killing the water," McNickle's phrase for the old people's feeling about the building of a dam. Kerr Dam itself was welcomed by the Flathead for the economic relief it brought during the depression years. But McNickle's dam is not Kerr; it's set too far up in the mountains. The term "killing the waters" first appears in the text on page 2:

In a time not long ago, he [Bull] would have seen a stream break clear from the foothill below him and swing in a slow curve westward to spill itself in a river--a river, they said, which pushed through the mountains until it opened itself to a great sea of water. He could see even from where he stood that the stream was dry. The gravels and sands of its course had the look of bleached bones. So it was true, what his kinsman had been telling him. They had killed the water.

I began to ask around about this phrase, and about water. It seemed to me to contain the central insight of the novel. I asked members of the culture committee, Johnny Arlee and Ron Theriault, if there were any songs, stories, or ceremonies having to do with water, with the river. I knew from Crow friends that they still prayed to the Big Horn River, even though the state had claimed it:

When we kill a deer we cut it up into little pieces, the parts that can't be eaten, and feed it to the river--entrails, legs, horn. An old man talks to the river with the children:

I give to you today, deer,
who gave to me,
so that he may complete his journey.
Thank you.

We want the river to be strong, we sing to it, feed it deer meat--tell it that we love it--old men and children.

"No, we never did that," the Flatheads said. "We're asking the old people now to tell us what water is--we need to know--to protect it. The state wants it. The old people just tell us, it's life, it's in everything. Don't abuse it."

I thought about McNickle's Bull phrase--"killing the water" all through the late summer and fall. And slowly it came to me. We don't know what it is we're killing. And I began to ask--water--what is that? Tell me about water.

There were many answers. A young man, apprentice sweat lodge leader, said:

You can find out for yourself, you know. All you have to do is go without it for four days. I'll guarantee that on the third day you'll know what water is, you'll have your paper. When your saliva turns to white paste and you try to spit out all the poisons your body is releasing. It's life. That's why the woman always brings it in the Sun Dance, in the peyote meeting, because she brings life, like water.

A Jewish friend told me about an African novel, God's Bits of Wood. A young girl is told a riddle by her grandfather: Water washes us, washes the plants and streets and air. Water washes everything. What washes water? She comes back to this puzzle over and over. It weaves together her experience. Water washes us, washes everything. What washes water? He tells the answer to the riddle at the end of the book: spirit washes water. "It's just something that stuck with me," my friend said. I looked but the book wasn't in our library. Besides, it was African, my friend was Jewish. What did all this have to do with Bull's "killing the water" from a novel by a French Cree-Irish mixed-blood from the Flathead Reservation in western Montana?

Killing the water. With all this and more in my head, I picked up my telephone two weeks ago. It was Frances, my Salish teacher, asking if I could join her for lunch. When we met, I told her I had been working on the McNickle book, thinking about his phrase, "killing the water," and that I had realized we don't know what water

is. "What was the word you taught us for water?" I asked her. "Seh-Wil-qwa." I listened. "Seh-Wil-qwa." She gently repeated it after each attempt of mine. I remembered that someone had told Art, another beginning Salish student, "Talk like you've got a mouthful of spit." Seh-Wil-qwa. I asked her for the literal translation. What does it mean, literally, to an old person--Salish? Her eyes widened; she sucked air into her open mouth, both hands up in front of her face. "It's too big, too much," she said. "You can't translate it into English. It's complicated."

I persisted. "Well, can't you just talk to me for a couple of hours and sort of fill in by talking about all the parts of it that don't translate? I mean, there must be a way in a paragraph or two, a page or two, that will tell about all those things that don't translate." "I will think about it," she said. "You know, the man who could have told you, and he'd talk about it too, died last summer. I'd go by his house every day and there were lots of things I wanted to ask him. Old Enaes Pierre--he really knew these things. He had a water story he told many years ago--I can't remember it--at the winter jump dances. It had fish in it and coyote and rabbit, and wolverine. He was so small, I always wondered if he had a wolverine spirit in him--no one ever said." We sat in silence, a university cafeteria buzzing around us. Frances pointed to my tea cup: "You know," she said, "That water that made your tea . . . I wonder about all the places it's been before it got into your cup. How many times has it been around the world, in the ocean, the sky, going through all kinds of different bodies? All those places." We visited

some more and departed. Next morning, these memories:

A late April day, drizzling rain, warm. Only two of us appear for Salish class at the Arlee Center. There's an hour of daylight left. "Let's go out, dig bitterroot," she says. We pick up Bones, the stray dog she's been feeding at tribal housing, drive across Finley Creek, the railroad tracks, up past the "No Trespassing Without Tribal Permit" sign, under high voltage transmission lines. There is a boulder on the side of the hill where a transplanted grizzly bear ate a farmer's pig last year. A saskatoon bush bearing white blossoms grows right out of this boulder.

We dig on the hilltop in the light rain until it's too dark to see. The steel, curved digging tool is shiny-wet. Her fingers strip the outer skin of the bitterroots; it slips off easy in the wet. The root shines pure white in the failing light, its own light, shining. She shows us where to look for its heart, small red seed tucked up inside the root crotch, plucked, dropped back on the rocky ground. "So's there'll always be bitterroot," she says. Meadowlarks call back and forth across this hilltop. "Uhwa-Whee," she teaches us--their name.

The hilltop is littered with automobiles--the shack-sized boulders from the last glacier--10,000 years. Huge icebergs float in the ancient glacial lake formed by an ice dam 200 miles west of here, Idaho now. It is 1400 feet deep where Missoula is today--a huge inland sea. It drains in a matter of hours when the ice dam fails suddenly--cubic miles of water all at once--

giant ripple marks thirty feet high make little hills across Camas Prairie for five miles. That was a dam! Not this concrete block set in the narrow gorge the Flathead River cut in the bedrock knob south of the lake. Here on this hilltop we dig amidst glacial boulders deposited when the icebergs melted after the big lake drained. Seh-Wil-qwa. The people are a part of this hilltop, these shining roots, these boulders, this old lake, the icebergs floating 1400 feet above us--this bottom of the sea, all in the word, the big eyes and hands in front of the mouth.

The river began to cut its way through this valley two million years ago, after the long dry spell in which the valleys filled with thousands of feet of sand and gravel. The Big Draw northwest of this hilltop is the old valley of the river, filled with glacial debris now--the surface covered with beautifully braided stream beds--dry for 10,000 years.

What I begin to understand, here on this boulder littered hilltop that also is the bottom of the sea, is what the river--water--actually is. It isn't merely that fluid ribbon shining in the valley. The river is this valley, this whole valley floor, all the mud and sand and gravel here, the waves and undulations of water still present in the rolling hills--rivers of soil laid down by water flowing for tens of thousands of years--Seh-Wil-qwa. We look out over the rolling farmlands of this valley and see the water moving all this earth, carrying and carving it. And the Mission Mountains covered with April snow that is melting down into this valley, evaporating into this air: mountain rock crumbles slowly, breaks

down towards ocean, ocean floor after the valley. It is this flow of energy down from the mountain peaks as they give up their rock to earth, to plants, to animals to flesh--it is this great movement of rock into flesh and back again that is the river, that is the beauty and magic of water.

* * *

Several months later I saw Frances again, after she had spent a whole morning with the food stamp people--"they ask questions even God doesn't ask!" She has fish in the freezer, but would like other things for Christmas, like fresh vegetables. She'd rather have a job.

She starts by saying, "You can't think water without fish being in there somewhere. It's even all mixed up together in the sounds. You know Missoula isn't an Indian word; we don't know where it came from. Our name for this place right here where Missoula is, is In-thla'-eye. It is the name for Bull trout. There were always a lot of them in the river right here west of the canyon, until the ice came. We could always get fish here. I don't know why, maybe they spawned in here."

I think of the Indians' annual migration, over Lolo Pass down into Idaho, the Clearwater River, to catch the salmon run just as the streams swollen by the spring thaws began to fall. Each band chose its own tributary to throw a weir across; the catch gathered into a large pile under the chief's supervision, bearers going from lodge to lodge around the circle while the chief counted out loud the number of fish to be

laid before each lodge. And I think about the big fishery at Kettle Falls, ruined by the dams.

You also migrated east, across the big divide, after the bison herds on the west slopes were hunted out in the early 1800's. The Upper Missouri River country, farthest reach of the Arctic shed--air--water--weather--the old Missouri River channel into Hudson's Bay, turned south by the last glacier, filled with glacial debris till now, but the cleansing Arctic winds, teaching endurance, still bringing the weather, the seeds, the birds. You skirt Triple Divide Peak, too close to the Blackfeet, though the Kutenais know it well, sacred mountain from which the snow-melt-water flows to three oceans--Pacific, Arctic, Atlantic. Seh-Wil-qwa.

"Did anyone ever tell you or did you ever see written down anywhere the story of Bitterroot?" she asks.

Long ago, as the story goes, in what we now call the Bitterroot Valley, Flathead Indians were experiencing a famine. One old woman had no meat or fish to feed her children. All they had to eat were shoots of balsamroot, and even these were old and woody. Believing that her children were starving to death, she went down to the river early one morning to weep alone and sing a death song. The sun, rising above the eastern mountains, heard the woman singing. Taking pity on the old woman, the sun sent a guardian spirit in the form of a red bird to comfort her with food and beauty. The bird flew to the woman and spoke softly.

"A new plant will be formed," said the bird, "from your sorrowful tears which have fallen into the soil. Its flower will have the rose of my wing feathers and the white of your hair. It will have leaves close to the ground. Your people will eat the roots of this plant. Though it will be bitter from your sorrow, it will be good for them. When they see these flowers they will say, 'Here is the silver of our mother's hair upon the ground and the rose from the wings of the spirit bird. Our mother's tears of bitterness have given us food.'"3

The last thing she said before taking the old hill home--"About killing the water. I have great hope. They can't do that, though they'll sure try. But it's arrogant to think they can do that. The water can get to places we'll never even know exist. No. They won't kill the water. It was here in the beginning. It will be here in the end. I have hope."

This then, I think, is a beginning of an understanding of that phrase--"killing the water"--of what water might be to this people who are named for the bitter, sustaining root that came from the hunger-tears, the sun, and the spirit bird, who carry the glacier-cycles, the fish migrations, in their knowledge that the earth is rooted in water. At the last forum to protest the proposal to build more dams on the river, Bearhead Swaney said, "If the river is clean, the people are clean. Everyone remembers." Water washes us, washes everything. Spirit washes water. Seh-Wil-qwa.

III

With these things in mind, Bull's anger at the dam becomes much clearer. He learns that his anger is as useless as the rifle bullet he fires at the dam, even the sound of that shot swallowed up in the louder sound of the dam itself. And when one of his young men shoots a young man of the dam, it is not only a useless act, but brings down on Bull's band of Little Elks the full weight of instituted racism in the person of the sheriff and the judicial system. And so Bull waits. He waits for an opening in the solid wall of white dominance around him, not in the hope that the dam will be removed, the water allowed to come alive again. He waits for a road to be made, a road for the Little Elk people on into a future which will not be stripped of their particular ways of being a people in these mountains, with these waters and skies. It is the possibility of the return of the Feather Boy Bundle that offers to him this hope of re-gathering the people around their ancient heart energy. And it is just this story of the arousal of this hope in him that is so breathtakingly cruel. For not only has his brother been turned into a "successful" white farmer, and been coerced/badgered by the priest into giving away their bundle as an expression of his "modernism," but those who would restore it to the Little Elks, Rafferty and Pell, are hopelessly naive about the way empire always has conducted itself in regard to the cultural loot it has stolen, cajoled, coerced away from the peoples of the land it has come to dominate.

This precious bundle, so feared by the priest, so coveted by the museum, so necessary to

the Little Elk people, lays in utter neglect and ruin, thrown away:

Adam tore his museum apart--and made the final discovery. The medicine bundle had effectively disappeared, although not absolutely. It had been tossed into a lumber room, still bearing its identification tag, along with broken furniture, battered steel cabinets, abandoned exhibits, including stuffed birds and animals too mangy to be refurbished. But someone had failed to take it out of inventory and it showed up as a registered item. The unending battle museums wage against rats, moths, organic decay, and an assortment of molds, mites, and enterprising worms had caught up with the medicine bundle. Mice had eaten their way through the buckskin covering and had bred and reared countless generations, each generation chewing away at the hide and the inner contents, whatever that might have been. The only remains consisted of a few pebbles and the shafts of some feathers. Other objects may have dropped out, but no one had bothered to gather them up in disposing of the bundle. What was left of the hide and binding thongs were tattered and profaned, devoid of holy mystery. (209-210)

In discussing the differences between urbanized peoples and peoples of the land, I recently made the standard distinction between being and having: urbanites needing to have in order to feel complete, people of the land exhibiting a sheer intensity of being that is the completeness of the land and its cycles, etc.,

expressing itself through them. A young man, graduate student in environmental studies, corrected me: it isn't the distinction between being and having, he said, but between being and getting. The fate of the Feather Boy bundle precisely expresses this distinction--the need to get something which, once gotten, is immediately forgotten and allowed to perish through neglect as the "getter" turns his/her attention to the next thing to be "gotten" in the endless, empty process of seeking being through having.

The viciousness and cruelty emanating from this enthrallment with getting, wherein even responsible having is aborted, is intensified by the very blindness of those so enthralled. Pell tries very hard to understand what the processes of so-called "civilization" have meant to the Little Elks. And he persists to the point of another discovery:

With kindly hands, they led him through the jungle of the law: to John Marshall: By common accord, the nations of the world recognized the right of each to chew off what it could, and to keep what it could hold; to Vattel: The nation with superior skill could appropriate to its own use the domain of a less accomplished people. They even led him to the Christian Bible: Multiply, and make the earth bear fruit.

These were not sentiments, these were principles of international politics--and how was it that he, a businessman of the world, should be raising such questions?

Indian lands had been taken because they would be put to a higher order of use, because they would contribute to the advancement of a higher order of society--and the law had legitimized such taking. The law was in society and society was in the law. Could he imagine what it would be like otherwise? Whose law, whose society, were irrelevant and immaterial questions. (190)

Adam Pell can see the way the law institutionalized greed, but he cannot see Bull. He cannot see the world from the place where Bull is. Rafferty, through sharing years of his life with the life of the Little Elk people and with the life of the place of which they are a part, has begun to understand. His naivete is in regards to his own culture, in regards to the massiveness of its blindness, self-preoccupation, and greed. And what makes the ending of this stark novel even more tragically true is that it is The Boy, the Indian policeman--who has also begun to find his way back, who kills Bull at Rafferty's order, shouting "Brother! I have to do this!" as the bullet from his pistol hits Bull point-blank in the heart.

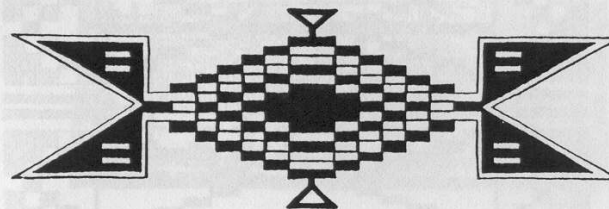
Kill the water. The water of life. Build the dam. That which holds back, that which diverts, that which harnesses so that we can generate energy. The medicine bundle, Feather Boy, is another kind of generator, not made of concrete and armatures with vast windings of wire. What we do to the living water out there coming down off the mountain, flowing through the land, we do to the living water inside ourselves, blood and spirit. This is axiomatic. "The soul

is composed of the external world."⁴ What to drink? What to wash in? What water for the plants, the animals, the fishes? The rain becomes acid. Bull could have told us. The tall grass prairie species, fifteen to twenty feet high (corn is a grass), made/kept their own moisture. They were in the way. They swallowed up whole wagon trains. And the tiny yellow blossoms of grass seed along the dirt roads. Feather Boy. In the belly of rats. In the pungent molds. Acid rain falling all over the world. Bull, Antoine, watching it all.

No meadowlarks sang, and the world fell apart. (256)

Seh-Wil-qwa.

Roger Dunsmore
University of Montana



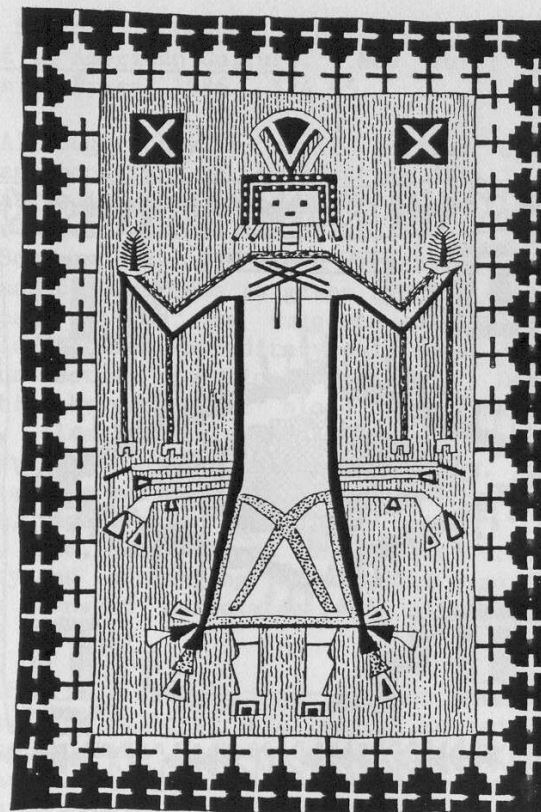
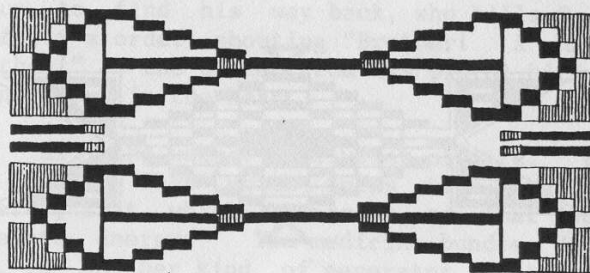
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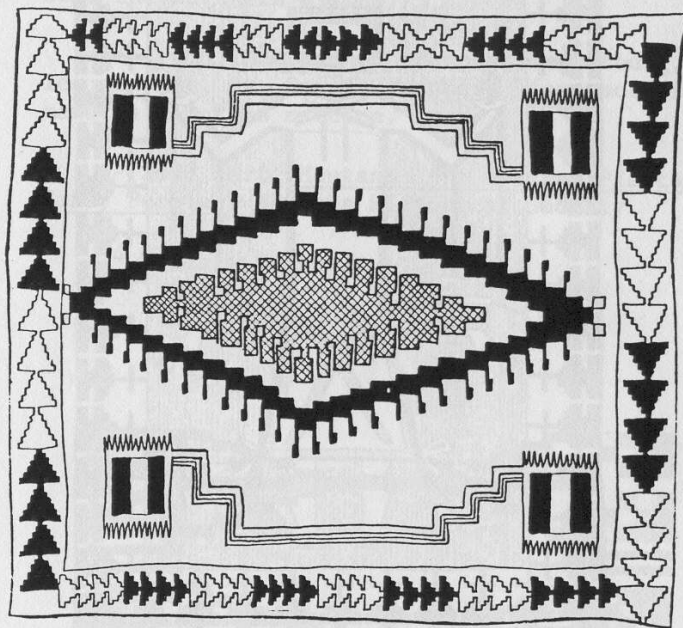
1 His mother had been taken in by the Flatheads. Her father had fought with Louis Riel in his attempt to establish a Metis state in Canada and her grandfather had built the big-wheeled Red River carts that took the Cree all over the Northern Plains.

2 I am indebted to Frances Vanderburg, Pehles ah weh, my Salish teacher, for much of the material in this section.

3 Jeff Hart, Montana -- Native Plants and Early Peoples, Montana Historical Society.

4 Wallace Stevens.





Reviews

Werner Sollors. Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. \$24.95.

Although only a small portion of this important book full of fascinating details deals with Native American matters, it is one that SAIL readers should attend to carefully. The core idea Sollors exploits in a variety of permutations and combinations is given by his subtitle. "American culture" he suggests consists in the interplay between hereditary relations, descent, and contractual relations, consent. Descent, connection by nature or blood, is linked with family, class, race, and place of origin--the "old world." Consent, relations of law, including of course marriage, is linked to possibility, freedom, regeneration--the "new world." Negatively, then, descent most easily associates with rigidity and a clinging to outmoded traditions, whereas consent associates with alienation and loss of values.

This is a useful formula that derives, I believe, from Sollors' intellectual rootedness in literary studies, a background quite different from that of most academics who have heretofore dealt with ethnicity. These usually have been sociologists, or those infected by that pathogenic discipline. Unlike the social scientists, Sollors concentrates on the "cultural contradictions" appearing in explanations by those conscious of ethnic diversity in "making sense of ethnicity and immigration in a melting-pot culture" to those being so melted. The revealing problematics of justification are probably most visible in literary, or sub-literary, texts. Of

special interest to SAIL readers will be the section on "Indian plays" and Indian melancholy, and the "interlude," From Indian to Urban, but there are few pages of this book that do not illuminate some issues of high relevance to the study of Indian literatures, traditional or contemporary.

I confess to being left with one question, and it truly is a question, by Sollor's analyses of the tragedies and triumphs of American poly-ethnicity: to what degree does his formula work for native peoples, and to what degree is it, finally, a paradigm for immigrants?

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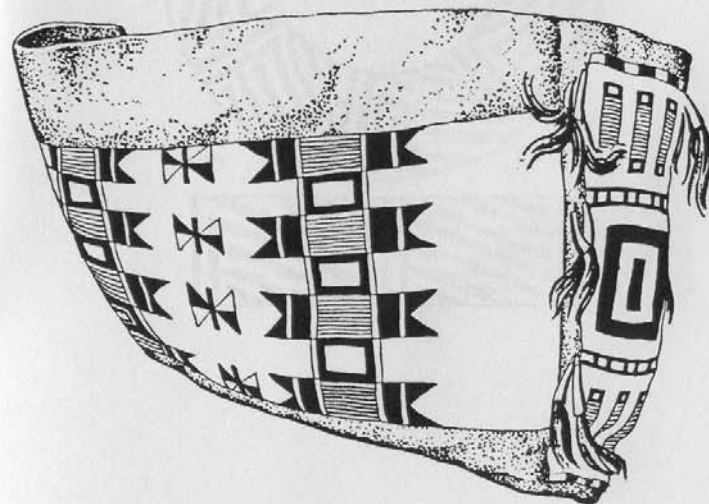
William K. Powers. Sacred Language: The Nature of Supernatural Discourse in Lakota. Norman. University of Oklahoma Press, 1986. 263 pp. 23 photographs, glossary, bibliography. \$24.95.

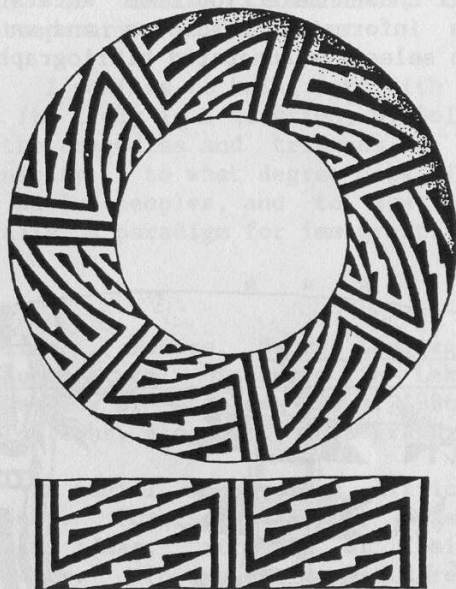
A useful book on a difficult and vexed subject. Powers unabashedly makes use of Levy-Bruhl's ideas, "stripped of their evolutionary parlance." Powers has worked carefully with the Pine Ridge Lakota, and his discussion of song terminology and song texts will be most helpful to specialists. His discussion of Lakota sacral-ity is founded on a recognition that the "Lakota system of naming and classifying," though not in accord with our scientific concepts, "is a coherent and logical system that underscores those relationships that constitute the Lakota perception of their own history and culture."

* * *

Frank Waters: A Retrospective Anthology. edited by Charles Adams. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University/Swallow Press, 1985. \$24.95. \$12.75 pb.

A well-chosen selection from Waters' major books, with informative headnotes and an excellent though selective annotated bibliography.





Illustrations in this issue are from Le Roy H. Appleton, American Indian Design and Decoration (New York: Dover, 1971).