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Introduction to a Special Issue in Honor of Carter Revard

It has been a privilege and a great pleasure to assist in gathering together this special issue in honor of Carter Revard, whose personal presence and intellectual work have been so important to writers and students of Native American literatures everywhere and most especially to the members of ASAIL. Professor Emeritus in medieval literature studies at Washington University in St. Louis, Carter Revard is also, to borrow the words of Chadwick Allen, “a renowned American Indian poet, essayist, emailer, and smooth talker.”

Born in 1931 on the Osage Reservation in Oklahoma, Carter Revard won a radio quiz scholarship to the University of Tulsa, where he earned a B.A. in 1952. One of the first American Indian Rhodes Scholars, he went on to earn an M.A. at Oxford, and a PhD from Yale in 1959. He taught at Amherst College before beginning his distinguished and prolific 36-year career (1961-1997) as a scholar and teacher of medieval literature at Washington University.

In a parallel journey, the same year he was named Rhodes Scholar, Revard was also given his Osage name, Nompewahthe, relative of Thunder. He participated in the political resistance of the AIM years, became a Gourd Dancer and an organizer in the St. Louis Indian community, and began to publish poetry with American Indian themes. Three collections of poetry, *Ponca War Dancers* (1980), *Cowboys and Indians*, *Christmas Shopping* (1992), and *An Eagle Nation* (1993), which won the 1994 Oklahoma Book Award, were followed by a collection of essays, *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs* (1998) and a multi-genre memoir, *Winning the Dust Bowl* (2001). As Chad Allen observed in his introduction to the 2000 MLA panel honoring Revard, “Although medieval England and the Osage Reservation may strike many of us as literally worlds apart, Carter has used his keen interest in the workings of language and storytelling to bring these worlds together in ways that illuminate and delight us, and that challenge our easy assumptions about the divisions between cultures and genres.”

Featured in this collection, which highlights the unique and complex ways Carter Revard negotiates multiple cultural experiences, are Revard’s keynote address to the Mystic Lake Symposium on Native American Literature, April 11, 2002, and a new poem, “Transfigurations.” The keynote address, “Some Notes on Native American Literature” appears here in its complete version, including sections on the new Oxford *Anthology of Modern American Poetry* and

on Energy Policy that Revard omitted from the oral address in favor of ending his reading with “Aunt Jewell at Cahokia Mounds” (see *Winning the Dust Bowl*, 175-83). “Transfigurations,” a long poem in four parts that Carter has been working on for several years, illustrates his recent desire to foreground the political in his work, to “show Indians acting on the world stage” (email 2000).

Also included are papers from two recent conference panels devoted to Revard’s work: the Western Literature Association meeting in Norman, Oklahoma, October, 2000; and the Modern Language Association Convention in Washington, D.C., in December of 2000. Carter was respondent to both of these panels, and we have included the panelists’ papers with only minor revisions, in order to preserve the sense of oral exchange and intimacy of the events. The WLA panel, “‘Making Places to Live’: Carter Revard and the Art of Translation,” organized and introduced by Janet McAdams, included Eric Gary Anderson, Ellen Arnold, and Lauren Stuart Muller. The MLA panel, “Ho’ega: In Honor of Carter Revard,” chaired by Chadwick Allen, included Dean Rader, Susan Scarberry-Garcia, and Norma Wilson. Because Norma Wilson’s paper has since been revised and published as a chapter in her recent book, *The Nature of Native American Poetry* (U of NM P, 2001), Norma submitted a letter of tribute to Carter in its place. We are pleased to include as well Suzanne Lundquist’s paper, “Carter Revard as Auto-ethnographer,” delivered at the second Native American Literature Symposium in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, in December, 2000.

In addition, we have included essays by Mrgara Averbach on the fascinating process of translating Carter’s poems into Spanish, and by Peter Beidler, who shares Revard’s interests and expertise in both medieval and American Indian literatures and dedicated to Carter his exploration of the possibility of Chaucerian influence in Louise Erdrich’s work. Also dedicated to Carter Revard are two poems, “Buffalo in Six Directions” by Janet McAdams and “i hear every word” by Comanche poet tenequer (Ron Evans)—both inspired by attending poetry readings by Revard. The collection also includes a previously unpublished interview with Revard from 1995 and a short recent one conducted by email, with questions submitted by several ASAIL members.

Retirement has hardly slowed Carter Revard’s pace, and his work as a poet and a scholar just keeps on expanding, developing, and becoming more complex—as attested to by the epic sweep and biting political commentary of “Transfigurations,” and by two elegant pieces forthcoming in 2003. One, to be published in a special “Performance”

issue of *Mantis*, is a translation, with extensive commentary, of the “naughty” narrative poem “Johane and Gilote” from the Harley Manuscript 2253, which has engaged Revard’s attention since 1956; the second, appearing in *Cream City Review*, is a “prose diptych” called “Osage Country, 1946: Up in the Hills, Down in the Valley,” set on the Osage Reservation in Oklahoma where Carter grew up. (Both pieces are cited in the bibliography of works by and about Carter Revard that concludes this issue.)

Nor has Carter Revard’s prodigious presence on the internet declined, as evidenced by the email exchange included in Averbach’s essay on translation, and by the series of email “favorites” submitted by ASAIL members. As Eric Anderson commented in a recent email to me (2002), “a lot of less conventional work has been done with and Carter by way of email”; Carter Revard exemplifies the way the internet is changing the face of scholarship, making it more interactive and process-oriented. In fact, the incredible volume and erudition of Revard’s email led Janet McAdams to wonder, in her introduction to Revard’s *Mystic Lake* talk: “Does Carter Revard really exist? . . . There are rumors that Carter Revard is so much larger than life that he is several lives, not a person at all but a committee with an email address. How else to explain a single post in which someone appears to be an expert on Wounded Knee, Anglo-Saxon riddle poems, the mating habits of cardinals, Mark Twain, chicken-fried steak, and Gourd Dancing? It exhausts me to think of the committee meeting of ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu.” I will close with her words, “If there is a Carter Revard, he is multiple,” and with Chad Allen’s: “Carter is both one of the smartest men I know and one of the kindest, and his kindness has been a boon to those of us lucky enough to know him.”

I would like to express my gratitude to all those who contributed their time and work to this collection, especially Janet McAdams (who introduced me to Carter Revard’s work and to Carter himself in 1995), Eric Anderson, Bob Nelson, and Bob Bensen, for their assistance and support, and most of all, to Carter Revard, whose amazing energy, wisdom, and generosity of spirit provided the occasion for this celebration.

**Ellen L. Arnold, Guest Editor
December 11, 2002**

**Brief note from Carter Revard on his community, the
Osage Nation:**

From the time I was a small boy I remember kindness, generosity, and humor from my Osage folks—Grandmother Josephine Jump, Great Grandma St. John, my stepfather Addison Jump, my aunt Arita and my Uncle Kenneth. The astonishing and overwhelming realization, just before I went off to Oxford in September 1952, that Grandma Jump, Chief Paul Pitts, Mr. and Mrs. Wakon Iron and members of the Lookout family, and many others, had brought me into the circle and given me a name of great honor to carry. How kind the welcome always after that when I could get back to Pawhuska and visit Grandma Jump and Uncle Kenneth and Aunt Arita. And how good and welcoming our Osage neighbors were in the Buck Creek Valley: Dave Ware, a longtime member of the Osage Tribal Council, his sisters Rosalie Murray and Julia Wells, for whose husbands I worked many days in the hayfields and wheat fields. The honor and pleasure of meeting John Joseph Mathews at long last, in 1978, when he showed me and the students who had come down from St. Louis around the Osage Tribal Museum that he had founded in 1938. How hopeful I am for the new Tribal Council and our newly elected Chief, Jim Roan Gray, as they begin their terms of office. And in the last few years there has been the pleasure of meeting for the first time some of the widespread Revard relatives—in Palm Springs, in Tulsa, almost everywhere it seems. Seeing the young Osage students and working people in the universities and around, wherever—at Haskell, Kansas University and Nebraska and University of Oklahoma and Oklahoma State and elsewhere. And being able to visit with my brothers and sisters and their children. I am convinced that my brother Jim and I can settle world affairs and agree on who ought to win a World Series or bar fight and have more fun doing it than anybody except maybe our Ponca cousins.

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Some Notes on Native American Literature

Carter Revard

(Delivered at Mystic Lake Symposium on Native American Literature,
Prior Lake, Minnesota, April 11, 2002)

This being a Native American Literature Symposium, and Native Americans being so solemn and serious, I'm going to begin with a humorous poem—about Stealth Bombers, international assassins, ethnic cleansing and germ warfare carried out in the United States between 1803 and 2001, AND the kind of reversible Black Holes that I hope some young Indian version of Bill Gates or Steven Jobs will invent to get us out of this mess. Given that range of topics to cover in a 29-line poem, I thought the best title for this poem would be POSTCOLONIAL HYPERBAGGAGE. Unfortunately, it is so crystal-clear that I know you will have no questions about what it MEANS, so it may not even be a poem—but maybe some of you, as good critics, can make it ALMOST a poem, if you will just ask me how something written in 1996 so neatly DEscribes, or INscribes, the events from September 11th, 2001, until the present moment. Of course, a poem is supposed to be news that STAYS news for at least two thousand years, and this one, mostly written in November 1996, has only stayed news for a little less than six years. If our grandchildren think it is still accurately reported news fifty years from now, maybe it WILL last a few thousand years—but to do that, the United States and the English language would have to live much longer than predicted by actuarial statistics of empires up to now. So here it is:

POSTCOLONIAL HYPERBAGGAGE

NOTE: In this poem I use a Spanish word that may be unfamiliar to readers in the United States: *desaparecidos*. It means “disappeared,” and was applied especially to those citizens seized, tortured, and murdered by the Chilean, Peruvian, Argentine and other secret police—aided and abetted by the United States, during the Nixon and Reagan and Bush One years. Many of these victims were dropped from aircraft into the ocean to sleep with the fishes—which may imply that several American presidents could be considered perfect Godfathers.

If only Vuitton would make a suitcase
with modem and hypertext—or at least windows
to let us put new folders in, where
jackets won't wrinkle and all
the smelly socks can be hung with care in
the hyperspace herb-drawer—and with
still cooler files whose chocolate
truffles would never melt
into a cashmere sweater. We need these
neat reversible black holes for crossing Borders,
things we could pack and close
at a single touch and never pop a seam
or rip a zipper. They'd make the Eurodollar
zoom up in value—
and hey, just think,
Stealth Bombers could be replaced
by diplomatic pouches full
of virtual assassins,
used terrorists could be dumped
out of the Trash Can, leaving
a Virtuous Reality.
All Indian Reservations could be *desaparecidos*
into Death Valley, yet accessible through
its golden icon, the Sacajawea Dollar.
Such a Pandora's Apple, I think,
even the seediest Satan could have sold
to the smartest Adam and Eve, just by saying
one taste of this, my dears,
and you're back in Eden.

It could be that this poem is overstuffed with answers, so let me read one full of questions. Luckily, it was written about 1982, so it's almost completely irrelevant to the fall of Babylon or the World Trade Center, or Wounded Knee, or the Rape of Nanking, or the siege of the Warsaw Ghetto or Ramallah or Bethlehem, or anything that happens to be happening as a result of government-sponsored terrorism. Some of us do remember fairly recent history, such as what was going on when this next piece was written some twenty years ago. Back then, Argentine and British people were killing each other out in the Atlantic Ocean, in the Falklands, and Death Valley Days Reagan was sending the Contras and covert agents to do in Central America what

Milosevich and Mladic would presently do in Yugoslavia. In other words, “A Response To Terrorists” was inspired by the fact that for a long time most of American foreign policy has been not just brutally wrong but incredibly stupid: what is proposed as cure is what causes the disease—we are not sending cowpox vaccine, but smallpox blankets. I don’t think it is particularly or only American policy that is unjust, misconceived and misapplied: the British before us, and most nations alongside us, have hardly done better. I’ll read “A Response to Terrorists” now, and you can decide how dated and irrelevant its questions may be, twenty years later:

A RESPONSE TO TERRORISTS

It seems you can’t
stay bottom dog too long
before some other
outbottoms you. Frankly,
speaking as an Indian I admit
it’s easier to be noble and smile
while vanishing, just as for Martin Luther King
in prison it was easier than
for Andrew Young as Ambassador—
and last war’s victims of the Holocaust may
be next war’s seekers of Lebensraum
in Lebanon or the West Bank: the Palestinians are
the ones in concentration camps, these days.
Isn’t there some way we might
get out from under without finding ourselves
on top and smothering others?
Oh sure,
it seems unlikely that the Acoma
will buy out Kerr-McGee
and claim New Mexico as theirs, or that
Cayugas, Mohawks and Oneidas will get the Adirondacks back
and run a leveraged buyout of
the Chase Manhattan, Rupert Murdoch, and the Ivy League.
But if they did,
would they be citizens at last of the great
Imperial Order, rather than our kind of
small endangered cultures where the sense
of needing every one of us,
of being the tip of growth, the quick

of living earth,
 is borne in on us by our smallness,
 our clear fragility?
 It's feeling powerful and yet
 afraid that fuels killing, it's knowing we are weak and brave
 that lets us want to live
 and let live.
 The terrorists—
 Reader, fill in the names of heads of government as you
 read this: their names were once
 (perhaps before your time) Reagan, Gorbachev, Shamir,
 Khaddafy, Thatcher, D'Aubuisson, among the rest—
 would THEY knife THEIR mothers,
 shatter a GRANDchild's head against a wall or even
 terrify kittens with a stun-grenade? They murder with
 their tongues, send
 surrogates to knife, garotte, beat, poison, torture, bomb—
 who could count the ways? This is a tiger: fire off
 a missile and the creature will
 retreat respecting us. The kitten's
 flayed, comes out a foot with self-inflicted
 bullet hole, flapping like
 a tongue. Forked tongue. Ah, look
 how they leave the Summit now,
 climb in their stretch limos and drive away,
 not skidding on the grandchild's brains.

As every lit student knows, poems can't be put into prose.
 Otherwise I'd tell you that in plain prose this poem says that fat cats
 with power keep making bad things worse, by trying to cure with
 bombs and bullets what has been caused by bombs and bullets, to heal
 with terror what can only be healed by justice and fair dealing—and the
 fat cats do it in comfort and luxury, limousines and tall buildings,
 surrounded by bodyguards and yes-men. The United States with its
 Allies conquered Germany and occupied it for many years, but we did
 not achieve security there by military force, so much as by helping
 rebuild the country, by dealing justly and making common cause
 against hunger and fear, by showing that the German people and the
 American and other Allied peoples can be, and will act as, friends not
 enemies. I wish that could have been the case with the American
 government and the Indian nations of this continent, and I wish it could
 be the case in Palestine and elsewhere in the Near East.

NOW, SOME ADULT POEMS¹

But enough of humorous poems—NOW I am going to read some poems that are perhaps too ADULT for you as students OR as teachers. By this I mean that most human beings do not develop their sense of how miraculous the world is until they are about to die, and luckily none of you has reached that stage, or so we all hope. This temporary immortality, enjoyed by those just finishing their teens while getting ready to vote for another fine president, and by the rest of us while laughing at the results, is probably why so many brilliant people between the ages of 14 and 99 really hate to read great literature—which is so much easier to read if the reader HAS developed this sense of wonder and awe and delight at things which people with their minds not yet open understand are so perfectly ordinary. Of course the death of a grandparent sometimes opens a young mind remarkably well, and quite a few of you may have had the good fortune to lose a mother or father or even a sibling you did not utterly hate. This loss might have led some of you to turn and read, say, the Twenty-third Psalm, or some verses of the New Testament, or the Koran, or a little Old English Poetry—or maybe even some newer poetry in English. If you HAVE been so lucky in losing what you loved, you may already be old enough to have felt the need for words that evoke a wonder and awe and delight that might help ease some of the grief you endured. Those who have had a rib broken, and lived to heal, may later notice how wonderful it is to breathe without pain—and may come to value “simple breathing” a bit more highly when they think about it: each breath you can succeed in taking helps the rib to heal, and so it is with a consoling set of words the breath may carry. What you breathe in helps heal you; what a good writer breathes out may help heal others.

So what IS an adult poem, and how is it made? I myself try to listen for how some ordinary thing might describe its extraordinary being. It would be a riddle, of course, what this creature tells us of itself—a bit of song, from which we are supposed to guess the singer’s name and nature. Old English riddles are spoken, for instance, by a hawk or a hunting-horn, a Bible or a bookworm, a swan or ship’s anchor, an onion or a man’s shirt, by a thunderstorm or by the Cross of Christ. In each of these, the created being speaks through a wordsmith, telling how it came into being, what it does, sometimes how it interacts with human beings. I suppose one MIGHT write the riddle of the Anthrax germ, or of the Stealth Bomber, but I have not done so—not yet, at least. Perhaps one of you will do that.

I use the term “riddle,” maybe because we can’t make sense of anything unless it is already somehow within us, so we solve both outside and inside mysteries by putting them together—we see ourselves by looking away and REcognizing what we always knew—or at least that was one medieval theory of how we know. But how does it get into us and back out in words, this mysterious song of something outside us? In each of us wayfaring souls, there forms around our human mind and senses a rust, a patina, a moondust layer of indifference, a despair at the ordinariness of the world we live in. This has to be brushed off, chipped away, the time-thickened skin of present sensation and thought peeled away from the living past and future: old songs must be heard and new ones sung, or the dance will die and the spirits no longer be honored. To change the metaphor, it has seemed to me that an Old English riddle, or a Ponca song, or for that matter the televised tears of an Israeli or a Palestinian or a Rwandan mother—these utterances of words beyond words—are like glassbottomed boats that let us see, drifting just below us in the depths of everyday things and common beings, creatures incredible yet real, in colors and light unbelievable yet visible, so that we marvel once more at how the human creature lives in this shallow ocean of air, just above the deep ocean in which our ancestors once breathed: “the mind, that ocean where each kind/ doth straight its own resemblance find,” as Andrew Marvell said. I have tried to revive the riddle-poem by looking at the mysterious inwardness of ordinary things here and now, in “our own world,” that is, here in the United States of America in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, as our computers count them at the present time. In this riddle-form, some ordinary created beings speak to reveal some of their mysteries, let some of their powers up from their depths into “the boat we all are in.” Think, for instance, how ordinary is what we call a HOUSE. And yet, when I came to listen, here is what a “house” once said to me:

THE POET’S COTTAGE

At your finger’s touch my turquoise flower
 of fossil sunlight flashes, you call
 from mountain springs bright spurts of water
 that dancing boil on its blue petals
 crushed seeds, their life’s loss repaid
 with offered words. Watchful electrons
 in copper wall-snakes await your cue
 to dance like Talking God down from heaven

and bring Mozart's melodies back,
pixel this world's woe and wonder, but
through wind's eye you see the sun rising
as creatures of earth from heaven's darkness
open iris-nets to the harsh light
of human mysteries, your here and now,
needle points where numberless
angels are dancing, always and everywhere.

In 1994, set to read poems in Tucson and generously lodged by the University of Arizona in the Poet's Cottage, I waked before daylight, had some oatmeal and coffee, and listened to radio and television. It popped into my head that a House had never been given its chance to speak its being, so I tried to let it do that—speak to me, and the poem's readers. The natural gas stove had automatic burners, so a finger's touch brought up its hard gemlike flames, in the shape of a turquoise flower—form following function, fire opening like a cactus-flower for the same reasons, to perpetuate the species (the flower is a sex-organ and must be beautiful and attractive to pollinators; the flame is a food-organ and must do its job efficiently so people will keep such stoves “alive”). And the natural gas, brought up from deep within the earth, is methane from the old marshes and jungles and seas, the result of our star's immense energy having been absorbed into “life-beings” and transformed into carbohydrates and then into hydrocarbon “fossils”—thus being a kind of “fossil sunlight.” So we “turn on the stove,” and then we “turn on the faucet” from which water flows, water that in Tucson comes down from the great reservoirs fed by mountain springs. And into the pot of water we pour the dried and crushed seeds of oats, set the pot over the turquoise flower that makes the water dance and boils the oatmeal. We offer words of thanks for this food, for the loss of life in these seeds that becomes our continuing in life as we eat them.

And then we “turn on” the radio and television sets: the electricity was “waiting” in the walls for us, its copper wires hidden like snakes in the walls, and given their cue these electrons come dancing out like Talking God (in the Diné Bahanané), and what they “bring down from heaven” (through their antennae) might be the music of Mozart, or could be Indian movies—*Smoke Signals*, maybe. The pixels on the TV screen may show us the “news” (“this world's woe and wonder”), but then as daylight grows outside the house, a look through the window (the Old English noun-compound from which window comes literally means “wind-eye”) shows that the sun is rising, and the birds and other “creatures of earth” are moving out of night (“heaven's darkness”) and

opening their eyes (“iris-nets” to “catch” the sights—Iris was a Greek morning goddess, and is a flower and a rainbow and a part of the human eye, its “color” part; and our word retina means “little net”). To these creatures, this light reveals mysterious humans, and the very great mysteries which we dismiss by calling them here and now—that is, Present Space and Present Time. The finale of the riddle is to remind us that these mysteries are small and sharp-pointed as that needle-point upon which the medieval scholars used to try and count the angels dancing, and in this sense a here is an everywhere, a now is an always.

Or maybe you would want to hear another John or Jane Doe speak, this being the one you know as Mr. or Ms. Refrigerator:

REFRIGERATOR

As winter snows	come sifting down,
white cold around	this kitchen’s summer,
my heart’s blue flame	freezes out famine,
swallows Provence and	provides Alaska’s
food-filled winter in	my warm white body
whose Freon blood	around belly’s ice
pulsing, expanding,	purring breathes out
warmth for cats	curled at my feet
to lick their furred	forepaws clean,
pink-tonguing cream	from tipped whiskers—
between two winters	warm as toast.

The paradox central to this riddle is that a refrigerator needs a source of intense heat in order to freeze things. It is a “white body” within which (if it is an old fashioned gas refrigerator like the one we had in Oklahoma when I was growing up) a flame heats the gas (it used to be Freon, I’m not sure what it now may be) whose expansion and contraction cycles drive the cooling of what is within the refrigerator, while the heat being taken out of the interior is “breathed out” by a gentle fan down at the foot of the refrigerator—making a warm place where cats, in the wintertime, may curl up. I hope the rest of this riddle is clear enough.

And maybe some of you have even, after you got away from stifling parents in their ordinary old house, had the exhilarating experience of washing dishes, using an ordinary detergent. Here is what a beautiful blue detergent said to me:

DETERGENT

Poured in a sink, my sapphire soul
Cherubic rises in rainbow bubbles,
I clean a clouded cut-glass until
it shatters the sun to shards of rainbow
as, when blue-gold dawn brings day from night,
bright color washes your world-stains clean.

WELL! if that lowly creature could talk so hifalutin, just imagine what an eagle might say to me when I was given nine feathers and they were beaded into an Eagle Fan that I carry now when I am Gourd Dancing. Here is the poem I made as thanks to those who gave me the feathers, and beaded them into the beautiful Eagle Fan. You will see that the feathers, like the eagle, are alive.

WHAT THE EAGLE FAN SAYS

I strung dazzling thrones of thunder beings
on a spiraling thread of spinning flight,
beading dawn's blood and blue of noon
to the gold and dark of day's leaving,
circling with Sun the soaring heaven
over turquoise eyes of Earth below,
her silver veins, her sable fur,
heard human relatives hunting below
calling me down, crying their need
that I bring them closer to Wakonda's ways,
and I turned from heaven to help them then.
When the bullet came, it caught my heart,
the hunter's hands gave earth its blood,
loosed our light beings, let us float
toward the sacred center of song in the drum,
but fixed us first firm in song-home
that green light-dancers gave to men's knives,
ash-heart in hiding where deer-heart had beat,
and a one-eyed serpent with silver-straight head
strung tiny rattles around white softness
in beaded harmonies of blue and red—
lightly I move now in a man's left hand,
above dancing feet follow the sun
around old songs soaring toward heaven

on human breath, and I help them rise.

Here, the eagle describes how it circles heaven the way a beadworker's needle circles as the beads are sewn around and around the handle of an eagle-feather fan, and also as the dancers, carrying such fans, circle around the drum. The colors of the beaded handle are the scarlet, gold, and midnight blue of the heavens at dawn, noon, and sunset, as the eagle circles ("piercing" white clouds—the thrones of thunder beings—as the beadworker's needle pierces the white buckskin); and these are the colors of a Gourd Dancer's blanket, scarlet of dawn, blue of midnight. The feathers remain alive in the fans, whose motion sends up the dancers' and singers' prayers for life to continue and the journey to be a good one.

TEACHING: ANTHOLOGIES

But I am speaking here to students and teachers of Native American Literature, so let me address briefly two other matters of urgent interest to you, especially as Indian students and teachers. One topic is the writing, publishing, and teaching of work by Indians, on which I will limit my remarks to the question of teachable anthologies. The other topic is that of Indian sovereignty, which I will link to the matter of United States energy policy. You will be glad to know that I can polish off each of these fairly large subjects in a few paragraphs, after hearing which, if you have listened carefully, you will be able to shape US energy policy, university literary curricula, and the future of Indian nations within and in relation to the United States empire, however long that may last.

So let me first polish off the literary matters, before settling the less complicated matters of energy policies and Indian sovereignty. The first important fact in teaching American Indian or Native American Literature is that the whole bleeping educational system depends on big mixed classes and mixed anthologies. This means Indian writers will always be a few voices in a babbling crowd, and to be heard at all they need to be strong clear voices. To be heard AND listened to, a voice must be saying something that makes a difference to the listener—and that necessarily means bringing laughter, or tears, or understanding, or a need for action and a way to act effectively. A teacher who finds poems, stories, commentaries that speak clearly and bring these results, will be a useful teacher, not just an academic but a part of a community and helping strengthen and lighten and hearten the community. A good anthology is one handy for use by such a teacher.

You can see that my literary theory is based on what literature does or can do within and for a community, rather than on what it does for one writer and a coterie of friends in ratholes and patrons in penthouses. Let me be specific: among many good ones, one anthology of the kind I have just sketched is Cary Nelson's Oxford (2000) *Anthology of Modern American Poetry* which begins with Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson, ends with Sherman Alexie, and includes six other American Indians: Scott Momaday, Adrian Louis, Wendy Rose, Ray Young Bear, Anita Endrezze, and Louise Erdrich. Another is John Purdy and Jim Ruppert's *Nothing But The Truth: An Anthology of Native American Literature* (Prentice Hall, 2001), which includes fiction, essays, poetry, and a screenplay (Gerald Vizenor's *Harold of Orange*). I cite these two anthologies for two reasons. The first is that both are user-friendly gatherings that give Indian people a chance to see more clearly and fully than do many anthologies the strengths, vulnerabilities, and high level of contributions by Indian writers—and others—to the historical realities of a country that claims to be, and should be, grounded in equity and founded on fairness. The second reason is that I have seen at least one review of Nelson's OAMAP, written by an intelligent and influential critic of modern poetry, that reminds me of the Milosevich approach to social and political unity, and I want to bring that to your attention so as to keep us reminded that the battle of Wounded Knee is not yet over.

So I will pass by the anthology of Indian Writing, *Nothing But The Truth*, and speak briefly about the issues raised by the critic in question, Marjorie Perloff, in her review of Nelson's *Anthology of Modern American Poetry*, and in her response to critiques of her review. Her review, "Janus-Faced Blockbuster," was published in the journal *Symploke* 8.1/2 [2000], pp. 205-13; five critiques in answer to her review (my critique being one), along with her response to the critiques, were published in the next issue of *Symploke* (9.1/2 [2001], "Forum," pp. 176-92). I quote here from her response (p. 189): "My argument was and is that the last 200 pages [of OAMAP], with their sudden shift to minority writing—as if to say that white men and women in America today can't and don't write poetry—creates enormous confusion. For whatever one thinks of Garrett Hongo or Ray A. Young Bear, the white poetic community (and much of the African-American community as well) has simply been erased." It has been well remarked that there are lies, damned lies, and statistics—so let us look at Perloff's statistics. The anthology has some 1223 pages of poems, and a rough count shows that its last 222 pages include eight American Indian poets with 46 pages, thirteen black poets with 68

pages, and thirteen white poets with 79—some 190 of the 222 pages—the remaining thirty-odd pages being divided among Lawson Inada, Ai, Garrett Hongo, Jimmy Santiago Baca, Ana Castillo, Sandra Cisneros, Jessica Hagedorn, and Martin Espada. Poets of color DO have much fuller representation in these pages than is usual in such anthologies, so I find it not at all hard to imagine that Perloff is upset at these statistics: and besides, she is upset that some of her favorites do not have the space SHE would have given them. She is, however, dead wrong in her claim that “the white poetic community (and much of the African-American community) has simply been erased” from Nelson’s anthology. Forty-six pages for eight Indian poets, 79 pages for thirteen whites, and 68 pages for thirteen blacks, with thirty left over for Latinos and Asian-Americans: oh my, Custer is SO being scalped by these savage anthologists!

One more tidbit. Perloff began her review by quoting one of Frank O’Hara’s poems, “How I hate subject matter,” in which O’Hara jokingly refused to write fashionable political verse. Perloff used this to belabor Nelson for including so much political verse. But when I, and the other respondents, objected to her dismissal of openly political poetry, Perloff responded by claiming that it was all a joke, O’Hara himself wrote political poems, and we were idiots not to see that he was joking. The answer is: he was joking, but she was not. Let me add that I actually like and respect the poetry of Frank O’Hara, despite my badmouthing the particular lines she quoted, and note that OAMAP includes (pp. 827-34) eight poems by O’Hara—more than any Indian writer except Adrian Louis—and O’Hara’s “Talking To The Sun At Fire Island” is so good, it might almost have been written by a pretty fair American Indian poet.

Which brings me to the final bit of my anthology-discussion. Perloff is especially dismissive of a more than pretty fair Indian Poet, Adrian Louis. She notes that, as Nelson’s headnote to Louis’s poems tells us, he “is an enrolled member of the Lovelock Paiute Indian tribe,” implies that his poems are in the anthology only for that politically correct reason, and utterly fails to recognize what he is saying, how he is saying it, and what its implications are. Since I have discussed the poems and her misunderstanding of them in my Reply to her in *Symploke*, I will refer only to one point, because at this point, not only does Perloff *not* understand what Louis is doing in the poem she refers to, but Cary Nelson has for once failed to supply the gloss or footnote that could have remedied the ignorance of (I would guess) most non-Indian readers, and made them more willing to do the right thing in teaching from this anthology—which would be, here, to set this poem

by Adrian Louis alongside the one it matches in many ways, Robert Frost's "The Witch of Coös" (OAMAP, pp. 97-100) as two ironically narrated stories of passion and adulterous lust. Let me quote here the tenth section of Louis's long poem "Petroglyphs of Serena" (OAMAP pages 1134-41; #10 on p. 1137), Louis says:

About a year after Serena
died in the car wreck
I saw her again—sort of spooky, but
ghost sightings are common around here.
Spirits come and go, to and fro.
She was with some strange-looking Skins,
drove a different car, and looked puzzled,
half-angry when I waved at her.
Acted like she didn't know me.
Kind of gave me a kiss-my-butt look
and then flipped me the bird.
I shrugged and did the same back to her.
Her car was filled with buffalo heads,
stampeding the ghost road
to White Clay.

For Indian readers, but not for most others, it is easy to recognize the way Louis has morphed the story of a Rezgirl, wild and feisty and smart, killed in one of the interminable car wrecks on the roads of Pine Ridge, into a Deer Woman story at this point. Indian readers will also, for the most part, feel the power and irony of those last three lines about her car, "filled with buffalo heads/stampeding the ghost road/to White Clay." We know that White Clay is a place just across the Nebraska state line from the Lakota reservation—a place of murderous liquor stores that contribute greatly to the car wrecks, and the human wreckage, central to Serena's story. Non-Indian readers are not likely to know this, and therefore cannot feel the ironic power of those lines. Nelson ought to have provided a footnote clarifying these points, just as anthologists do for, say, Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn," when he speaks of a heifer being led to sacrifice.

I hinted, above, that one good use to make of this anthology might be to pair some of the Indian poems with comparable "classical" modernist poems. Let me suggest a few such pairings that ought to open up the canon and maybe even the minds of teachers and students: Sherman Alexie's wonderful trio of "Tourists" (pages 1222-3) would go splendidly with Eliot's "Prufrock" (p. 278), and Wendy Rose's

“Truganinny” (p. 1156) would remind readers of some things left out of Pound’s “River-Merchant’s Wife” (p. 205), and Louis’s “How Verdell and Dr. Zhivago Disassembled the Soviet Union” (p. 1129) would pair well with Edwin Arlington Robinson’s “Mr. Flood’s Party” (p. 28). The usefulness of such pairings is that they let the canonical poems be tested against the fresh and deep dimensions of the Indian poems. When the French wine-makers finally allowed blind taste-tests of California vintages alongside the French, they were astonished to discover how deeply those Californicators had gotten into oenology. The same thing will happen if Indian poets are given a chance, by such “tastings,” at least if the “tasters” are not mere chauvinists with heavy investments in Establishment vineyards.

But now, I must draw this to a close, by doing what I promised earlier: showing how US energy and foreign policies can be reformed through a rethinking of American Indian sovereignty. I can do this with four names of small European countries: ANDORRA, MONACO, SAN MARINO, AND LIECHTENSTEIN. Each of these has quasi-sovereignty, a viable economy, an interesting history and culture to itself, poses no threat to but instead is symbiotic with the country or countries that surround it, and serves a very useful and indeed valuable purpose in the culture of Europe. Indian nations within the United States can look at those four small nations as usable models for how much of a land base, what degrees of independence, what different means of attaining viable economies might be realized if the US government ever decided to look seriously at them as models.

But how does this link to energy policy? Simple: so long as the US energy policies put fossil fuels at the center of our economy and culture, we will continue to be vulnerable to foreign nations that can cut off our supplies. The answer: TURN TO RENEWABLE RESOURCES—WIND AND SEA AND SUN. AND WHERE DO WE GET WIND AND SEA AND SUN? ON INDIAN LANDS. I propose that Pine Ridge windmills can light up Chicago. I know that the oil cartels already understand that this is their future, that they will transfer their Terminator programs into the windmills and the solar cells, and that the future Enron scandals will be situated in these. So, it is probably too late by now, but I propose that the Lakota, the Osage, the Oneida, the Navajo, all the nations, go into the energy business, locate and build the windmills, the solar terminals, the fuel-cell cars and generators right on the Rez. I assert that the profits from clean and renewable energy can do more than casinos, and with less human damage, to house and clothe and feed and acculture small sovereign Indian nations within the great nation of the United States. And with

that, here endeth this ridiculous but truthful prophecy, and I must thank you for asking me to come here and let Schrödinger's black cat out of the Department of Energy's Black Hole. And may your children enjoy the good life which will be theirs, if this prophecy comes true because it must be you, as good parents and extended family, who will see that it does come true.

NOTES

¹ In this section, I adapt at some points passages published in the *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* in its January, 1999 issue, and also some discussion of riddles in *Family Matters*, *Tribal Affairs* ("Herbs of Healing"), *Winning the Dust Bowl*, and in a recent (2001) issue of the Canadian journal *Florilegium*.

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Transfigurations¹

Carter Revard

(December, 1992: the day after Ronald Reagan addressed the Oxford Union—
September, 2002: after Tony Blair supported Bush's plan to attack Iraq)

1.

Depressing, depressing—they found him,
says the happy mother of
the bright and decent Oxford students
who've just been listening to him, just
had tea and wine and canapés or what not with him,
—they found him utterly charming, and his speech
to the Oxford Union audience smoothly
reminded them how special
Anglo and American relations are,
how we've stood together
against the Nazis and the Commies, how
the Evil Empire's now collapsed
because the Iron Lady stood with him and now
the Tories can get on with wrecking
the National Health Service and bring back—
oh hell, it's too disgusting
and tedious to go through. And yet—
Could they be right? this smoooooth Ronnie
and bristly Maggie, who sent hit men to bomb,
torture and murder in Honduras,
Northern Ireland, Nicaragua, Guatemala,
El Salvador—might the poets paint
their bloody work as necessary
and therefore beautiful and
good, like Andrew Jackson's Trail of Tears
or battles won in France by Henry Fifth?
A question much too big for this Nobody. So I'm
just standing here in Oxford,
here on the Turl, looking
at these Italian ties, these brilliant silks
in Walter's of the Turl, to brighten up
the rainy, flooding weather of this day,
early December at the end

of Michaelmas Term when the brown
roiling Cherwell has risen up
almost into the Botanical Gardens: I'm hoping
the Oxford Union's merely as stupid
as I recall its being in the Fifties, though not so dumb
as Parliaments, or Presidents, in the Eighties.

2.

Looking at bright silks in a dark mood, though,
I think peculiar things.
Maybe I'm looking at expensive clothes
to keep from thinking how the rich men rule.
Babylon fell, I think. Alzheimer's gets
the Emperors, lion and lizard keep
courts where Belshazzars used to sleep, their silks
and satins flutter in clothes-moth wings—
old Presidents tumble in the add-bleach cycle,
rotten tyrants placed here or there by fussy
compost-building Time, raking his footnotes.
Yet they come back, I think, it all seems
to recycle, just repeat itself: if only
death WERE the mother of beauty—
famished caterpillars eating
poison-packed leaves and turning them into
waving angelic wings, Monarch
and Luna Moth and Tiger Swallowtail.
But those are free, while fat silk-moths must not
come forth, must never rasp
and ruin the one long thread they spin into a shroud, never
visit moonshadowed flowers, like deity must die
to robe us in raw silk, then the chemists
conjure from coal angelic glories, tweak
oil-film from fossil seas and set it
dancing in rainbow swirls upon
a dandy's ties—
called up from time
by Chinese women, German chemists, by
old Englishwomen winding, unwinding—those "silkwives"
of fifteenth century London—careful as Urania with
that Phoenix-egg from the rainbow-winged first
universe when from her great

brooding song this universe
exploded as brilliant quarks
that cooled into space and time and stars within each
infinite pupa—
flashing, turning to otherness, digesting
self to blossom where
in the Emperor's Masque his minions dance,
mirrored in silken brilliance,
crimson pajamas, black satin sheets of bordello,
a fop's foulard, Q.C.'s robes,
thread turning and turning,
spinning, weaving, O dark
Mother of Bright Wings—genies slide
with silken gravity of water down
the turbine-wheel, becoming
current alive with
ghost-voices; sand dunes melt into
silicon sapphires, rare earth wakens as
germanium touching golden wires
to music as of Apollonian lyres—
and see the Psalms of David
melting with Christian alchemy into stained glass
of Placebo and Dirige, much as Jerubbabel
once channeled Babylon
into Jerusalem, bright faces passing over
the glass of Siloa's brook that flows
fast by the Oracle of God, reappearing on
the Thames, the Hudson, Amazon, Volga, Yangtze—
and far off see the glittering Stars
and Galaxies rain down into
that huge Black Hole, as dead leaves go
into a bonfire and come forth
as flame, ashes, smoke and light and heat
but then become
the next year's flowers—trees—grapes and
wine, cider and brandy—world into words,
speech into writing, Songs into Drum—
wrenched down personal
Black Holes into an insurrection
of Dark Matter as a Quasar dies—
till from decaying Space and Time arise

and fly away new Bubble Worlds, brief rainbow minds upon
their film of bursting time—

O see
the great and vibrant world become
a tiny set of words upon
a baby's tongue
and how it grows, how all that old debris
from superstars becomes this mass of
proteins with sense and memory, foetus that
coheres to selfhood, "crying for the light,
and with no language but a cry."

Yet still THEY'LL say, they always say, the Presidents
and would-be Kings, clanking their tongue-chains:

We're for the greater good, we do it all
entirely for true Peace and Freedom, for
the Empire, for
America, the Beautiful—
Old Glory, see how
it waves, it's waving down here on
our Humvee bumpers, high up on our mighty
impregnable skyscrapers, everywhere—
those children that we starved, we bombed, those whom
we burnt in the idol Petrol's belly,
we sacrificed for our Old Glory, see?

3.

Well then, a sunset walk in this curious universe,
leaving in their windows
those mothwing ties, leaving to Heaven
one dozing forgetful President with his Counselor,
that brisk Attila the Hen.

Much brighter, out here on the galactic rim
of Oxford, walking with my light of life,
la Stella mia, given an endless
evening translucence here to walk through, all
these WATERY trans-figurings,
Port Meadows on the fringe of Oxford as the
Cherwell floods them, sunset lying on
their momentary pools—
where lapwings wheel and dive among
white gulls swirling, black rooks pubbing, magpies

plotting,
 men sitting pipe in mouth, long rods across canal, waiting
 for a fish to pull the rod-tip down, between
 canal boats and a pair of serene swans
 who grandly cross the canal to seize our bits
 of bread from a baguette with ham and salad,
 take bits from fingers or spear chunks in
 the water, fallen floating soggies gobbled by
 coots, moorhens and ducks as we stride by, passing
 the waterlogged Meadow's wild
 ponies shaggy for winter, one palomino Arab trotting,
 prancing for his rider posting stiff-
 spined in her billed cap—we walk through Wolvercote and
 turn
 at last down toward The Trout Inn beside
 that stallion muscling of water under bridge through weir,
 that swirls roilyboiling upon itself in
 moiré silk motion, long mothwing sunset still
 spinning in eddies past
 the people at their patio tables.
 —Walking out here through Jericho, we saw those counterspy
 cats slink into alleys, slip beneath parked cars,
 step gingerly on Dead Sea asphalt, plotting
 escape to high windowseats where others calmly
 looked down from glass Nirvana
 on us in Maya—reminding me, as I pass, of the quiet
 Public Record Office in Kew, its pools with swans around
 thousands of parchment corpses
 from the Hundred Years' War, when English chivalry led
 by King Edward and his sons, the Black
 Prince and his brothers,
 went over to rape, pillage and loot French villages,
 the nunneries despoiled, the blind King of Bohemia slain,
 when homicides came home to pardons for good service
 in France by King's testimony, given
 on Justice Itinerant rolls, beside the felony indictment
 their mark of pardon, King's X, Pax—
 Pardon Me For Murder, Your Majesty?
 I DO: YOUR PRIVATE ENGLISH CRIMES ARE PARDONED
 FOR PUBLIC MURDERS, DONE IN FRANCE FOR ME.

4.

—I know the Oxford swans still fly, they are not pinioned
like the black swans in London's St. James Park,
that royal park behind 10 Downing Street,
the War Office, Whitehall and all that. And yet,
"The silver swan, that living had no note...
More geese than swans now live, more fools than wise,"
and here, as we step down to the Trout, the small
arrows of geese zoom low overhead,
turn sharply and shoot southward
over the flooding Thames not far above
the broken walls of Godstow Nunnery,
God's Place beside its lock where the waters tremble,
stone and water winding around
each other a clear mauve
and steely silver sunset
where Venus glitters and a helicopter flutters,
mothlike glinting, maybe with Ronald Reagan going back
royally to America, pardoned by
the Oxford Student Union here beside "the chartered
Thames,"
flying above Blake's vision of a land where still,
serenely crimson on those mellow stones,
the hapless infant's sigh
runs in blood down college walls.

¹ Carter Revard comments that he may well try to convert this long and unruly "poem" into an "essay," and remarks that an effort to make such a change worked in the case of "Family Reunion" and showed him interesting things about "differences between poems and essays."

An Interview with Carter Revard

Janet McAdams

(Conducted at the Meeting of the Modern Language Association,
Chicago, December 28, 1995)

JM: You've mentioned that you think that a lot of contemporary poetry has lost "story." We don't tell stories in poems anymore.

CR: I think the stories have been submerged; they're snags rather than canoes. They give readers trouble rather than transport them. By that I mean most poems have to have some kind of story that's being told about something. Most anything has to have that; I think story is a basic part of human nature. If you ask how you remember things there are two main ways—one is place and one is story. Story is time, place is space. The old memory experts, when they wanted to remember things, they would place something in each room. That was one way. But the way memory people work now, they make a story out of something. For example, if they want to memorize the phone book, they make a story about it.

Instead of just being about my feelings—or our feelings—or even in one sense what happened, a poem ought to be about how these things happen and how they go together, in a way a reader can get in on instead of being excluded from or puzzled by. We can take advantage of what's being done by the non-story telling novelists and fiction writers and so on, and for that matter by the Ashberry and so on group who do such peculiar things that don't strike me as any use and strike me as removing the writer from any kind of community I can imagine, which I know must be false in some sense since there's so many people who say "Ashberry is wonderful" but I haven't been able to make sense of it or say that there's anything there worth making sense of.

So I'm talking negatives here. There are poets who aren't doing it and there are poets who are deliberately not doing it—that is, telling stories, keeping stories going. They think they're gods and away from the rest of humanity and they're superior and looking down. Joyce said "artists are gods paring their nails." I think he should have been kicked when he said that. When he got over to Paris, he had a little too much cunning, a little too much exile and not enough silence. I think story is a basic part of human beings. With the poem, if you let it [story] go, you've lost the audience.

That's not true of somebody like Stevens. There are all sorts of peculiarities there—his plonka plonka plonka stuff. It's very odd stuff.

It's not like anybody else. I can see a mind at work there, working hard at things that concerned him philosophically, trying to get them clear. I can't pin him down. It's like trying to nail jello to the wall to get Stevens' philosophical poems pinned down.

But I still think he's gone away from an audience, so I prefer narrative poems and lyric poems that have stories implicit in them and the sense of going into a shared experience, telling you a story which turns out to have a great deal with who we are. And after we're through reading it, we see more the poet and the rest of us have in common. I think of the whole poetry business as building a verbal community. It may not be a very big one, but it's a place to live, a place where people can find out what they share, where they really are mad at each other, where they don't agree at all.

JM: Something that interests me a great deal in your work is your sense of the line. Some poems are center justified; many of them have that sort of staggered lineation.

CR: The center justification allows me to flash each line in front of the reader as a little revelation. I like doing the different spacing of words, over here, down here, back over here and so on. What I like is to break the syntax in such a way that you get to the end of this line and it could go several ways and when you actually pick it up, it's perfectly clear but a little surprising. There's more energy. You're breaking the atom and releasing certain forces. I'm not sure I can explain it, but I can illustrate it. [Reads from *Ponca War Dancers*—"Another Sunday Morning."] What I was doing there was to place each line where the most vivid awareness of what was in the line would come to the reader's eye. When everything is left-justified, it suggests that everything starts from the same place.

JM: What about the poems with the caesura in the middle of the line? The poem you read last night, for instance. I wonder what it's like for you, to have this literature, medieval and old English, in your head and have it intersect, for want of a better way of putting it, with tribal narratives?

CR: I got to Oxford, you had to learn Old English to get a B.A. The riddles in Old English turn out—like "The Swan"—to be very mysterious statements from things that you take for granted, an anchor, a swan, a storm. And a lot of them, since they don't give the answers, are disputed. When you begin looking carefully at those, there's a whole sense of the world I began to think that was close to the many of

the Indian things I was among, word-shaping as ways of seeing objects and things, the fan for instance.

Tom Goodwin was finishing at Indiana and doing a year with us at Washington. Tom and I were doing a reading aloud for the students of the alliterative poetry and we were starting with the Old English riddles. Tom was much more up on than I, but he had to go for a job interview. I got stuck doing these one Saturday.

I thought, if I go in and talk about the actual Old English riddles here, I'm going to be sunk, because I don't have time to prepare every one of them. So, I thought, I'll make up a riddle or two. So I fiddled around a little bit and I came up with "Water"—there are nine of them in *Cowboys and Indians*, *Christmas Shopping*. I put this note in to introduce them: "The Anglo-Saxon tribes invented a special song-form for beings of power to word themselves to human audiences. The name of this form among modern scholars is riddle: short poems in unrhymed alliterative metre, word-webs whose twilight spinners are to be spotted by the keen-eyed viewer. And so I've included three old and six new. I made up one for amber. We were in Denmark and bought some beautiful amber for Stella and my aunt Jewell. Amber comes in floating on the waves there; it's washed free under the sea."

JM: What a beautiful image.

CR: It's grand old stuff. It's millions of years old—the Jurassic Park stuff. "On rearing white-necks I ride the whales road into"—in these poems you have kennings, "horses of the sea," all the Homeric stuff.

JM: Leslie Silko and Linda Hogan have both talked about how the Native American world view is similar to what's being described in popular physics—worlds mirroring each other, what's going on in every particle and part of the universe. I think I see that in your work, too.

CR: I've had a long interest in all the scientific stuff, but I'm not good at it. I got into college through a quiz show, so I had to learn enough for that. So I'm not good at it, but I've always read as much as I can. I've always stayed interested; I've tried to do a lot with different things. [Reads from "Earth & Diamonds" in *An Eagle Nation*.]

JM: Who are some of the writers you admire?

CR: I like Bobbie Hill [Roberta Hill Whiteman] a lot. There are a lot of people I can think of like Elizabeth Bishop, Lowell to some extent, Wilbur—the kind of standard writers. I think there are three great American poets so far: Whitman, Dickinson, Frost. The rest are kind

of waiting. So I get in trouble with all the students. T.S. Eliot—he himself has said he’s a minor poet. But minor doesn’t mean some obscure anthology; it means somebody who stays good forever, who is cake and not bread.

JM: Your last book was *An Eagle Nation* . . .

CR: I put together the poems for *An Eagle Nation* and it turned out to be pretty darn long. I knew Arizona was interested and they took it. They did a beautiful job. Norman Akers did that cover. He’s an Osage guy, the son of Victor Akers who used to hell around with my brother.

They did everything that wouldn’t get you executed. It got Victor killed, as a matter of fact. I went to my Aunt Orita who knew about Norman Akers. The painting is called “The Meeting Place.” There’s an Osage warrior there, a kind of a spirit warrior. The colors are like the eagle fan.

JM: It sold out last night [at the MLA Reading], in the first five minutes.

CR: It sold well the first year. I’ll tell you a story. A year ago, there was a conference in Oklahoma. A very nice woman there was running a writer’s center. I was supposed to go there and talk about poetry. Before this, there was to be a dinner. So I got my little rental car. The fees were very small, so it cost me more than I made. Most of the writers there were genre writers, romance writers, and boy were they alive.

I got seated next to an agent. She said, “So you’re a writer.” And I said, “Sort of.” And she said, “A poet.” And I said, “Sort of.” “Poetry doesn’t sell.” she said. I said “You’re right.”

She asked, “What was your last book and what did you get in royalties?”

I thought I’ll fix her. My last book was *An Eagle Nation*, and I had made \$914 the first year, and I was very proud. So I said, “\$914.” And she said, “That’s what I said. Poetry doesn’t sell.” And when I went outside, all the romance writers got in a stretch limo!

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Carter in Space

Eric Gary Anderson

(Delivered at the meeting of the Western Literature Association,
Norman, Oklahoma, October 26, 2000)

American Indians are no strangers to space. Lots of American Indians have already been there, have stood in relation to sun, moon, and stars; among Native writers, we have Black Elk, Sherman Alexie (*First Indian on the Moon*), Simon Ortiz (*Men on the Moon*), Susan Power (the “Moonwalk” section of *Grass Dancer*), Linda Hogan (*Solar Storms* and the poem “Man in the Moon”), Wendy Rose (“Holodeck”), Betty Bell (*Faces in the Moon*), Scott Momaday’s story of the seven sisters and the bear brother, John Joseph Mathews’s autobiography *Talking to the Moon*, and, if you really want to go there, there’s Chakotay on *Star Trek: Voyager*.

Here are some of the spaces Carter inhabits, visits, travels to and through (*i.e.* the spaces I’m not really going to say much about this morning): Oklahoma, Cahokia, St. Louis, Las Vegas, New York, Washington DC, Amherst, Oxford, Paris, the Isle of Skye, Bordeaux, Rome, Athens, Corfu, Pawhuska—local and cosmopolitan; Native spaces and places (Indian Country); colleges and universities both here and overseas; family; medieval British literature, and in fact the whole enchilada of Western literature (from Greco-Roman on); cyberspace. (The Western Literature Association has to be a pretty roomy place and a pretty loosely-bordered space in order to include Carter, it seems to me.)

Carter in Space (and in fifteen minutes!). I have in mind a very open-ended definition of “space,” which includes both “outer” space and earthly, geographical “space”—the spaces Carter drives through in “Driving in Oklahoma,” as well as the space he has in mind when writing about “neat reversible black holes”—space ships, nebulae, supernovas, quasars, brilliant quarks, and such. Here I also need to mention flying dragons and TWA airplanes, which leads me to think of birds, since birds are even more important than 747s to Carter. In his poems and essays, we find eagles, chickadees, pigeons, bobwhites, ducks, geese, redwing blackbirds, purple martins, juncos, waxwings, cardinals, meadowlarks, owls, hawks, wrens, red grouse, mockingbirds, ravens, sparrow hawks, warblers, herons, bob-white quail, scissortails, turtle doves, bowerbirds, barn swallows, red-bellied woodpeckers, bluebirds, kingfishers, catbirds, crows, turkey vultures, yellow-bellied

sapsuckers, orioles, robins, flickers, and so on. In Oklahoma, so far as I can tell, birds help tell you where you are, and birds, I think, help remind us of the relationships between earth and sky. That is, birds are intermediaries between the space “up there” and the space “down here,” about which more very soon. As Carter says of the pigeons in “Outside in St. Louis,” “What, / I wonder, do they fly through, among, within?” (*An Eagle Nation* 71).

The heart of my talk this morning can be found in one poem of Carter’s and one essay (also of Carter’s). The poem is “Close Encounters,” in *An Eagle Nation*, which begins like this:

We of the Osage Nation have come,
as the Naming Ceremony says,
down from the stars.
We sent ahead
our messengers to learn
how to make our bodies,
to make ourselves a nation,
find power to live, to go on,
to move as the sun rises and never fails
to cross the sky into the west
and go down in beauty into the night,
joining the stars once more
to move serenely across the skies
and rise again at dawn, letting
the two great shafts of light beside the sun
become white eagle plumes in the hair
of children as we give their names. (25)

And the essay is one of the “Tribal Affairs” pieces from *Family Matters*, *Tribal Affairs*: “How Columbus Fell from the Sky and Lighted Up Two Continents,” which contains a section called “How the Osage Nation Came from the Sky” and considers a two-headed question that comes up in Carter’s American Indian literature classes: “is it only ‘mythmaking’ to say that humans come from the stars? Is it more ‘factually accurate’ to say that humans are made out of this earth we live on, as is said in the Hebrew Creation Story?” (153). Carter’s use of quotation marks (badly represented by my use of air quotes) anticipates his response:

We *do* come “from the stars,” just as we *do* come
“from the earth.” The old Hebrews got it right; so

did the old Osages. Thinking about the “old myths”
 can perhaps have its humbling uses. It may well be
 that myths are like the stars: we see by their light,
 even though they may have “died” centuries ago.
 (153)

Why do so many of Carter’s poems describe a vertical axis, as well as various forms of ascent and descent, various “ups” and various “downs”? I’m thinking of the way things move at the beginning of “Dragon-watching in St. Louis,” where a father and a little boy see a “monstrous jet” while out for a stroll: “had they seen it go screeching down/ into the sunset with sweptback wings downglinting/ as their words rose like drowned twigs from a stream” (*Eagle* 93). Because the Osage—and because all of us—come from the stars *and* from the earth. Because words rise. Or, as in “Starring America,” the passenger “coming down to/ LaGuardia” is

... looking down
 past the massive tilting wing with its magically
 shifting ailerons, its insect-like
 adjustments, creaks and thumps that
 keep us flying as we
 drop downward cushioned against the screaming
 hell of jets
 just feet away, sinking into the fume
 and grumble of traffic as we princes of
 the middle air look at headlights like
 souls gliding in Dante’s *Paradiso* smoothly along
 their destined ways. . . . (107)

What keeps us flying? What cushions us against screaming hell? What makes words rise up even if “like drowned twigs from a stream” or a sinking, stinking jet stream? The vertical axis, the vertical descents and ascents help reinforce and reanimate cultural descent and cultural ascent. “Walking among the stars”. . .

. . . And making places to live. We also see and experience a real and solid groundedness. There’s a crucial relationship between the vertical descent as creative cultural force and the earth as destination *and* home. Keep in mind Special Agent Wazhazhe No. 2,230, in “Report to the Nation,” who mentions the word “geo-graphics” (*Family* 81) to signify the relationships between writing and earth, the ways places and texts inform and help to create each other, the groundedness

that helps balance and define that vertical axis. So again, what matters are the connections, the relationships between earth and sky; the people descend to earth and look at the stars from earth, and since this is a cyclical or recurring event, the people also rise up, ascend back up to the point from which they look at earth from above and descend back down to it. My title, "Carter in Space," sets out to work as a sort of shorthand for all of these relationships and movements through and to and back from space: the "star-stuff" of "water and language, time and space, memory and writing" (*Eagle* xi).

In Carter's writing, clearly the "where" is just as important as the "what." One offshoot of all this is the possibility that it might make sense to combine the idea of genre as classification or category with the idea of genre as place to live. As Jace Weaver (Cherokee) observes, "American Indian writers help Native readers imagine and reimagine themselves as Indian from the inside rather than as defined by the dominant society" (5). Genre may very well exemplify what Weaver, referring to the related concept of the canon, calls a "Eurocentric trap" (x)—a means of measuring and evaluating all things Indian by non-Indian standards, leading, "albeit perhaps by inadvertence and with honorable intentions, to a denial of Native personhood and damage to Native subjectivity" (x). With Weaver's critique and the words of various other Native writers centering my thinking, I want to urge a shift away from western questions of formal identity and toward two moves Carter makes in his work: one is the move of putting European literary and cultural traditions inside Osage containers, and the other is cross-reading, bringing (for example) Wallace Stevens into contact with Simon Ortiz, John Milton with Wendy Rose, and Robert Frost with Louise Erdrich, and all of the above into contact with Carter.

American Indian writers repeatedly qualify, question, dismiss, leapfrog over, or revise western notions and practices of literary genre as they locate themselves as Native writers. For instance, *Family Matters*, *Tribal Affairs* seamlessly mixes autobiography, literary criticism, satire, travelogue, various forms of poetry, and much more. Carter certainly respects these and other genres, as when he translates Old English Riddles and offers a few "'New English'" Riddles (179) of his own, "adapting WAS [white Anglo-Saxon] poetics for American Indian themes and purposes" (181). And yet he at times gently, at times more wickedly reinvents and recontextualizes the genres he deploys. In writing, for example, "What the Eagle Fan Says," a Riddle about the Eagle Fan he carries when Gourd Dancing, he productively guides readers toward and into places not governed by the expectations of genre so much as they are animated by the surprises and certainties

of what Carter elsewhere in *Family Matters* calls “a community of words on Indian ground; good neighbors without fences” (xi). So instead of, or in addition to, thinking about “odes” and “sonnets,” we might think about “star poems” and “bird poems” and “rock poems.” We might also consider what “here” refers to in Carter’s poem for John Joseph Mathews, “Rock Shelters,” how “here” glides across space and time and shifts from the juncture of Doe Creek and Buck Creek to the global and the galactic and back again:

. . . Think
of walking on blue stars like
this one, new
plants, new beings, all the rock
shelters where we’ll crouch and see
new valleys from.
Here’s my
mussel-shell. Here’s the charcoal.
We were here. (83)

“So here we float in time among the stars,” Carter says in “A Giveaway Special,” a poem in *An Eagle Nation*, and here and elsewhere in his work, “Carter in space” is inseparable from Carter in time, Carter in language, Carter in writing. Space matters to the extent that it helps to describe a relationship. That is, space, for the Osage people as well as for Carter as an Osage person, is a starting place as well as a place to return to; it is not, however, a remote, isolated place. It is not even a single “space,” but rather a plural form, “spaces,” in all its radiating and sometimes radical ascent and assent and descent and descent. Carter is, very much in solidarity, “making spaces to live”:

Into a star, the old singer sang, as he moved toward
the House of Mystery where the child he would give
its name was waiting among the assembled
representatives of the clans, arranged to repeat the
starry order: *Into a star you have cast yourself*. I am
naming, as I go, as I approach the House of Mystery,
those who have cast themselves into our stars and are
walking with us here. I am Carter Revard,
Nompewahthe, at Buck Creek, Oklahoma, June 21,
1984. (*Family* 26)

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Worlds Into Words: The Technology of Language in Carter Revard's Poetry

Ellen Arnold

(Delivered at the meeting of the Western Literature Association,
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technology:
(from *Gk techne* art, craft skill; *re. to L texere* to weave)
applied science; the totality of the means employed to
provide objects necessary for human sustenance and comfort.
(Webster's Dictionary)

I'd like to open with one of my favorite lines from Carter's work, taken from the introduction to *An Eagle Nation*: "How time dawned on mind and was beaded into language amazes me the way an orb-spider's web or computer chip does. . . ." (xi). I used this quote as the epigraph to my dissertation—a study of the ways some contemporary Native American writers are drawing parallels between ancient tribal worldviews and the worldviews suggested by the new sciences of wholeness—quantum, chaos, and complexity theories. Carter's words seemed to capture perfectly, in lyrical language and evocative images, the erosion of boundaries between the Western categories "culture" and "nature," "science" and "spirituality"—and the defiance of the popular assignment of Indians to the "nature" and "spirit" halves of those splits—that such interplay accomplishes. I cheated a bit, though, because I didn't complete Carter's sentence: "How time dawned on mind and was beaded into language amazes me the way an orb spider's web or computer chip does, or the dance of time and space and energy that patterned selves into my parents, who did not have me in mind, and into the four children and seven grandchildren who've so far surprised us" (xi). By leaving off the end of the sentence, using the first half to introduce the grand and abstract themes of my project, I skirted what is most wonderful and insistent in Carter's work: his lovely and relentless tracing of the timeless and infinite—the universe-al—in the specific and individual, a tracing which keeps always at the surface of awareness the translation of universe-al forces by individual perception into individual consciousness and embodied being.

The remainder of the passage reverses this process:

Amazing that a brief quivering of air can re-present such wonders, that little coded curves of ink on paper might set the same vibrations pulsing from a human mouth in Buck Creek, Oklahoma, and from others in Singapore or some future meadow or unbuilt spaceship—from mouths now neatly packed into genes that have not even begun to express themselves as human parts, within their unripe sperm and ova. The creation of language, of writing, is less astounding than the invention of water, but not much less, and we each re-create, as we go, all that has been given us. (xi)

As speech and writing stitch time into history, trace the translation of universe into minds and bodies, simultaneously the universe is created anew with each spoken sound and stroke of pen or computer key.

As Maureen Konkle points out in a recent essay, Kenneth Lincoln attributes what he called the Native American Renaissance to a generation of Native American writers who learned to “translate” Native cultures (in the form of oral history) into “Western literary forms” (143). Lincoln’s approach is typical of what Konkle calls the “culture concept”—academic approaches that “seek to define elements of Native culture in literary works” (144), a practice that often obscures the histories of Indian peoples as political subjects persistently working for sovereignty. Konkle observes that Alexander Posey’s writing “resist[s] the Euro-American notion of Indians’ identity . . . by putting Indians back into time” (154); much of Carter Revard’s work—for example the unpublished poem “Transfigurations” I handed out today—similarly “puts Indians back into time,” or as he puts it in one of his infamous emails, “shows Indian acting on the world stage” (2000). But Carter also puts time back into universal processes that are beyond time, weaving family matters and tribal affairs *through* national and international histories, and into the larger fabric of universe-al affairs in which time—history—is a pattern beaded into mind, like words, tracings of the beautiful and often violent processes of deconstruction and recreation that time and minds must stop to make visible.

In the Preface to *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs*, Carter states his writing makes “a community of words on Indian ground” (xi); that community embraces EuroAmerica and its cultural products, including its particular versions of history and science. “I am reclaiming what’s worthwhile in Europe for our people” (24), he says, and, I would add,

for all people; his community of words is busily unmaking and remaking—translating—the forms of EuroAmerican culture into more “indigenous” and “universe-al” ones, reconnecting them to the circle of being that also includes the perspective of the universe. Carter says of his poem “Dancing with Dinosaurs” (from *Ponca War Dancers*), “I have tried to turn the old stories, and new sciences, into present myth” (Family 25). In Carter’s work, the specifics of history—personal, family, clan, community, national and international—are always suffused with what Dennis Tedlock calls the “mythistory” of creation, keeping always in consciousness the fact that human and non-human beings are embodied intersections of time and space, creation and destruction—walking star matter. To borrow a word from his poem “Discovery of the New World” (also in *Ponca War Dancers*), Carter’s poetry is an “asterization” (43) of the planet, his language a technology that takes apart the world to reveal the star matter that composes it, and puts the world back together on the page in an artful design that weaves stars (and the darkness before and after stars) back into the patterns of time and space that make bodies, places, and histories in their intersections. Carter keeps the stories of the evolution of life from interstellar dust told by both the scientists and the Osage (and other Indians) always in conversation, creating a new naming ceremony that restores English language itself to earth and sky and cosmos.

In “History, Myth, and Identity Among Osages and Other Peoples” (1980), Carter points out that in traditional societies, “language both reflects and shapes a sense of identity in relation to a world outside but part of an Indian self” (89); before the “civilizing,” of Indians, figurative naming—naming that is descriptive and based in close personal observation—linked “personal identity . . . with . . . tribal identity and connectedness with the world of other-than-human natural beings” (90). As Carter points out, the traditional Osage naming ceremony embodies the orderly movements of the cosmos and situates the named within family, clan, and tribal histories, as well as within the “circle of being” that includes all his people, the land, the animals and plants, earth and sky, and the stories of origins. On the other hand, the English language has “settled on names that have long since been melted and eroded into lumps of sound which carry reference, but are not figurative. . . . [O]ur system of naming has been impersonalized, demythicized, disfigured” (91). In “Nonymosity” (from *Cowboys and Indians*), the poet tells us:

Names have to pack together. They have moved
halfway from poetry to numbers

and numbers now are what we have to be
to fit into computers
. . . . What is your real name,
the one that tells you what you are, the one
that links you to your people's past
that tells the others what you've done
and what the powers have shown you,
that is the lightning's path into your life?
I name you here, DOPED SILICON, and you,
MAGNETIC BUBBLE. Your children shall become
COMPUTER CHIPS. We are in the clan of
SOLAR CELLS, a sapphire conduit from the stars
into our souls. . . . (18-19)

Even the binary operations of computer chips—names gone almost all the way to numbers—are restored to a place in the cosmic order in a naming ceremony that “re-figures” (makes figurative again) or trans-figures names across the borders between science and myth, representation and connectedness.

The trope of the black hole that appears so often in Carter's work provides an apt metaphor for the meta-work of his writing, the technology of trans-lation and trans-figuration. In *Family Matters*, *Tribal Affairs*, Carter observes, “When I wrote ‘How the Songs Came Down,’ I was thinking of all the places I had been, and of how each person is so like a black hole out of which no light could ever emerge to another” (16). In the short story, “How the FBI Man Almost Saw God,” a black hole is compared to “solitary confinement” (60); yet when the Osage physics student in the story yokes two black holes together, aligning them carefully with “all the solar system and galactic forces” (52), he creates a kind of perpetual motion machine, which powers his magic motorcycle into other dimensions and casts a headlamp beam that “like the Ghost Dance . . . brings the old worlds up again in any part of matter” (58), making the mythic space/time of the old stories visible against the Osage foothills. As Carter puts it in the unpublished poem “Postcolonial Hyperbaggage,” (included in the handout), “We need these/ neat reversible black holes for crossing/ Borders.” In “Transfigurations,” the black hole serves as a trope for the poetic process, which unmakes the sense and thought world of the writer and sucks it down into the compressed traces of spoken words on the page, from which no light is emitted, until the reader engages them and the deconstructed and collapsed world emerges as a new world in interaction with the embodied consciousness of each reader or listener.

“Transfigurations,” a long poem in four sections, framed by William Blake’s “London” and written after Ronald Reagan addressed the Oxford Union and Maggie Thatcher had “honored her Emperor,” in Carter’s words, “concerns the dreadful paradox of Empire, always founded on death and degradation” (email 2000). The poet is studying expensive silk ties to distract himself [Carter Revard gives a brief introduction to the poem, and reads section 2¹]:

Looking at bright silks in a dark mood, though,
I think peculiar things.
Maybe I’m looking at expensive clothes
to keep from thinking how the rich men rule.
Babylon fell, I think. Alzheimer’s gets
the Emperor, lion and lizard keep
courts where Belshazzars used to sleep, their silks
and satins flutter in clothes-moth wings,
old presidents tumble in the add-bleach cycle,
dictators placed and replaced now by fussy
composting laws I guess.
I think how caterpillars eating
poison-packed leaves transfigure them into
waving angelic wings, Monarch
and Luna Moth and Tiger Swallowtail,
yet how silk-moths must not
come forth, must never rasp
in two the long silk thread they spin into a shroud, never
visit moonshadowed flowers, like deity must die
to robe us in raw silk after
our irising the stuff with angel’s
glories, dyes made of fossil
leaves rainbowed out of anthracite,
oil-films from fossil seas
in many colors swirl and
dance upon a dandy’s ties
called forth through time
by Chinese women, by German chemists, by
old Englishwomen unwinding, winding—those “silkwives”
of fifteenth century London—careful as Urania with
the Phoenix-egg from that rainbow-winged first
universe when through her great
brooding song this universe
exploded with brilliant quarks

that cooled into space and time and stars within each
infinite pupil—
flashing and turning into otherness,
digesting self to blossom in a brilliance of
crimson pajamas, black satin sheets of bordello,
a fop's foulard, Q.C.'s robes,
thread twisting and turning,
spinning, weaving—O dark
Mother of Bright Wings, you turn the brilliant
Gravity of water down turbines into
Electric current for a ghost-net song, brown sand
Into a sapphire chip of silicon, rare earth
Becomes germanium, touching Apollonian lyres—
and listen, hear the Psalms of David
transformed by Christian alchemists into stained glass
of Placebo and Dirige, hear in Hebrew how Jerubbabel
turned Babylon into Jerusalem, in Milton's English where the waters
of Babylon turn into Siloa's brook that flows
fast by the Oracle of God. And far off, see the glittering Stars
within a Galaxy go down into
that huge Black Hole, as dead leaves go
into a bonfire and emerge
as flame, ashes, smoke and light and heat,
but then become
the next year's flowers, trees, grapes and
wine, cider and brandy, world into words,
speech into writing, Songs into Drum—
just so, they morph
through each Black Hole into an insurrection
of Dark Matter when a Quasar dies
and from decaying Space and Time arise
and fly away new Bubble Worlds, brief rainbow
minds upon
their film of bursting time.
O see
the great and vibrant world become
a tiny set of words upon
a baby's tongue
and how it grows, how all that old debris
from superstars becomes this mass of
proteins with sense and memory, fetus that
coheres to selfhood "crying for the light,
and with no language but a cry."

The poem oscillates like a doubled black hole between deconstruction and construction, murder and rebirth. It sucks the reader into its inexorable gravity field, defies our obsessions with beginnings and endings, our longings to pin down, to capture meaning; it collapses the reading eye and mind into participation with the perpetual unmaking and remaking of objects and perceptions, world and universe, and spits out new “bubble” minds that can hold paradoxes and contradictions, murder and beauty, time and timelessness, spoken words and written histories in simultaneity. Words on the page, living stories collapsed into tracings on paper, like the moths that die to produce silk, spin out in *moire* patterns, echoes of aborted wings in sunsets reflected on water. Or unspun like cocoons, the life within sacrificed to be respun in the isolated, individual act of reading, words—like silk ties, costly to make but pleasurable and beautiful nonetheless—both reveal and distract from the dark realities of other murders—the murders required to support empire. Like individuals, the events of history—nations states in conflict, the subjugation of peoples and earth’s bounties to the manufacture of Empire—are black holes as well, sites of dismantling and remaking, locations in space/time that make visible the inherence of parts in wholes, the tracings of wholes in parts, the ongoing processes of creation in the coming together and breaking apart of things.

NOTES

1 “Transfigurations” appears in print for the first time in this issue of *SAIL*. An earlier, slightly different version was distributed and read at WLA.

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Making a Place to Live: Carter Revard and the Art of Translation

Lauren Stuart Muller

(Delivered at the meeting of the Western Literature Association,
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*The trouble is, we keep exploding facts
into old myths, and then compressing myths
into new facts.*

Carter Revard, "Earth and Diamonds"

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, one definition of the verb "to interpret" is: "the act of translating, a translation or rendering of a book, word, etc." Carter Revard's writing brings alive the "etc." only gestured toward in that definition. Frequently, his strings of translations rupture the amnesia of official interpretative conventions, turning those conventions topsy-turvy. Articulating kinship networks, histories, myths, and crisscrossed genealogies in an interplay of translations across languages, geographies, cultures, and even galaxies, Revard illuminates, as he puts it in the preface to *Tribal Matters, Family Affairs*, "some ways in which American Indians now, with words, make places to live—in poems and novels and essays, as well as on reservations and in cities" (xi).

Contemporary writers and scholars often foreground the act of translation to explain the impact—or the impossibility—of linguistic and cross-cultural communication in writings by and about American Indians. In *Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism*, Craig Womack invokes fellow Creek poet and journalist Alexander Posey to create fictive dialogues in "Red English," literary conversations that translate and comment on Womack's own literary critical essays. Leslie Marmon Silko turns to Mayan codices to expose the constant material and literal translation of body parts, blood, and water into global capital in *Almanac of the Dead*, and, in the process, demonstrates that (contra Marshall McLuhan) the medium is not always the message. Ancient prophecies speak through multi-media technologies, including satellite weather maps, television talk shows, and the internet. Eric Cheyfitz's study *Imperial Poetics: Translation and Colonization from The Tempest to Tarzan*, and David Murray's

Forked Tongues: Speech, Writing and Representation in North American Indian Texts examine the violent politics through or within which Western European writing translated Native American oral cultures, in particular, by imposing notions of individual property and “the proper.” In “Traddutora, Traditora: A Paradigmatic Figure of Chicana Feminism,” Norma Alarcón examines cultural appropriations of the figure of Malinche, the translator who “mediates between antagonistic cultural and historical domains” (280). Other scholars use geographical metaphors to indicate and interpret the exchange between Native and non-Native cultures. Consider Mary Louise Pratt’s “Contact Zones,” Gloria Anzaldúa’s “Borderlands,” Hertha Dawn Wong’s “Boundary Cultures,” or Jack Goody and Ian Watt’s “The Great Divide.”

Carter Revard persistently engages the interpretative frameworks that undergird these multiple translations of the act of translation. How he does that has something to do with the way dinosaurs become birds, as well as the ways these birds keep the people dancing. Attending to correspondences that puncture “the screen between the past and us,” (“Sea Changes,” *Eagle* 119), Revard demonstrates that what is most alien can be most intimate, or vice versa, and that what was thought to be earthbound and extinct can soar on wings of song, every day. If scientists now believe that dinosaurs evolved into birds, he observes in the poem “Earth and Diamonds,” then, “we can no longer/ believe that dinosaurs became extinct” (*Eagle* 106). Furthermore, each of us is implicated in this interchange between past and present. As he reminds us, Volkswagens and jet planes, in fact, *are* fueled by “fossil stars/ of coal and oil and uranium,” the “blood” of our ancestors, the dinosaurs (*Eagle* 112).

Revard’s gloss of the commonplace does more than playfully awaken us to startling analogies. In contrast to the colonial/imperialist severing of names from histories detailed by Silko and Cheyfitz, Revard makes names “tell who we are and how we came to be here” (*Family* 125). The essay “Making A Name” exposes and undoes colonialism’s translations by re-placing names within the context of stories, kinship, and land. It begins by reflecting upon “the names of birds and plants,” then moves into “surnames and ‘Christian names’ and marital settlements and legitimate heirs, and then into to certain American places and their names” (*Family* 108). Whereas cultural critic Raymond Williams examines keywords that emerge at key times, such as the Industrial Revolution, to reveal within a single word, “the often implicit connections . . . people [make], with . . . particular formations of meaning” (Williams 15), Revard realigns words with

multiple forgotten histories, as well as possible future trajectories. As he explains, “names have their Creation Story packed inside them like software, shaping their meanings and functions” (*Family* 107). Simply put, no name can be entirely “personal” or individual. Contrasting the elitist function of mysterious Greek or Latin names to the way a man encourages his young nephew to engage in the active process of naming birds in Charles Eastman’s *Indian Boyhood*, Revard contemplates what it means to return language to the vernacular, wresting it away from the oligarchy of priests, and professors. As he explains, “technologists and scientists . . . hold custody of our understanding, our speech, our culture” (111) and thus produce “mere tame and pinioned words that not longer sing or soar from thought to sense and back” (110). Nicknames, by contrast, “carry” a real story about the person so named, “a story that the name-givers thought important enough to make every address to this person carry a reminder of that story” (116). Revard’s own stories of family names, place names, and bird names provide a commentary on the ways proper names (connected to property) often depend upon (and simultaneously silence) violent histories. Recounting the history of Lord Amherst, for whom Amherst College is named, for example, Revard finds “that under the name set upon that beautiful little town with its lovely college, magnificent poets, splendid students, extremely able teachers, there was a buried history of ethnic cleansing, carried out with the help of germ warfare, that was an important part of the British aristocracy’s fight for imperial dominance against the French aristocracy” (121). Furthermore, he compares what was done to Indians (with smallpox-infested blankets) to what was done by Aeneas to Evander in the founding of the Roman Empire. If you will allow a Revardian digression for a moment, this particular translation of Roman history provides an apt commentary upon the origin story of Literacy promoted by Jack Goody and Ian Watt, in their discussion of “the great divide” between orality and literacy. In their account, the invention of the phonetic alphabet miraculously enables civilization, democracy, and abstract thinking, implicitly linking American democracy, through literacy, to the glory that was Greece and grandeur that was Rome. Revard reminds us of the skulls buried beneath the grandeur.

In “The Consequences of Literacy,” Goody and Watt posit that oral cultures exist outside history, in a perpetually-present realm of myth. As Revard’s work reminds us, such theories project their own “literacy myths,” which can generate unfortunate consequences. Social Darwinian notions about the civilizing effects of print literacy in English, for example, fueled nineteenth-century educational policies

designed to eradicate American Indian cultures. In his study of American Indians and the Boarding School Experience from 1875-1928, historian David Adams quotes the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, who felt that, where Indians were concerned, “a good school may thus bridge over for them the dreary chasm of a thousand years of tedious evolution” (Adams 19). Revard insists that the gathering of people in song enables a more active reclamation of history. As he puts it, “To name a place, to keep steadily before us the history that went into its naming, is not to be finished with it, no matter what wretched or heroic actions once happened there. We are making history now, burning sweetgrass over the old name” (124). Significantly, the “we” in this sentence refers to the people of a particular place, the American Indian Center of Mid-America, in Saint Louis, Missouri, as well as all who carry the “strange, impossible” name of “*American Indian*—from *Amerigo* Vespucci and from *India*: an Italian explorer, an Asian subcontinent” (125). “Making a Name” closes by reminding readers that “dying humans gave us these names, beneath and upon them are the losses and sacrifices of those who gave us life. . . . We are still making, still giving our names—wherever they come from, we will take them around the drum. When the songs rise and the people dance, when our own names are called at the drum, there old and new names too may be heard” (125).

Revard’s use of “oral traditions” reverses the modernist trend of translating oral poetry. As Michael Castro notes in his study, *Interpreting The Indian*, Mary Austin’s “Path on the Rainbow” inaugurated a trend of non-Native twentieth century poets translating and commenting upon Native American songs and chants. Austin’s 1923 collection, “The American Rhythm,” discusses the significance of Indian poetry for modern American verse. Jerome Rothenberg further extended the work of Austin

by placing tribal poetries and the consciousness behind them within a modern literary and historical context. In addition, Rothenberg’s concept of “total translation” draws on the inclination toward performance poetry in twentieth-century European and American avant-garde literary movement. (Castro 117)

The apotheosis of this tendency might be found in Gary Snyder’s 1974 collection, *Turtle Island*, which finds in older Native American cultures a fortuitous alternative to the destructive, exploitative imperialism of

America's "hell on earth." As Castro points out, American Indian writers have challenged the racist assumptions central to these appropriating translations of American Indian songs and subject matter—most famously, perhaps, Leslie Marmon Silko in "An Old Time Indian Attack" and Geary Hobson in "The Rise of the White Shaman as a New Version of Cultural Imperialism."

Carter Revard's translations of Anglo-Saxon riddles into contemporary language offer a corrective to the imperialist translations so common in mainstream twentieth century American poetry. In "Herbs of Healing: American Values in American Indian Literature," Revard translates the Old English poet's riddle of the Swan, "pretty much keeping Old English alliterative meter" (*Family* 178). He also offers his own contemporary translations of the "Anglo-Saxon poetic form," instructing the reader in the proper protocol for approaching such endeavors. He explains,

What has to be done is the same as with any ancient form: treat it with respect, not as entertainment, but as revelation. . . . If we want to write a "New English" Riddle, we need to try and give the creatures of our time such voices and dimensions, we have to realize that in our everyday life there are amazing and mysterious converging of power and mystery. (179)

Revard's riddle of a Television Set—a Sony from Japan—infuses mundane technology with just that wonder. Finally, he adapts "WAS" or White Anglo Saxon poetics for American Indian themes and purposes. His beautiful riddle "What the Eagle Fan Says"

tells how an eagle in flight pierces clouds just as a beadworker's needle goes through beads and the white buckskin of the fan's handle, spiraling round sky and fan; and how the eagle flies from dawn to sunset, linking colors of day and night as they are linked on a Gourd Dancer's blanket (half-crimson, half-blue), and just as they are beaded onto the handle of the Eagle Fan. (182)

This nuanced interplay of multiple trajectories epitomizes one way in which dinosaurs keep dancing and keep the people dancing, in Carter's hands. I'll close with the last four lines of that riddle:

Lightly, I move in a man's left hand
Above dancing feet follow the sun
Around old songs soaring toward heaven
On human breath, and I help them rise. (183)

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Lauren Stuart Muller thanks Ellen Arnold and so many others for their patience and persistence in putting together the SAIL special section on Carter Revard. Her publications include "Collaborative 'Life Stories' and Anonymous Team Journals: Fostering Dialogue and Decentering Authority in the Classroom," *American Quarterly*; "Native American Literatures, 1994-96: A Selective Annotated Bibliography" *ADE Bulletin* (with Hertha D. Sweet Wong); "Paula Gunn Allen" in *American Writers Supplement* (with Jacqueline Shea Murphy); and *June Jordan's Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint* (ed.).

The Poetry of Carter Revard: Stars Among the Walking

Dean Rader

(Presented at the Modern Language Association Conference,
Washington, D.C., December 28, 2000)

*If these words can do anything
I say bless this house
with stars.*

Joy Harjo, "The Creation Story"

*We are in the clan of
SOLAR CELLS, a sapphire conduit from the stars
into our souls*

Carter Revard, "Nonymosity"

Oklahoma is a long way from Hollywood. Washington DC, even longer. Nonetheless, through the miracle of the MLA, it is my pleasure to offer you a tour of houses of stars.

These are no ordinary houses and no ordinary stars. But, in a panel on Carter Revard, would it be logical, even appropriate to begin to expect the ordinary? Like its Hollywood brother, this tour seeks to point your vision toward sites of residence. But, unlike the typical West Coast tour that might feature several houses for one star, this tour offers tours of only three houses but many individual stars. Also unlike a tour in LA, our concern lies not with the houses so much as the stars within. Out there among the palms and sun, you'd never get a glimpse of the stars themselves, but here in snowy, cloudy, Washington DC, within the tree-lined halls of the Marriott, I will try to be the best of guides and orient you to many stars.

So, hop on . . . the bus driver is cranky, and it's time to go.

Here, off to my left, is our first house. [Hold up a copy of *Cowboys and Indians*, *Christmas Shopping* as though I'm a cheeky but cheery tour guide.] Notice its creamy exterior and black trim. Its

rectangular design. But our concern is not with the house but the stars that are its residence. Come, let's take a peek:

One could say a number of things about the residents of these houses—that they evoke a sense of place (the area around Pawhuska in the great state of Oklahoma); that they create a motion of flight; that they enact a truly unique hybridized poetics that fuses oral traditions, the contemporary lyric poem, and Anglo-Saxon and medieval verse. But upon closer inspection, what emerges from these poems for me is a complex musing on the Osage relationship to the universe. It seems clear that the author sees his ancestors, and perhaps himself, as conduits between the heavens and the earth, figures in whom one finds a balance of the terrestrial and the celestial. So many of the poems turn on axes of stars, black holes, galaxies, and all that is heavenly. How does one inhabit both heaven and earth? What does it mean to descend from stars to this place? Can one fully return to the stars? Can one, in fact, return to one's pulsing home? I would argue that through his poems, through his astral tropes and sidereal thematics, Carter Revard achieves something truly magical—he builds a house in both the terrestrial and celestial, and he invites us inside for a beer.

Unfortunately, I can't offer you a beer at the moment, but what I would like to do for the next few minutes is take you on a very brief tour of the notion of "stars" in Carter's work in an attempt to create a kind of linguistic mosaic of truly stellar motifs. Because the Osage come into this world from the stars, many of Carter's poems reflect an interest in returning, in some form, to the ground of his making. There is a profound directionality in his work, the rhetoric of descending and ascending, rising and plunging. For instance, in a poem like "Indians Demand Equal Time with God," Carter warns us (and God) that despite attempts to take away Indian access to the divine, Natives will ascend nonetheless. He writes:

We won't let
you kill him even now before
we're ready.
Until then,
quit stepping on our fingers dammit—
they fit this ladder well enough.

Look out Big Dipper—here we come!

(Cowboys 45)

Perhaps more than any others, Osage fingers know the rungs of the celestial ladder; they know how to climb back to the heavens. Indeed, in "That Lightning's Hard to Climb," Revard suggests that, in the terminology of the lightning itself, the Osage are not "struck down"; rather, the lightning and the catalpa tree become a means of ascension, ladders back home (*Cowboys* 60-61).

But if stars function as a metaphor for the divine, in a poem like "Paint and Feathers," one of the tenderest and most troubling poems I know, they also function as provocative metaphors for love, death, and resurrection. In the opening lines, Revard fashions a star into both a coffin and a means of regeneration:

Into a star
you have cast yourself,
made your body of
the male star who touches
the sky with crimson
that I touch now upon
your face so you
may move upon the path
of life as does the young
sun at dawn. . . . (*Cowboys* 39)

And then, after the boy has put his face into a brown paper bag filled with spray paint, and after he has driven head-on into another car, the universe that embodied life in the opening stanzas, now "will speak/ of driving in the wrong/ direction, children killed,/ those who will not live/ to see old age, those blinded/ by metal paint and headlights/ whiting out the stars" (39). The stars' occlusion becomes a metaphor for larger issues of absence: the absence of the boy, the absence of countless other boys, the absence of hope, the simple fact that certain events can erase from our vision the very stars themselves. In another poem, Carter makes the stars' absence metonymic for a kind of environmental and cultural transformation that seems to portend or at least reflect a mindset of erasure: "now misting from the horizon is a smog of light from Bartlesville that dims the stars. I think it's the NEW WORLD rising like midnight dawn, and it shines only for safety" (*Eagle* 111-12). For the new world, both the darkness between heaven and earth, and the stars themselves are too much, so they are annulled. Here, as elsewhere, the stars serve as a powerful but disturbing metaphor for the ways in which contemporary Anglo-American technology and culture has dulled or even erased the

splendor of otherness. The Oklahoma landscape, once brilliant, is now dark, hazy.

But we can't dally in Oklahoma, attractive as that may be. Notice to my right another home. [Hold up *Ponca War Dancers*. Still cheery but still a very bad tour guide.] Like the previous one, this residence is filled with people, ideas, language, and perhaps most importantly, stories and stars. Throughout *Ponca War Dancers*, it remains clear that stories have come down as some sort of magical gift from above. For instance, in "How the Songs Came Down," Carter suggests that people are black holes and that, like light from the stars, the stories, like the Wazhazhe, will always make their way to earth and make it a residence. A similar directionality takes place in the opening moments from "People from the Stars:"

Wazhazhe come from the stars
by their choice, not by falling
or being thrown out
of the heavenly bars like Satan
into Europe,
and we are invited back
whenever we may choose to go;
but we joined the people of death
and moved to another village
(we call it, *Ho-e-ga*)
where time began; we made our fire places
and made our bodies of
the golden eagle and the cedar tree,
of mountain lion and buffalo,
of redbird, black bear, of the
great elk and of thunder so that we
may live to see old age
and go back to the stars. (45)

The Wazhazhe have not fallen; rather like Dante, they have descended, literally con-descended, in the Latin sense of the word, descended with the "people of death" to Ho-e-ga, this other place. However, wherever they are, they are guided or at least oriented by stars. The poem continues:

Meantime, the Europeans pay us royalties
for oil that lights their midnight highways
dangling across the land in

star-strings through the night.
We trade our royalties for time enthroned
on wings of shining metal
to look down at the stars beneath
or up at stars above
before we touch down in the desert
creation of Las Vegas and wheel off
to shoot craps at the Stardust Inn. . . (45)

Stars are everywhere. And again, as in Dante, they are the reference points. Stars are the etymology of the words of life, the omphalos of the universe, the flashing gods. Our cities try to replicate their celestial glimmer; our airplanes try to get us closer to them. Our cities, our casinos emulate their splendor. Yet, the stars are not simply out there but here, among us. To descend from the heavens is not a punishment, but rather the opposite, a gift. The Osage, though they come from the stars, literally embody the earth—gaining permission from eagle, tree, and bear to use their bodies in this world.

Finally, it becomes clear in Carter's work that through their descent and their relationality, stories and the Wazhazhe are the same. Both arrive from stars. Both inhabit this world. Both put us in touch with the divine because both are themselves divine. For Dante, who ended each of his three books with the word "stars," stars represented God's transcendence and his permanence in heaven, but for Carter Revard, stars are not mere celestial orbs but sites of generation. In fact, Carter argues in an essay called "Walking among the Stars" (in *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs*) that contemporary science and various stories can and should be transformed into myth. In the essay and the title, Carter intends a kind of return, a second coming back to the heavens in which he walks not on water but among the stars. However, in the final stanza, it is not the heavens that need Carter's poems; they have enough stars. It is here, this earth, this adopted village, this Ho-e-ga, these people of death that need the poems, need the stars. Thus, Carter may walk among the stars, but his poems are stars among the walking.

Carter, you are welcome in my books at any time, and wherever you are going, I hope you have a safe journey and a good life and that you live into the happy days—hon-ba tha gthi.

Dean Rader is an assistant professor at the University of San Francisco, where he works in the English Department and with the MFA program in creative writing. He has published essays, reviews, poems, and translations in both national and international books and journals. He is on the editorial board of *SAIL: Studies in American Indian Literatures*. His book, *The World Is A Text*, co-authored with Jonathan Silverman, was published in 2002 by Prentice Hall, and *Speak to Me Words: Essays on Contemporary American Indian Poetry*, co-edited with Janice Gould, is forthcoming in 2003 from the University of Arizona Press. He is currently at work on a book on American Indian art, literature and film.

“I Have More Than One Song”: Singing and Bird Song in the Work of Carter Revard

Susan Scarberry-Garcia

(Presented at the Modern Language Association Conference,
Washington, D.C., December 28, 2000)

It is indeed a high honor to be present with all of you on this occasion of honoring esteemed poet Carter Revard. Just as there have always been birds, Carter Revard has always been there for us at MLA over two decades. A meeting without Carter would be considerably diminished. *We are very glad that you are here.* I remember Carter twenty years ago speaking of stars as we gazed out the window of the shuttle bus between conference hotels. I remember Carter walking in Times Square, speaking of Aunt Jewell, after dinner with Luci Tapahonso and other writers. I remember Carter at MLA San Francisco as panel respondent commenting that Ortiz and Rose’s poetry is full of substance and strength comparable to that of novels. And I remember Carter last year in Chicago, wearing his stunning inlaid Cardinal bolo tie, thrilled with his wife Stella to find an oversize leather-bound first edition of the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher. Osage poet and essayist Carter Revard is a fascinating writer, a poet who delights in the discovery of ordinary and extraordinary things, a contemporary scop who reveals transoceanic literary connections in his creative work.

Perhaps it was the striking image of the crimson-red Cardinal set in the silver bolo in Chicago last December that reminded me of the bird imagery in Carter’s work and set me on the path to this panel today. And, it was surely the discussion around a cafe table in San Francisco with several of you, two years ago, that laid the foundation for this event of honoring Carter.

In Revard’s autobiographical book *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs*, the poet explains about the birds peopling his work:

If there are so many birds in the poems that come to me, it is because on the meadow and with the elm, catalpa, poplar trees around a house where birds would have only those trees except for the willows of the pond a quarter mile away, our trees were where the orchard orioles, robins, turtledoves, scissortails,

bluebirds, kingbirds, dickcissels came to perch and
sometimes nest and sing or shout. (18)

These birds are joined in the dizzying catalog by mockingbirds, shrikes, indigo bunting, yellow-headed blackbirds, flickers, redheaded woodpeckers, yellow-bellied sapsuckers, meadowlarks, bobwhites, sparrow hawks, redbelt, Swainson hawks, red-shouldered hawks, turkey vultures, and marsh hawks (18-19). For Revard, it seems, the multiplicity of mellifluous bird songs at home is akin to the diversity of human languages on the planet. And like the miner's canary testing air quality in the mines, the health of birds is a good indication of the health of the planet, and of the health of indigenous human populations. At a time when the loss or extinction of languages parallels the loss of habitat and species in the animal world, Revard, as ornithologist by inclination, proclaims the sense of joy and awe that comes from sighting unusual birds, or even everyday birds, just behaving like birds—soaring, pecking, preening or singing.

The work of the late ornithologist Luis F. Baptista was recently discussed in *The Los Angeles Times*:

[His] research led to his conclusion that no two species of birds have the same speech pattern and that individuals of the same species—say . . . the white-crowned sparrow—speak or sing a different dialect according to whether they nest in Alaska or Argentina. . . . Some birds are bilingual; some are trilingual. (*L.A. Times* 6/18/00)

These remarkable observations are supported by studies in Northumbria, on the English/Scottish border, that suggest that even sparrows in adjacent fields sing in different dialects. When reflecting on this uniqueness and diversity of verbal expression I am reminded of Revard's Uncle Gus in the poem "Ponca War Dancers," "twirling and drifting/ stomping with the/ hawk wing a-hover then/ leaping/ spinning light as/ a leaf in the whirlwind/the anklebells shrilling, dancing/ the Spirit's dance" on the Osage dancegrounds as the "grave, merry faces/ Osage and Ponca, Otoe and Delaware,/ Quapaw and Omaha, Pawnee, Comanche and Kaw" look on (*Ponca War Dancers* 54). This gathering of tribes is akin to Revard's catalog of multicolored birds, each with its songs and dances mysteriously distinct and radiant. The rainbow necks of pigeons that Revard notices in "Outside in St. Louis" are symbolically akin to the rainbow feathered gourd and the beautiful

“rainbow bodies” of small birds who give life to Osage girls that Revard describes and celebrates in “Dancing with Dinosaurs” (*Eagle* 71; *Ponca* 61-62). It is the Bird People who image the multicultural diversity of the Native People whom Revard knows best, and it is the Bird People who have given their songs to humans to better communicate with the spirit world.

The poet Carter Revard, having been named *Nom-peh-wah-the* for the Thunder Beings, further identifies with Mockingbird who creatively mimics the voices of others. In “Walking Among the Stars” Revard writes: “So, like that mockingbird, I have more than one song, but they are all our songs” (*Family* 20). In this statement Revard positions himself, self-effacingly, as an agile teller of tales of a collective communal history. Extending oral tradition by telling and then writing about the life of birds in north central Oklahoma, Revard is a carrier of unusual local knowledges. And as Mockingbird, Revard also carries the voices of Aunt Jewell, Carter Camp, and Addison Jump, among others, far away from their homelands.

In “Brothers” from *Cowboys and Indians, Christmas Shopping*, Revard recounts an incident from his childhood when his brother shot and then killed a wounded male meadowlark. Having been handed the dying yellow bird, the poet recalls the painful intensity of the moment as the “she-bird . . . hover[ed], shrilling.” And the poet depicts his sense of helplessness as he questions: “‘What’ll we do?’ ‘Maybe he’ll live’” to a brother who responds: “his guts are smashed, idiot.” The poem concludes with the poignant line: “No one remembers this but me” (11). Apparently this early sensitivity to the value of the life of birds, which struck Revard at ten, helped to form the basis of his poetic sensibility.

Another poem in the same volume, “A Mandala of Sorts,” traces the journey of a feather, perhaps of a sparrow or robin, all the way to the sea and beyond to a distant shore:

And I watch go riding down the gutter a feather
That spins and twinkles, left by one of those birds
Whirled behind summer, down the earth’s tilting
Into the dawn, or across dark seas to shores
Hushed by their singing, where sunburned lovers lie
Among stars at dusk, and watch the gold moon rise. (31)

As Revard contemplates the feather’s intercontinental journey, I recall his recent essay, “Beads, Wampum, Money, Words—and Old English Riddles,” where Revard states matter-of-factly: “The eagle’s

feathers are also alive" (188). Thus, this knowledge that the feather carries its vitality and potential for new life, even if off the bird, is widely shared by Native people. A Navajo friend of mine has disclosed to me that he periodically washes his eagle feathers in the snow to purify and renew them. And a Pueblo elder whom I have collaborated with once told me, "The feather is portraying something that's impossible for man to do, to duplicate, and yet the feather has been separated for some time and yet it's still living. It's still revealing what it's supposed to reveal, the beauty of color" (Jose Rey Toledo). Revard echoes other Native writers such as Linda Hogan, who in her essay "Feathers," likewise seeks the beauty and mystery of feathers (*Dwellings* 15-20).

Wearing feathers is a great honor in Osage country and Revard images this ritual gesture in "Paint and Feathers," a eulogy for a young Osage man whose life was cut short in an automobile accident. When the police find him, "they do not notice feathers/ from scissortails blowing in/ the midnight wind" (*Cowboys* 39). But it is these feathers plucked recently from a dead bird along the road that help define this man's tribal identity as they blow in his hair. Revard mitigates the tragedy by describing the narrator as equipping the man for his journey to the next world as he ties sacred feathers in his hair: "white/ eagle plumes I fasten now/ into your hair, so you/ may have the sun's power/ and travel with him" (39). This funerary rite is melded into reminiscences of the young man's naming ceremony where he was symbolically identified with a "male star" and thus to the Osage creation story. At once, as the poet paints crimson arcs on the departed man's face and ties eagle plumes into his hair, "present time," the "now" of the poem, transforms into the mythic time of the ancestors. Wearing a sun disc of mother of pearl around his neck, the departed may now "stand and see/ all life within [his] vision,/ all colors of it in/ horizon's circle, changing/ and still as sun at noon" (39). This Osage man has been fully prepared for his journey to the spirit world, where his vision has been broadened by the sacred energy of the white eagle plumes, in order that he may see infinitesimally far into the interpenetrating networks of spirit. "Paint and Feathers" ends fittingly with the affirmation that relatives will continue to pray for him: "At the Sun Dance, little brother,/ we will dance for you" (39). And in the sky world where "the feather/ will fly itself" buoyed by the currents of air, the departed Osage will likewise gain the power of flight, sustaining his journey into the next life, just as the scissortail feather which the young man puts in his hair moments before his death symbolizes the

transcendence he will soon achieve through his people's last farewell rites for him (39).

One of Revard's best known poems, "What the Eagle Fan Says," is composed in the form of an Old English riddle, told from the perspective, one guesses, of an eagle spirit embodied in a feathered fan. Long a scholar of Old English and Middle English poetry, Revard models this cryptic Plains poem on alliterative Anglo Saxon verse. Threading through the clouds, hearing the voices of "human relatives" below on earth, Eagle offers his body to Plains dancers once he has been brought down from the sky. Now implanted in buckskin, the eagle feathers "in a man's left hand,/ follow the sun/ soaring toward heaven" (*Cowboys* 51). Still the eagle, in a new life of the fan, "move[s] lightly/ above dancing feet/ around old songs/ on human breath/ of thunder beings/ of spinning flight . . ." to "help them rise" (51). Having been gifted with eagle feathers himself, the poet thanks the spirits of the sky world for allowing this spiritual messenger bird to uplift his people.

Revard's book, *An Eagle Nation*, reinforces this bond between humans and eagles, not only in the title but also in individual poems such as "Close Encounters," where the link between Osage and ancestral eagles is clear. Revard writes of the Golden Eagles, as well as Red Bird, Cedar Tree, and Black Bear, who mythically allowed Osage to "take their bodies," and their own food, "great showers of acorns, seeds for/ . . . our daily bread" (25). And within this same volume, in the title poem, Revard describes an event that occurred when his family visited the Oke City Zoo. A wounded bald eagle impervious to the whistles of "a nice white couple" turned his head and spoke in a "low shrill sound" to Aunt Jewell, who "from her wheelchair, spoke in Ponca to him," calling him "*Kahgay: Brother*" (32). The poet observed: "I knew she was saying good things for us./ I knew he'd pass them on" (33). This power of communication between traditional Native elders and the Bird People seems to be one fundamental means of ensuring that the spirit world is beneficent, bestowing blessings upon generations of Ponca and Osage.

In his poetic translation of "The Swan's Song," an Old English riddle from the *Exeter Book*, a tenth century British collection of poetry on mystical themes, Revard establishes the regal dignity of this magnificent bird (*Family* 177-78). If this were merely yet another translation of this thousand-year-old poem, perhaps it would go unnoticed, but the imagery of this translation is also appropriate for a poet interested in present-day tribal concerns.

The Swan's Song

Garbed in silence	I go on earth,
dwell among men	or move on the waters.
Yet far over halls	of heroes in time
my robes and the high	air may raise
and bear me up	heaven's power
over all nations.	My ornaments then
are singing glories,	and I go in song
bright as a star	unstaying above
the world's wide waters,	a wayfaring soul.

The swan, at home on earth, on land or water, flies over humans, including heroes from oral traditional tales. He is indeed of the earth, in the natural world, but also at home with the spirits above "all nations" (*Family* 178). The swan describes himself on his flight path: "I go in song/ bright as a star," thus symbolically linking himself, likely for Revard, to the Osage, who are intrinsically Star People (*Family* 178). And in the "Beads, Wampum, Money, Words—and Old English Riddles" essay, Revard calls this "wayfaring spirit," the swan, a "traveling spirit," perhaps a metaphor for ancient Native wanderers singing traveling songs (182). The swan then becomes an image of humanity in its fullest spiritual expression.

In reflecting upon the origins of the world, Revard theorizes that birds were originally dinosaurs that sprouted feathered wings as a survival strategy. "Before we came to earth,/ before the birds had come,/ they were dinosaurs,/ their feathers were a bright idea" (*Ponca*, "Dancing with Dinosaurs" 60). Admitting that he has "mythicized" the dinosaur-bird transformation hypothesized by scientists, Revard continues this mythic revelation in "Walking Among the Stars" (*Family* 25). He writes: "I have noticed that we Indians put on feathers to survive, as the dinosaurs did, and that we sing as the birds do . . . when we dance in our feathers to bring the new children into our circle, when we sing the old songs, we are doing just what the old Osage Naming Ceremonies, linked to our Creation Stories, describe" (25). Since, as the young narrator Omishto in Linda Hogan's novel *Power* attests, "everything, our words, our intentions, travels by air," Carter Revard's strategy of intimately knowing and "naming the birds" is a means of recognizing the cosmic forces that animate, shape, and travel the natural world (*Power* 3; *Family* 108). Carter Revard stands strong among other learned Native American poets such as Scott Momaday,

Geary Hobson, and Joy Harjo who join the singers of antiquity in envisioning the sacred grace of birds in flight.

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Susan Scarberry-Garcia is the author of *Landmarks of Healing: A Study of House Made of Dawn* and of *Dancing Spirits: Jose Rey Toledo, Towa Artist*. She has also written numerous articles on the literatures and arts of the Southwest. Previously President of the Association for the Study of American Indian Literatures and Chair of the Executive Committee for the Division of American Indian Literatures of MLA, Scarberry-Garcia now writes comparatively about her literary excursions with colleagues into Western Siberia to work with native Khanty and Nenets writers. Scarberry-Garcia has taught at Navajo Preparatory School and is currently Visiting Assistant Professor and Hulbert Endowed Chair of Southwest Studies at The Colorado College. She has admired the work of Carter Revard for two decades.

Letter to Carter Revard¹

Norma Wilson

November 12, 2002

Dear Carter,

Above is buttermilk sky. Earlier this morning a large doe and her small, dear companion passed through the garden. Though it's below freezing, the sun feels warm. The red-belly is back for the season of sunflower seeds. It's mid-November, 2002. Twenty-six years since I met you in your poems, I'm nearing the end of my time as a professor of American Indian literature and beginning to cycle back around to writing the poem of my life. I hope this letter conveys a little of what your writing and friendship have meant to me. And I thank you for letting me share your letters with the world.

When I found your poetry in *Voices of the Rainbow*, I had just begun to read for my dissertation. I was, you might say, shopping for Native American poetry. I got more than I bargained for. Your poems made my eyes see the Oklahoma land and all the places I'd lived more fully. The meadowlark in "Driving in Oklahoma" whose "five notes" pierced the "the windroar like a flash/ of nectar on mind," those notes that made you want "to move again through country that a bird/ has defined wholly with song" spoke of the deep distance between the bird's natural definition and the present to which we had sped in less than a century, on the highway that fills the first half of this poem. From then on I'd see the meadowlark and hear the meadowlark as I never had

It was the motion of your words that made this and your other poems live in my mind. Your precise and detailed descriptions of landscape, animals, people, conversations, songs, everything was always moving. Your voice has spoken from a fertile heart and a brilliant mind.

After your poems astounded me, I wrote you asking for more. On July 17, 1976, you wrote me from The Old Manor, Sunningwell, near Abingdon, Oxfordshire. You had gone there to look for the origins of a particular manuscript of medieval poetry—Harley 2253 in the British Museum. You wrote of riding the bus to the Bodleian Library and seeing the "kestrel falcons hovering in the way Hopkins described them in "The Windhover." This led to your analysis of "Driving in

Oklahoma” and a statement of your poetics. You said you were sorry that you couldn’t make your poem as good as Hopkins’ but that his was about crucifixion and resurrection, while yours was “only about where song comes from and what it has to do with being or feeling free.” While you said your own poem was “smaller,” you “did try to set the poem’s two halves at balanced play, and the radio/bird contrast, ‘country’ musics of the two, ought to expand its meaning from sights to visions, sounds to music.” Then you went on to discuss several other poems from the Rosen anthology, including “Another Sunday Morning,” partly in reference to Wallace Stevens. Clearly your poetry was responding to Blake, Frost and Wordsworth, whom you mentioned, as well as Hopkins and Stevens, but you were also writing something new in a unique voice that is only yours. I think you realized that. You wrote, “I hope my comments don’t rumple and mess up what you found to like in the poems; they ought to work like small parts of the real and common world, beyond and below words, with meanings shifting like peyote visions, while what is said about them only goes off on tangents, never gets them in focus.”

Although you said that most of your poems had “not been written as Indian or non-Indian,” the details of your life revealed that you were engaged in the life and literature of the Osage people. You had taught an American Indian literature course the previous spring and had taken twelve of the students in your class to Pawhuska for an Osage dinner. Some of your poems about your relatives, for example, “Coming of Age in the County Jail” and “Support Your Local Police Dog,” made me see something else, that the most seriously disturbing events in our lives can also be very funny. I’m still amused by your critique of your first book *My Right Hand Don’t Leave Me No More*, published by friends in 1970: “they said hey let us do it, and it pretty well got messed up. Since they were friends of mine I let it alone, and have not been sending copies anywhere—there are some copies lying under my desk in St. Louis, but it is about as attractive as a mangy billygoat, so I don’t send it round.” You went on to mention that some of the poems in the book were “not so very bad” and that others were “weak” and you wished they hadn’t got in.

You also mentioned “Wazhazhe Grandmother,” published that spring in *Sun Tracks* at the University of Arizona. “Wazhazhe Grandmother” became my favorite of your poems, though somehow at this point, they all seem to have become one poem, that continuing song of your life.

In that first letter, you introduced yourself this way—

I grew up with four half-brothers and sisters who are half Osage, and with Ponca cousins and relatives (including Carter Camp, whom you may have heard of, now serving three years in Springfield Mo. for disarming a postman there). And I think I have Indianness in me, but I am only by blood a small part Osage. Colleagues at Washington University lay on a lot of MacBluffs about where's my copper tone, so I ask for the blood of Christ that dyed them Christian, or the circumcision scar that made them Jewish. When I jumped into my genes they were mostly white, but the red ones spelled OSAGE. Still it is delicate being mixed—neither red nor white nor pink, could never serve for a barberpole I guess.

Our correspondence continued throughout the summer, and by September, having read more of your poems, including those in the “mangy billy goat,” I had decided to devote a chapter of my dissertation to your poetry and invited you to present a reading at the University of Oklahoma, which you did on October 20. You were glad to come for the reading, but my enthusiasm made you uncomfortable. “I have to say you are overestimating my work and me,” you wrote on September 16. “I make the winter counts, not the paths or myths.” I can only accept your self-assessment up to a point. Your poetry, like the winter count, does leave a record of events, people, places and animals, significant to the Osage, the Ponca, and yourself during these seventy-one years of your life, and this is an essential part of your writing, yet your poems also help to explain why our experience as human beings is significant in relation to the entire continuum of time and life in this cosmos.

Despite your amazing knowledge of literature and your gift as a poet, you have always made light of your genius, writing on September 30, 1976, for example, “Sorry to go on like this, typing always likes my fingers better than my brain. A way of speculating before I think.” Yet, your speculation and elaboration are what keep me going back to your letters and your poems. Your explanations of your method have provided me with guidance as a scholar and also as a writer of poems. You explained in the same letter,

In trying to put close relatives into poems I found the first trouble was being honest about painful things, and that the second was in finding a family voice to speak with. To do either of these things forced me to work like

hell. It is fishing in the heart to see what truths will take the bait of words that is involved. These people are of great importance to me, but of absolutely no importance to anyone else unless they are put in the right words.

Yet, it is not just your poems or your analysis of your writing that have helped me to understand this life. I have also learned from your friendship and advice. In a letter of October 31, 1976 (my mother's 53rd birthday), after you'd returned home from the reading in Oklahoma, you wrote to say that you hoped that my mother and I could get together soon, and that you hoped I could "put some little word shims under her, it's like the washing machine in the spin cycle, a little balancing makes a lot of difference." You had read some of my poems about my mother and knew of my strong love and concern for her. Though it would be fifteen years before I would persuade my mother to come and live near us in Vermillion, South Dakota, I never forgot your words. They supported me through the years as I rebuilt the relationship with her that my father and others had tried to destroy. I was preparing to begin this letter, on October 15, just a month ago, when I was called to the emergency room. My mother had fallen in front of her house, and I would be holding her hand as she died later that day. She taught me love, and so, at this time I can write nothing of any meaning without her; it was not just your words urging me to help her to cope with this life that influenced me. My poems began with her. As we stood by her coffin at the cemetery and the service ended, a Swainson's hawk in its rare dark phase circled above us and we saw her spirit soaring.

The love and respect you have shown for your relatives in your life and poetry inspire me. Always proud of your relatives' part in standing up for Native sovereignty at Wounded Knee, you wrote in your letter of October 31st that ten days earlier, you and Carter Camp's wife Mickey provided the bond money to spring Carter Camp from prison in Joplin and then took him to visit his father, mother and children in Oklahoma. You said that he would be reindicted in South Dakota on October 27th. Through the years you have maintained a close relationship with your cousin Carter; and I was fortunate to meet him and other members of your family who came to the special session, "Hoega: In Honor of Carter Revard" at the December 2000 Modern Language Association conference in Washington, D.C.

All through the seventies, you wrote me often, generously discussing your poetry and also describing your move with Stella and your children to a house closer to the Washington University campus,

your trips to visit relatives and present readings in Oklahoma, and your involvement with other American Indians on the Washington University campus in planning campus events, benefit performances and powwows. In a letter dated April 17, 1977, you said of your promotion to Full Professor, "Contrary to what I expected, the promotion to full professor has actually gone through now, which probably means any poems will need more careful footnoting from now on. So far the chair I sit in does not need enlarging, don't know about my skull."

In August 1978, after finishing my work on the doctorate, I moved to South Dakota to teach in the English Department and American Indian Studies Program at the University of South Dakota. On January 11, 1979, you wrote that you had seen my dissertation advisor, Alan Velie, at the MLA conference. You had also talked with James and Lois Welch, Paula Gunn Allen, Wendy Rose and Gretchen Bataille, and you encouraged me to come the next year. You suggested that I present a paper on the work of Allen or Momaday or Ortiz, since their work was better known than yours.

I invited you to come to the University of South Dakota for a conference held in April 1979. While you were here you wrote the original version of "Dancing with Dinosaurs." I still have the rough draft you wrote in the margins of an information sheet describing the plans of multinational corporations to mine uranium in the Black Hills. On October 15, you wrote of trying to get "Dancing with Dinosaurs" into *Ponca War Dancers*. Frank Parman had sent you proofs for the book, saying it was "overfull already;" but "Dancing" did get in as the last poem in that collection, published by Point Riders Press of Norman in 1980.

In a letter of July 7, 1980, you wrote that you gourd danced at White Eagle in June and that your mother had surgery on June 25, which "went o.k." At that time you didn't foresee her cancer as an immediate problem. She lived a year longer. You wrote me on August 6, 1981 that she died the 31st of July and sent me the words you spoke at her funeral—"my mother did not acknowledge defeat by cancer or age or troubles, she just ran out of time before she could fight them off again. That sounds exaggerated but it is pure and simple truth."

Over the years, as our lives grew more hectic, our letters were less frequent, and now they are electronic; but you have been generous in answering my questions about your life and your poetry, always more fully than I've ever expected. As I was completing the manuscript for my book *The Nature of Native American Poetry*, I sent an e-mail, asking you about the Dawes Act. You wrote back, on May 3, 1999,

detailing the provisions of allotment and the differences between the Osage Reservation allotment and those of other tribes. You went on to explain the history of your own family's acquisition of the 80 acres on Buck Creek that are home to the poem "Wazhazhe Grandmother." Your answer went far beyond what I could include in my essay on your work. But I needed that explanation, having no experience of that history. In that message, you shared other memories that brought back my own childhood visits to my grandparents' farm on Tennessee Ridge, where we too drank water from a cistern:

I will say that rainwater out of a cistern is much the best drinking water, next to some of the deep wells providing water to certain houses around the valley perhaps, but very sweet and fresh always until the last years when the gutter-connection was lost and the cistern stagnated and some snakes and frogs got into it (my brother Antwine got quite a scare one morning when he brought up on the cistern's revolving cups a water snake). Then we used it only for wash-water.

Jerry and I still speak of your visit in April 2001, when you came for a reading at the University of South Dakota and spent a week with us. You read from your new book, *Winning the Dust Bowl* and left us your copy annotated with the sticky notes you'd used to mark the passages. I have never attended a better reading. The sound of your voice lovingly spoke the words of each poem. The entire reading built up to a climax at Cahokia Mounds as you read "Aunt Jewell as Powwow Princess," a poem about America if there ever was one. You engaged us all that week so intensely, patiently and fondly, giving your time and support to the many students and writers who met you here. You dazzled us all and left too soon. When I found your cardinal bolo tie hanging on the bedroom closet door, it seemed a fitting metaphor. Jerry and I both missed you. I mailed you the bolo, as in 1976 I had sent the sweater and library books you left in Oklahoma that first time I heard you read your poems. Carter, I hope these electric words will serve to thank you for the gifts of your friendship and poetry.

From Turkey Ridge,

Norma

NOTE

¹ Norma Wilson's paper given at the 2000 MLA Convention, as part of the Panel, "Ho-ega: In Honor of Carter Revard," was expanded and published as a chapter, "The Mythic Continuum: The Poetry of Carter Revard," in her book *The Nature of Native American Poetry* (Albuquerque: U of NM P, 2001). Therefore, Norma chose to substitute something more personal for her conference paper.

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Norma C. Wilson, professor of English at the University of South Dakota, wrote *The Nature of Native American Poetry* (U of NM P, 2001). She is currently writing an introduction to Native poetry for the "Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature" and completing a manuscript of "Poems from Mojacar."

Carter Revard as Auto-ethnographer

Suzanne Evertsen Lundquist

*(Delivered at the Native American Literature Symposium
December 2000, Puerto Vallarta, Mexico)*

Carter Revard, in his analysis of Wendy Rose's poem on the Wounded Knee Massacre, "I Expected My Blood and My Skin to Ripen," draws his reader's attention to the brief quote that prefaces Rose's poem. The quote comes from a 1977 sales catalog for Plains Indian art advertising moccasins, a hide scraper, a buckskin shirt, woman's leggings, and a breastplate from the Wounded Knee Massacre for sale ranging in price from \$140.00 to \$1,000. Revard's reaction to this information is at once personal, political, and ethical:

To ask a controversial but (I think) relevant question, would it be possible to catalogue and sell a collection of souvenirs from Belsen, Dachau, or Auschwitz, and not draw a firestorm of outrage from a wide range of United States Citizens? The answer to that question might explain why we may build in Washington, D.C., a monument to the Holocaust carried out in Europe by the Germans, but none to the many exterminations on this continent by the United States.
(Family 170)

This kind of comment is typical of those made throughout Revard's collected essays gathered together in the text *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs*. And yet, it is difficult to establish a genre designation for this work. Somehow just establishing this work as a collection of personal essays does not appropriately distinguish the actual nature of Revard's writing. At first reading, the essay from which the above quote is taken, "Herbs of Healing: American Values in American Indian Literature," might be the type of article typically submitted to a scholarly journal. In this essay, Revard tells his readers that, "There are some Big Guns of American culture and politics who aim to shoot down 'Minority Literature,' claiming that it is trash unworthy of our classrooms, that conversing with it corrupts and keeps students from the uplifting morality of the 'classical' books they ought to be spending time with." For the sake of the "next generation of Americans, to

whom we stand in *loco parentis*,” Revard says that he will set “certain ‘classic’ poems beside others by contemporary American Indian writers, hoping this critical look will prove the true values of America are just as vividly and richly present in the ‘ethnic’ as in the classic poems” (162). To illustrate his thesis, Revard discusses family values by examining Wallace Steven’s “Anecdote of the Jar,” alongside of “Speaking,” by Simon Ortiz of Acoma Pueblo. He explores the violent nature of the “Us versus Them” mentality by comparing John Milton’s “On the Late Massacre in Piedmont” to Wendy Rose’s poem of protest against the Wounded Knee Massacre, cited above. Revard next moves to gender issues through a discussion of Robert Frost’s “Never Again Would Birds’ Song Be the Same,” set against Louise Erdrich’s “Jacklight.” The outcome of such exegesis is remarkable as both epistemological exercise and philosophical exploration of timeless concerns, kinship, gender, war. What heightens the implications of such experiments is the carefully kept balance between Revard’s voice (as analyst), the subjects that matter, and the perspective attained at the juncture between ethnic boundaries and borders.

Why then, call this book *Family Matters, Tribal Affairs*? Taken together, Revard’s essays weave an integrated pattern that might be called an anthropology of his experience. He is at once son, brother, husband, father, poet, professor, and mixed blood Osage, Irish, and Scotch Irish. Victor W. Turner, in his study of the etymology of the English word *experience* discovered that it derived from the Indo-European *per-*, “to attempt, venture, risk.” Other cognates—Germanic, Greek, and Latin—relate the word *experience* to the phrase “I pass through,” says Turner, “with implications of rites of passage.” Other possible links indicate that *experience* is also related to *experiment*. (Turner 35). Lest the audience get too uncomfortable with what seems like a scholarly sidetrack, I might suggest that Revard would be very comfortable with such a discussion. After all, Revard studied at Oxford University in 1952 and received a doctorate in English from Yale 1969. Revard’s teaching career includes five years at Amherst College (1956-61); and nearly thirty-nine years at Washington University in St. Louis (1961-1999). And his teaching specialties have a large range: English Language and Medieval Literature, Native American Literature and Autobiographies, and the like.

Much of Revard’s creative non-fiction is concerned with words, names, and etymologies. In fact, his essay, “Making a Name,” begins with a discussion of the Hebrew Creation Story, with “the primal human male as source of all names within human language—an authority given and confirmed by God himself” (108). The essay then

ranges widely through a discussion of how “the metaphors in common bird-names have slumped into obscurity” (109). Or how English has borrowed many “Mysterious Greek Names” that have obscured understanding from most people, excluding, however, “the scribes, the scientist-priests in white robes, the professors in black and blue and scarlet gowns” (111). And, finally, he gets personal—that is he explores personal names and places. Of particular interest is Revard’s “meditation on the name of a New England college town, and what lies beneath that name”—Amherst. True, Emily Dickinson claimed Amherst as her home town, and Robert Frost taught at Amherst College for a number of years. But Amherst was named after Jeffrey Lord Amherst, “who was a British military commander in the ‘French and Indian Wars’ of the eighteenth century” (118). Beneath the name *Amherst*, Revard tells us, is the “buried history of ethnic cleansing, carried out with the help of germ warfare, that was an important part of the British aristocracy’s fight for imperial dominance against the French aristocracy.” Furthermore, says Revard, “The town, and the college, had been given this name precisely *because* that particular English lord *had* fought the Indians.” So how does an Osage Indian teach at Amherst? Revard explains that within the school song “of gentleman scholars from clean families, there was direct reference to that history, and not to support the singing of it was to take a different view of New England history, of American history” (121). Needless to say, Revard could not remain at Amherst with a clear conscience.

This kind of reflection is typical of those who engage in an ethnography of modern thought. Clifford Geertz explains that there are numerous ethnographic themes available to us, but he considers only three: “The use of convergent data; the explication of linguistic classification; and the examination of the life cycle” (156). Geertz tells us that the various disciplines that make up our “scattered discourse” are “more than just intellectual coigns of vantage [advantageous viewing position] but are ways of being in the world.” Furthermore, “Those roles we think to occupy turn out to be the minds we find ourselves to have” (155). Therefore the inhabitants of any collective “are typically not merely intellectual but political, moral, and broadly personal (these days, increasingly, marital as well)” (157). Closely related to Geertz’s ethnographic themes is David Porush’s assertion that “postmodernism places the self-conscious activities of the human observer/scientist/teller—and consequently the making of narratives—in the center of things” (cited in Krupat 49). Multiculturalism adds yet another complexity to the “coigns of vantage” that both Geertz and Porush acknowledge. Gregory L. Jay tells us that: “One thing that

multiculturalism dis-orient is individualism, since multiculturalism continually ties persons back to the web of their interpersonal and cultural identity, an analysis of one's cultural identities may dis-orient the fictions of one's personal selfhood" (133). And finally, Arnold Krupat suggests a metaphorical conception of the self that moves us away from memoir or autobiography towards a relatively new genre—literary auto-ethnography.

Krupat explains:

Metonymy and synecdoche I take as terms that name relations of a part-to-part and a part-to-whole type. Thus where personal accounts are strongly marked by the individual's sense of herself predominantly as different and separate from other distinct individuals, one might speak of a *metonymic* sense of self. Where any narration of personal history is more nearly marked by the individual's sense of himself in relation to collective social units or groupings, one might speak of a *synecdochic* sense of self. (212)

Auto-ethnographies demonstrate how ancestry, race, gender, ethnicity, mythology, class, geographical locale, and historical moment are taken into account when an author formulates a notion of *self*.

In Revard's chapter, "History, Myth, and Identity," he explains that traditionally "an Osage would have had his personal identity carefully, explicitly, unmistakably linked with that of his people, with the symbolic arrangement of his village, with the marriage arrangements and hunting encampments and choosing of chiefs and war and peace ceremonies, with animals whom he could hunt or whose feather he could wear, the plants he would eat, the earth and the sky he dwelt within." Revard concludes that: "'History' and 'Myth' and 'Identity' are not three separate matters, here, but three aspects of one human being" (141). Contemporary Native American auto-ethnographies not only include tribal contexts but mixed-blood and multi-cultural contexts as well.

In an interview with Joseph Bruchac (in *Survival This Way*), Revard explains:

I think, if we're lucky, we'll have writers come along who know the mythical dimensions and are very, very honest, fiercely, unflinchingly, almost meanly vivid about the tough parts of Indian life and will not

neglect either dimension. Which really means I'd like to see American Indian writing be a standard for this country. I'd really like to see this country judged by its Indian people as a civilization and brought into the dock and given its good and bad marks. Until you do that you don't have an epic, and I'd like to see the Indian people do the epic for this part of the earth. It may not be just one person, it may be a bunch of people. That's what I'm looking for. (Witalec 378)

The kind of literature Revard is looking for can be found among a collection of Native American texts raggedly designated under a wide variety of hyphenated labels—Native American Studies/Autobiography, Native American Studies/Women's Studies, Indian Prose/Memoir, and so forth.

Carter Revard's *Family Matters*, *Tribal Affairs* joins a growing number of Native American texts that are both the kind of texts that Revard is looking for and auto-ethnographies. N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and *The Names*, Gerald Vizenor's *Interior Landscapes*, Paula Gunn Allen's *Off the Reservation*, Diane Glancy's *Claiming Breath* and *The Cold and Hunger Dance*, Janet Campbell Hale's *Bloodlines*, Linda Hogan's *Dwellings*, Louise Erdrich's *The Blue Jay's Dance*, and Leslie Marmon Silko's *Storyteller* are examples of Native American texts by authors whose creative energy has turned to doing the work historically done by anthropologists, philosophers, linguists, sociologists, geographers, environmentalists, and historians of religion. These authors collapse the boundaries between disciplines and genre in an attempt to recombine the various elements that create Native American identity. The results are narrative works of creative non-fiction that have great literary and ethical merit.

Revard's text is a marvelous example of how these various disciplines and ethnic identities converge in a narrative form that also combines poetry, short story, mythology, and references to the multiple voices and experiences that have made Carter Revard. And yet, his brand of being personal is always in "relation to collective social units or groupings" (Krupat 212)—family, faculty, students, tribe, and various authors within and without Native America. Revard is clear, in every chapter, that he is the teller, the observer.

And yet Revard plays with his own persona, especially in his chapter called "Report to the Nation: Repossessing Europe." In this epistle, Revard calls himself *Special Agent Wazhazhe*. The narrative begins: "When I claimed England for the Osage Nation, last month,

some of the English chiefs objected. They said the Thames is not the Thames until it's past Oxford: above Oxford, it is two streams, the Isis and the Cherwell. Forked tongue, forked river I suppose" (76). In this report, Revard composes a stunningly ironic commentary on the violent illogic of colonization, all the while playing Coyote: hoping that he won't be cheated, arrested, hanged, or assassinated for his efforts like Cortez, Balboa, Pizarro, and the other conquistadores. One caution that Revard makes in his "report to the nation" is that Europe, "being secondhand and pretty badly used, ought not to be priced so high as Louisiana when Jefferson bought from a French dictator the land on which, as he knew and did not know, our Osage people happened to exist." Therefore, Europe "won't be worth things of serious value. So don't any of us offer language, traditions, beadwork, religion or even half the Cowboy and Indian myth, let alone our selves, this time" (89).

Revard's self, then, is also multiple or at least an integration of various voices. His Osage name is Nompehwhahthe. And he was born in Pawhuska, Oklahoma. He was born a twin, raised by his stepfather on the Osage reservation, and encouraged to go to college by his Anglo grandfather, Aleck Camp. Each fact is expanded into story in Revard's text. Family does matter, naming matters, being an Osage and an American matters. And the authenticity and integrity of such personal voice narratives is worthy of study in English departments. Nompehwhahthe means *fear-inspiring man*. This name comes from the creation narrative of the Osage people. Apparently when the Osages "were trying to come down from stars to earth, their messenger was sent ahead to find a place where they might become a people." The messenger travels to three divisions of heaven without finding a home. In the fourth division, a "Man of Mystery, the god of the clouds" addresses the Osages telling them: "I am a person of whom your little ones may make their bodies. When they make of me their bodies, they shall cause themselves to be deathless" (140). Perhaps Revard can't prevent death. But he can model what it means to write an anthropology of experience: what amounts to Revard's "truth claims"—what is worth sharing—what he calls "herbs of healing."

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Translating Carter Revard: An Adventure among Mixed and Fertile Words

Márgara Averbach

Email Magic

I am grateful for e-mail. I met Carter Revard through the Internet some years ago. It could never have happened any other way, I suppose: how else could I, an American Literature teacher in Argentina, talk, debate and communicate with an Osage poet from North America? First, we “listened” to each other in lists and then, suddenly, we were also “chatting” personally. (Carter probably loves the way the words of oral communication invade and conquer the language of computers and cyber space.)

I re-read all the emails carefully when I started writing this and I confirmed my memories: the chat was deep, varied, intense. It involved so many themes I cannot even start to make a list. But just to give an idea of the multiplicity of points Carter spoke about, understood and clarified for me, among many other ideas, concepts and facts, we discussed the war in the Middle East; politics in my country, Argentina; the place of women in the world; discrimination, hunger and injustice in general; Mark Twain; and of course, poetry and Native American Indian situations and creations.

And then, he sent me some poems, first through email, then in books. At that point, my work as a teacher and translator on the one hand, and my e-mail friendship with Carter on the other got together.

I had been translating Native American authors’ short stories and poems for a time when this happened; I teach American Literature to students who can read either in the original language (English) or in translation (Spanish). In Argentina, our formation as literature scholars is panoramic. As students are asked to read and study literatures written in many different languages, they cannot be obliged to learn all those languages, and many times they read in translations. That is why, when I teach Native American literatures, I translate short texts I have admired and loved for my students.

Translation Problems

My profession as a translator has its own place in this puzzle. I have translated novels and taught literary translation for more than

fifteen years. There are certain basic problems in translation that should be discussed briefly before talking about any specific work.

The literary translator's task is very problematic. Literature's specificity does not depend on the message, but on the use of the linguistic code. In "El grado cero de la escritura," Roland Barthes compares the text with a window through which we can see something, a tree, for instance. He says that a perfectly transparent language would be one in which the window pane cannot be seen and only the tree is visible. He calls that kind of language "Zero Degree of Writing," and he states that it does not really exist; it is only a postulate. An example of something similar to the Zero Degree is the language of math or chemistry, for instance, $3 \times 3 = 9$ or H_2O . From Zero Degree onwards, the window pane begins to be more and more visible, and when we get to literary texts, the tree is no longer the center of the text. What is important is the texture of the window pane, the way the glass transforms the tree and expresses it in a different way. Taking this into account, it is logical to hear some theorists say that literary translation is impossible: if the key to the text is in the window pane and the translation is going to change the glass, can the result be something similar or even related to the original text? I consider that translating literature is possible—that is why I do it and I teach my students how to do it—but I have to admit that copying the texture of one of these panes into a different one is an enormously difficult task.

To achieve a decent imitation of the original text, the translator will have to pay attention not only to the meaning of the text, but also to the language of the original and devise ways to reproduce, re-codify the use of the original in the other language.

The translator will also have to build a bridge between cultures. An author generally writes for his or her own audience, people who share one or more of his or her cultures. A silly example: if I had to translate a novel by an Argentine author into English (I would never do this; the literary translator must translate into his or her native language, in my case, Spanish) and the novel talked about one of our National Holidays, let us say, the 25th of May, I would have to explain this to a non Argentine reader, who probably does not know what the date means to us and to the author of the book.

In the case of poetry, there are hard and often bitter debates among translators. I will state my position here so my translations can be judged accordingly. There are people who believe that when you translate poetry, the only important thing to translate is the content, and that you should translate it line by line with no rhyme. I believe that if a poem in the original uses rhyme and rhythm, the translator should try

to reproduce both without changing the general meaning (though he or she will have to change certain things to achieve this). The reader will receive a different text if the poem does not rhyme or has a different rhythm. It goes without saying that what the translator will achieve is not a mirror image of the original but a kind of adaptation or imitation, because the ways different languages manage rhythm and rhyme can be completely different too. For instance: our rhyme in Spanish is much more complex and varied than English rhyme, and our way of making rhythm has nothing to do with short and long syllables (spondee, iamb) because our language distinguishes only between stressed and unstressed syllables, and vowels all have the same length in Spanish. Therefore, the difficulties are great, and there is always a better way to solve the problems than one can imagine. A poem is never fully translated, and no translation is the final translation of a text; one can be always sure that if one devoted another year to a translation, it would definitely get better.

Carter Explains Why He Sings

Let us go now to Carter's poetry. To me, it was surprising, marked by a mixture of a pleasure and understanding of Nature on the one side, and a deep knowledge of the sources of many cultures, including the European ones, on the other. This has baffled me sometimes. The fact that it is a poetry based especially on rhythm (not on rhyme) makes it more difficult to translate (as I explained before, English rhythm is very far away from Spanish rhythm in origin and method, farther than rhyme). When I had cultural problems (meaning my own lack of deep knowledge of Osage culture), I turned to Carter for advice and explanation. He has generously shared interpretations, data, and understanding with me. He has explained with enormous patience things that were obvious for him and he has criticized my readings when necessary. I think his explanations and ideas show him as he is: a person dedicated to teaching, in the best of meanings related to that word, which is not always fully appreciated.

When I translated "Coyote Tells Why he Sings," I could not find a reference to the word "blackjack" (as a tree). When a translator does not find a word, does not understand, there is fear. I was very uncomfortable with the idea of asking Carter—I still did not know him well enough—but my fear was more powerful, and I finally asked. This is what he wrote to me:

A blackjack is a kind of oak tree that grows on the Osage Hills where I was born. It is a small, untidy and indomitable tree. Its leaves are thick and glossy dark green, not quite as holly-leaves and when there is a rainstorm, the big drops sound very loud on these leaves. (6 June, 1997)

This description of the blackjack is poetry again. I think Carter cannot write without writing poetry. After the explanation, one can see the rain, the leaves, the fertile land when reading it. And the same happens with the culture details. I had felt the verb MADE music was used as to express something solid, a making of a concrete object of beauty, such as a sculpture. But I did not know the cultural details, and Carter, as Coyote, told me. I had been looking for the poem in the books to review the translation, and I could not find the poem with that title because in the book it was called "The Coyote." Yet, before Carter told me about the change in the name, I found the poem. This is what Carter said:

I'm glad Coyote stepped forward and let you find him. As you see, he was given his voice by Thunder, who waked him; and music was given to him by the Thunder-storm, and by the rain-water it brought, moving the stones in such a way that they changed the musical key of what he heard the water saying, so that Sound became Music. Or, as the last line of the sonnet says: "The storm MADE music, when it changed my world." Coyote had heard only sounds; and then, when the sound of the water changed its key, transposing to a deeper note in such a way that he realized: this is more than sound, this is Music. And then of course he absolutely had to sing. I realized, after having earlier titled the poem simply "The Coyote," that readers might not understand that what the coyote is saying DOES tell why he sings. And someone who has listened to coyotes under a bright moon will know that they are not just "howling," they are SINGING, and they sing because they have learned to hear the MUSIC of the world, not just its SOUNDS.

My Osage name shows that I am of the Thunder clan. Nompehwhahtheh means "fear-inspiring" or

“Makes Afraid,” and this refers to the fear that the Thunder being creates. . . . When Osages decided to come from the stars to this world, we sent ahead our messengers to “scout” or reconnoitre this world we were going to live in. They met the beings who had learned to live successfully in this world: the Black Bear, Mountain Lion, Cedar Tree, and so on, and each time they met one of these beings, that being would say: “If you will make your bodies of me (i.e. incarnate me, incorporate me), then you will live to see old age, and live into the blessed days.” Thereupon this being would tell them they could use certain names whose reference would be to this being and his or her attributes. So Thunder gave them, as one of the names they could use, the name *Nompehwhattheh*, which means “Makes Afraid.” as the Thunder makes people afraid. . . . I do not refer to all this directly in the poem, but when the Coyote, who is speaking in the poem, says, “The Thunder waked me,” this will be understood as part of the poem’s context and meanings. (7 October, 2002)

These ideas, images and understandings, which surround the poem as the music Coyote heard and understood, were mine in a different way when I read this message. As a translator, I feel I should translate the explanation also and add it to the poem as a footnote.

The same happened when Carter explained to me the metaphor of the “allomorph” in “To the Muse of Oklahoma”:

“allomorph” is a word I picked up in high-school chemistry classes [this I knew, but he explains to me the chemistry meaning of the word and then goes on]. So in the poem I compared “truth” to these other elements or compounds—the “truth” about something depends on the circumstances and temperature prevailing. Thus when I say in the poem “We walked upon the water,” that could easily be taken for a lie, but if you remember that I am talking about the winter time, then you see that statement is perfectly truthful. We walked upon the water when it was in its solid form. Truth has a summer allomorph (watery) in which one cannot walk upon it, but also a

winter allomorph (icy) in which it is natural, normal and usual to be able to walk upon. You have to know the version of truth you are dealing with. And muses—especially in the form of milk-cows—need to have both the allomorphs. (6 June, 1997)

Here, Carter achieves at least two things: first, he mixes weather, chemistry, social interests, and the relationship between human beings and nature in one complex, wonderfully hybrid metaphor; second, he is talking about tolerance, about understanding the Other. To me the allomorph metaphor is a perfect description of Otherness as necessary, as indispensable, as visible.

Much later I translated “Driving in Oklahoma,” from *Ponca War Dancers*. This last anecdote is somewhat problematic and leaves me in an awkward position, but I think it is worth retelling. I did not get to this poem by myself, I did not choose it. I was writing a paper on technology as seen by Native American authors and when I asked Carter whether he remembered having written something on the subject, he mentioned the poem. These are some of the explanations he gave me about it:

The deeper contrast is between the natural music and the technological. The bird makes the earth its home by song, and in some ways so do human beings, but we may forget that the technology is not the real source of the song, only a kind of medium, and that our fast motion, always going somewhere, may at times “cross” with the real singing which is not confined to “roads” and “machines.” I was making a word-play also on “country music” in the poem, since the main genre of recorded music played along US Route #66 is COUNTRY MUSIC. So in the poem I am contrasting this radio-broadcast “Country Music” with the music of the (natural) country, the roadside music, the songs in the air from the birds. One kind of music is blasting out the windows of the speeding car, from its radio, and comes from time-capsuled “records” made maybe decades earlier, played a hundred miles away in some closed and windowless room by a bored “disc-jockey,” and turned into electrons zapping through space way up to the ionosphere and bounced back

into the metal “aerial” of my car radio’s receiving apparatus, and transmogrified through its electrical apparatus into sound and music again. So the basic comparison in the poem is between the technological music and power of its “country-music songs” on the one hand, and on the other hand the natural music and power of the bird’s wild-country music. And the contrast strikes home to me as writer when, in the comfort and isolation of a speeding car, with the radio music blasting out my windows, I suddenly see and hear a meadowlark fly across the highway just in front of me, singing as it flies. . . . They have very bright yellow breasts, a great black bib or vest curving down into and up out of it at their throats, and a beautifully intricate speckling and interweaving of browns and tans and other winter-grass colors on their backs. Where I was driving, US #75, when this meadowlark crossed in front of my car, the road is a straight north-south ribbon of concrete through rolling tallgrass prairie, and I was driving during the courting season when the males are all displaying and singing and competing for mates, so there were lots of birds fluttering and sailing and singing on both sides of the road, perching briefly on fenceposts or small plum or chokecherry trees along the roadside in the fields.

In the first part of the poem I referred to how “free” of heavy burdens I was feeling, and compare this feeling to that physical feeling an astronaut must have, when on the way to the moon, at that point where the GRAVITY of earth gives way to the GRAVITY of the moon. There is an exhilaration in being “weightless,” a feeling you and I would know from what it is like in one of those children’s swings when you reach the top of the swing and start back down—a kind of inner sweetness near the heart, at the “pit of the stomach”. . . . When we are on a trip like the one I was on, . . . being “between home and away” as I phrase it in the poem, is like being between Earth and Moon gravities. In that capsule, it seems to be Technology which sets us free. But in the poem I describe how, speeding along, I saw and

heard the meadowlark cross just in front of me, singing as it flew. So I pulled over to the road-shoulder, found an envelope and pen, and wrote the first draft of the poem. It is about being reminded of a simple fact: the Country is “defined wholly by song,” this Oklahoma country is Meadowlark Country before and after it is Country and Western Music country. And the bird’s song made me want to move again through that natural country, and try to “see” how that bird, even while it sang, was moving “so easy while it flies.” (14 October, 1998)

I read the poem, I read the explanations, I felt that some of the details of my readings were confirmed (the oppositions country music-lark music; technology-nature; the incredible cuts in the graphics of the poem). So I translated the poem and wrote my paper where I analyzed a number of texts, including that poem. Yet, when I sent the paper to him (I wanted him to give me his opinion, and by this time I had realized that Carter is always there when one tries to reach him), he explained a mistake I had made. I had thought the man in the car had hit the bird; I had made the bird’s death a price for the man’s illumination. There is something personal in the mistake; the poem had reminded me of one time I was on a highway and a bird crossed the road flying too low. I could not stop the car in time, and I haven’t been able to forget it.

Carter pointed me to an evident truth I had not seen: there is no sadness in the poem, no loss; therefore, the bird cannot be dead or wounded. I had let myself be carried away by my own memories and had not paid enough attention to the text itself. That is the worst sin a translator can make and I know it. Luckily, I had Carter to watch out for me.

To translate his poems has been thrilling, challenging and important for me. I feel grateful to be able to transmit to my students at least part of the magic Carter’s words gave to me when I read them in the original language. I know the translations can be improved. They always can. So I present them here as a work in progress, an attempt (not good enough, I am sure) to transmit Carter’s art to other readers in another language.

The Coyote (Coyote Tells Why he Sings)

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,
And the rain came in a pelting rush down over the hill,
The wind blew wet into the cave; I heard the sounds
Of leaf-drip, wet 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.

El Coyote (Coyote explica por qué canta)

Había un arroyuelo, un sendero de agua, cerca del cubil,
y tenía un hilito todo el verano seco,
cuando nací. Una noche, a fines de agosto, llovió...
el Trueno nos despertó. Las gotas rompieron como olas
en el polvo, sobre las ojas tiesas, negras de los robles, sobre líquenes y
rocas.
Y la lluvia vino a la carrera, a cántaros, hacia la colina,
el viento sopló húmedo en la cueva y yo oí los sonidos
de las hojas y las gotas de agua, el crujido del viento en ramas
empapadas.
Y después, la canción del arroyuelo cambió, oí caer una piedra
que hizo ondas nuevas, borboteó otra vez en un tono más bajo.
Donde estaban las ondas nuevas bebí, a la mañana siguiente,
Agua fresca, embarrada, y me temblaron los dientes.
Y pensé en la delicadeza, la elegancia de la piedra y en cómo la
tormenta hacía música cuando cambiaba mi mundo.

To The Muse, In Oklahoma

That Aganippe Well was nice, it hit the spot—
sure, this bluestem meadow
is hardly Helicon, we had
to gouge a pond, the mules
dragged a rusty slip scraping
down through dusty topsoil into
dark ooze and muck, grating open
sandstone eggs; but then the thunder
sent living waters down, they filled
the rawness with blue trembling where white
clouds sailed in summer and we
walked upon the water
every winter (truth's
a zero allomorph of time), although
it was more fun sliding. We'd go and
chop down through six-inch ice by
the pond's edge, pry the
ice-slab out onto the pond from its
hole where the dark water welled
up cold to the milk-cows sucking noisily,
snorting their relish—and when
they'd drunk, we shoved the ice-
slab over to where the bank
sloped gently, took
a running chute and leaped atop the slab real
easy and slid,
just glided clear over
the pond, riding on ice. Or we stretched prone
on the black windowy ice,
looked down on darkness where fish
drifted, untouchable, below our fingers.
Ice
Makes a whole new surface
Within things, keeps
killer whales from seals just long enough
to let new seals be born before they
go down to feed or be fed upon.
—Come sliding now, and later we'll
go swimming, dive in with the
muskrats, black bass, water moccasins, under

this willow let the prairie wind
drink from our bare skin:
good water
 fits every mouth.

A la Musa, en Oklahoma

Ese Pozo Aganippe era lindo, era lo justo...
sí, esta pradera de tallos azules
no es el Helicón, ya sé, teníamos que abrir
un estanque, las mulas
se daban resbalones oxidados cuando rascaban
a través de la tierra polvorienta hacia
el lodo oscuro, el estiércol, y hacían un ruido agudo
al abrir huevos de arenisca; pero después, el trueno
enviaba abajo aguas de vida, y ellas llenaban
la crudeza con azul tembloroso en el lugar
en el que las nubes blancas navegaban en verano y nosotros
caminábamos sobre el agua
cada invierno (la verdad
es un alomorfo cero del tiempo), aunque
era más divertido deslizarse. Y
partíamos el hielo de metro y medio junto
al estanque, levántabamos un poco
el pedazo de hielo hacia el estanque, lo apartábamos
del agujero de donde surgía el agua negra,
fría, hacia las vacas lecheras que la chupaban con ruido,
bufando de delicia... y cuando
ellas terminaban, volvíamos a empujar el pedazo
de hielo al lugar en que la ribera
se inclinaba, suave, subíamos para tomar carrera
y saltábamos sobre el pedazo con facilidad
y nos deslizábamos,
nos deslizábamos sobre el estanque,
cabalgando sobre hielo. O nos estirábamos boca abajo
en el hielo negro con ventana,
mirábamos abajo a la oscuridad donde pasaban
los peces, intocables, bajo nuestros dedos.
El hielo
hace una superficie totalmente nueva
dentro de las cosas, mantiene a las ballenas

asesinas lejos de las focas lo suficiente para que
nazcan nuevas focas antes de que bajen
a alimentarse o ser alimento de otros.
...Bajábamos deslizándonos y después, íbamos a
nadar, nos zambullíamos con las
ratas almizcleras, las lubinas negras, las serpientes de agua, bajo
este sauce dejábamos que el viento de la pradera
bebiera de nuestra piel desnuda, abierta;
el agua buena
es buena para todas las bocas.

Driving in Oklahoma

On humming rubber along this white concrete
 lighthearted between the gravities
 of source and destination like a man
 half way to the moon
 in this bubble of tuneless whistling
at seventy miles an hour from the windvents,
 over prairie swells rising
 and falling, over the quick offramp
 that drops to its underpass and the truck
 thundering beneath as I cross
with the country music twanging out my windows,
 I'm grooving down this highway feeling
 technology is freedom's other name when
 —a meadowlark
 comes sailing across my windshield
 with breast shining yellow
 and five notes pierce
 the windshield like a flash
 of nectar on mind
gone as the country music swells up and
 drops on me wheeling down
 my notch of cement-bottomed sky
 between home and away
 and wanting
to move again through country that a bird
 has defined wholly with song
 and maybe next time see how
 he flies so easy, when he sings.

En auto en Oklahoma

Sobre goma que susurra a lo largo de este cemento blanco
 el corazón leve entre las gravedades
 de origen y destino como un hombre
 a medio camino de la luna
 en esta burbuja de silbido sin canción
 a cien kilómetros por hora desde los ventiletes,
 sobre olas de praderas que suben
 y bajan, sobre la rampa rápida, lateral
 que cae hasta la ruta inferior y el camión
 que truena por debajo cuando paso
 con la música country que sale, vibrando, de mis ventanillas,
 voy trazando un surco en esta autopista y siento
 que la tecnología es el otro nombre de la libertad cuando
 -una alondra
 cruza navegando mi parabrisas
 con el pecho brillante amarillo
 y cinco notas perforan
 el parabrisas como un fogonazo
 de néctar en la mente
 que se fue mientras la música country hace una ola y sube y
 y me deja caer rodando abajo
 por mi desfiladero de cielo con fondo de cemento
 entre mi casa y lejos
 y hace que quiera
 moverme de nuevo a través de campo que un pájaro
 definió totalmente con canción
 y quizás la próxima vez ver cómo
 vuela tan fácil, cuando canta.

Postcolonial Hyperbaggage

Oh, if Vuitton made a suitcase
with modems and hypertext—lor at least windows
to let us put new folders in, where
jackets won't wrinkle and all
the smelly socks can be hung with care in
the hyperspace herb-drawer—and with
still cooler files whose chocolate
truffles would never melt

into a cashmere sweater. We need these
neat reversible black holes for crossing Borders,
things we could pack and close
at a single touch and never pop a seam
or rip a zipper. They'd make the Eurodollar
 zoom up in value—
and hey, just think,
Stealth Bombers could be replaced
 By diplomatic pouches full
of virtual assassins,
used terrorists could be
 out of the Trash Can, leaving
 a Virtuous Reality.
All Indian Reservations could be tucked
Into Death Valley, accessible through
its golden icon, the Sacajawea Dollar.
Such a Pandora's Apple, I think,
Even the seediest Satan could have sold
to the smartest Adam and Eve, just by saying
one taste of this, my dears,
and you're back in Eden.

Hiperequipaje poscolonial

Ah, si Vuitton hiciera una valija
con hipertexto y módem... o por lo menos ventanas
para que pusiéramos ahí nuevas carpetas, donde
las solapas no se arruguen y todas
las medias llenas de olor puedan colgarse con cuidado en
el cajón de hierbas del hiperespacio y con
archivos todavía más frescos cuyas trufas
de chocolate nunca se derritan
en el suéter de cachemira. Necesitamos esos
agujeros negros prolijos reversibles para cruzar Fronteras,
cosas que podamos empacar y cerrar
en un solo roce y nunca abrir una costura
o desgarrar un cierre. Harían que el eurodólar
 subiera como un cohete
y ey, piensen solamente,
se podría reemplazar a los bombarderos invisibles
 por equipajes diplomáticos llenos

de asesinos virtuales,
se podría descartar a los terroristas usados
 en el Cesto de Basura, para que quedara
 una Realidad Virtuosa.
Todas las Reservaciones Indias podrían desaparecer
en el Valle de la Muerte, accesible a través
de su ícono de oro, el dólar Sacajawea.
A esa Apple de Pandora, creo yo,
Podría haberla vendido hasta el Satán más sórdido
a los más inteligentes Adán y Eva, sólo con decirles
un poquito de esto, mis queridos,
y ahí están, en el Edén de nuevo.

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Buffalo in Six Directions

Janet McAdams

I wrote this poem after Carter Revard visited my poetry writing class at Kenyon College to talk about riddle poems.

*It's a contemporary interpretation of the form-
I begin with a riddle, invert it in the closing section,
and in between use found texts and invented found texts.*

1. Riddle

the long day left to languish
flesh forgotten hide hacked
I hurtled hard-hooved
out of this century

2. Recipe

Rub the hide with brain to soften it.
Pack the stomach with cherries and roast
over a slow fire or stew
with cherry juice, spices
to mask the wildness
but that wild taste
lingers on the tongue the way
we thought we saw them
one hungry winter
so many winters
after they disappeared.

3. Measures

Lewis & Clark: "200 miles of buffalo"
One kill = a week of meat

“the world”—he wrote—“looked like one robe”

4.
Letter

My Dearest One,
When the train stopped dead from hard winter
they came out of nowhere, the herd
looking for shelter
pushing against the train
though we shouted, rang bells,
and shot into them.
Nothing would stop them,
so we held fast and waited.
Some froze standing, some
curled together.
One of the soldiers hacked off a head for a trophy,
so large, he could barely wrestle it onto the train,
larger than our Emily when I left Boston last summer.
If you saw such fur, you could not imagine a cold
bitter enough to pierce it.
I was grateful for the divine cold
but couldn't help but wonder
why has He sent us into this country
so filled with monsters and savages.

5. Journal

Tuesday 17th. Shot at three bulls but missed all.
Wednesday 18th. Wrote a letter to my beloved Agatha.
Thursday 19th. Killed two young bulls today though the last
would not go down. Pumped his skin
so full of lead. We pickled the meat in the Great Salt Lake.
Friday 20th. Return to England on the morrow. A successful journey:
79 bears, and 180 buffalo hides.

Enough hides for a dozen lifetimes!

6.
Riddle

We hurtled hard-hooved
thundered down dusty plains

like stalks of lupine rising
We ran past bones piled

into towers beautiful bonfires
left to languish the long day
 we disappeared.

Janet McAdams teaches creative writing and American Indian literature at Kenyon College. Her poetry collection, *The Island of Lost Luggage* (University of Arizona Press, 2000), won the Native Writers Circle of the Americas First Book Award in 1999 and an American Book Award in 2001.

Louise Erdrich's Lulu Nanapush: A Modern-Day Wife of Bath?

Peter Beidler

—For Carter Revard

Carter Revard is an Osage poet and dancer who has spent most of his professional life as a professor of British medieval literature. I knew his work first as a fellow medievalist. When I read his work on fourteenth-century lyric poetry I was impressed by this man's sensitivity to the nuances of medieval poets. When I first met Carter in the late 1970's, however, I met him not as a medievalist. Rather, he was serving as a respondent to a paper I gave at the MLA on James Welch. I forget precisely what his response to my paper was, but I recall that it was an elegantly gentle put-down in which he wondered whether I had fully appreciated the Blackfeet traditions of the writer I was discussing. Over the years Carter and I became friends, running into each other time after time at one conference or another. Occasionally I went to hear what he had to say about medieval literature, but more often in recent decades I went to hear him read his own poetry or discuss some feature of Native American literature. Occasionally we would discuss the exciting news that one of us had "found another one"—that is, another scholar who was a student both of medieval British literature and of contemporary American Indian literature. By and large those of us who share these two quite different interests work in the two fields separately. That is, we teach and write about medieval literature and we also teach and write about American Indian literature, but we almost never find a chance to combine our interests. I am happy to dedicate to Carter this short article in which I suggest the possible influence of a medieval poet on Louise Erdrich.

Louise Erdrich is a sophisticated and eclectic writer of fiction. Her work reflects not only her Ojibwe roots in Minnesota and North Dakota and the oral traditions of indigenous storytelling, but also her solid grounding in non-Indian literature. Other scholars have noticed connections between her work and that of writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Herman Melville, Flannery O'Connor, and William Faulkner.¹ Erdrich herself acknowledges repeatedly the many writers she has read with admiration.² There is no question that Erdrich is a self-consciously literary writer: "Everybody you read is a literary

influence. I had a literary education, so the entire literary canon is a background." (*Conversations* 38). My purpose here is to suggest that Erdrich's work may show echoes of the work of Geoffrey Chaucer.³ In developing that suggestion I will try to connect Erdrich's work with the concept of a Chaucer-like frame tale, with the concept of a literary "marriage group," and, especially, with the character of Alisoun as depicted in the Prologue to Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*. On this last, I shall be particularly interested in demonstrating that Lulu, one of the central characters in Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, may be seen as a kind of modern-day Native American Wife of Bath. At the end of my essay I shall consider briefly why it matters that we establish the kinds of connections I am suggesting here.

Frame Tale and Marriage Group

So far as I know, there is no definite external proof that Erdrich knew Chaucer's work. That is, I am not aware that Erdrich has ever said in an interview that she had read or was influenced by Chaucer. Still, Erdrich studied English and American literature in college, and it is entirely possible that she had encountered, at least in a survey course, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and his most famous character, Alisoun of Bath. It seems likely that Erdrich's 1996 novel *Tales of Burning Love* has a connection to Chaucer's tales of Canterbury. Erdrich's novel concerns the life and loves of Jack Mauser, a part-Ojibwe contractor. Jack is himself somewhat similar to Alisoun of Bath in that his five wives balance her five husbands. More interesting is the possibility that the central event of this novel builds on Chaucer's concept of the framed narrative. That central event in *Tales of Burning Love* involves Jack's staging a fire in which he appears to burn to death. After his supposed funeral several days later, his four surviving wives are snowbound overnight in a Ford Explorer. (The fifth wife, June, had died many years earlier in another snowstorm, though she is present with the Explorer in spirit.) The night is cold as the snow falls rapidly in the terrible North Dakota blizzard of January, 1995. The four living wives, Eleanor, Candice, Marlis, and Dot, know that they are in danger of freezing to death in the Explorer and that if they fall asleep they may well suffocate. To stay awake, they make a pact to tell exciting tales—tales of burning love—to one another. The subject they mostly tell tales about is Jack, the husband they have all married.

The fundamental tale-telling situation is generally similar to what we find in the *Canterbury Tales*: a group of travelers who make a pact to entertain one another during a specific period of time by telling tales.

One of their number, the Host in Chaucer and Dot in Erdrich, emerges as the leader. In the *Canterbury Tales* the pilgrims agree to the host's terms: two tales from each pilgrim on the trip out, two on the trip back, a contest the winner of which is to get a free supper, the criteria for winning (entertainment and morality), and so on. In *Tales of Burning Love* the group also agrees on a set of rules and criteria for the tales:

Eleanor went on. "We *have* to stay awake all night. The one responsible for her hour has to keep the others from dozing off. We should set some rules."

"Rule one," Dot volunteered. "No shutting up until dawn. Rule two. Tell a true story. Rule three. The story has to be about you. Something that you've never told another soul, a story that would scorch paper, heat up the air." (206)

They even decide to consider the car as "a confessional" (205). And because most of the tales they actually tell center on their relationships with Jack Mauser, their current or past husband, their tales constitute a kind of modern-day "marriage group" in which the tellers give confessional narratives about their own marriages. The situation of four wives in the Explorer, of course, is different from that of the twenty-nine *Canterbury* pilgrims on horseback, but it seems likely enough that Erdrich was drawing on Chaucer as she built her own set of tales in a fictional frame. In any case, the concept of a "marriage group"—a series of tales initiated by the Wife of Bath and centering on male-female relationships in marriage—is familiar to all Chaucer scholars.

Lulu and Alisoun

If readers are willing to concede at least general similarities between Chaucer's frame tale and Erdrich's, and see at least possible parallels between Chaucer's discussion of marriage and Erdrich's in *Tales of Burning Love*, then they may be willing to accept what I consider to be the strong possibility that Erdrich had read the Wife of Bath's Prologue and that Alisoun of Bath is in some sense echoed in Lulu Nanapush Morrissey Lamartine in Erdrich's *Love Medicine* and other novels. There are some very general similarities between the two characters: both Alisoun and Lulu are unusually strong and dominant women and both have had multiple partners and marriages. These sorts

of general similarities, of course, do not mean much. I have identified eight similarities, however, that suggest that in creating Lulu, Erdrich was echoing Chaucer's Wife of Bath.

First, both women have early sexual experiences with older men. It appears that the first sexual partner of Alisoun of Bath is her first husband. At the time she is apparently twelve years of age, while he is “olde” (D 197). Lulu’s first sexual partner is also a man older than she is, the strange recluse Moses Pillager who lives alone on an island in Matchimanito Lake on the reservation. Apparently when she is still in her teens, Lulu goes to Moses on the rebound when she learns that the young man she loves, Nector Kashpaw, has been taken by Marie. We never learn exactly how old Moses is when he and Lulu first make love, but another character refers to him as “too old for” Lulu (*Love* 75), and we know that he survived a couple of epidemics that decimated the Ojibwe reservation before she was born.

Second, both Alisoun and Lulu are proud of their almost eternal youth and are concerned about the loss of their attractiveness as they grow older. Alisoun's bragging lament is well-known (I give marginal glosses in *italics*):

But - Lord Crist! - whan that it remembreth me
when I recall

Upon my yowthe, and on my jolitee
joyfulness

It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote.
the bottom of my heart

Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote
does my heart good

That I have had my world as in my tyme.
But age, allas, that al wole envenyme,
poison

Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.
Lat go. Farewel! The devel go therwith!
The flour is goon; ther is namoore to telle;
wheat flour

The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;
bran

But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde.
strive to be merry
(D 468-79)

Lulu shares Alisoun's sad, nostalgic, defiant, but optimistic and generally cheerful attitude about her declining attractiveness as she grows older. Here she is in her seventies, reminiscing from her room in the senior citizens center on the reservation:

I was never any looker. It was just that I kept
my youth. They couldn't take that away. Even bald
and half blinded as I am at present, I have my youth
and my pleasure. I still let in the beauty of the world.
It's a sad world, though, when you can't get love
right even after trying it as many times as I have.
(*Love* 278)

Lulu is optimistic even about the pleasures she will know after she dies:

[D]eath will set me free like a traveling cloud. .
. . I'll be out there as a piece of the endless body of
the world feeling pleasures so much larger than skin
and bones and blood. (*Love* 287)

Third, both women give us a catalog of their husbands and lovers. Alisoun of Bath tells us over and over that she had many husbands, and, indeed, she counts them off for us:

I shal seye sooth; tho housbondes that I hadde,
As thre of hem were goode, and two were badde.
The thre were goode men (D 196-98)

My fourthe housbonde was a revelour (D 453)

Now of my fifthe housbonde wol I telle (D 503)

That confessional, counting-them-off language sounds somewhat like Lulu's:

And yes, it is true that I've done all of the things
they say. . . . I'm going to tell you about the men. . .
. There was this one man [Nector Kashpaw] I kept
trying to forget. The handsome, distinguished man
who burnt my house down. He did it after I got
married the third and last time [to Beverly
Lamartine]. . . . I doubt I'll ever marry again. . . . He

husbands' statement that the only way to keep a cat like Alisoun at home is to singe its fur so that no one else will think she is pretty, one of Lulu's rejected lovers does singe her fur, leaving her bald all the rest of her life. The spurned lover is Nector, who discovers, on the very night that he leaves his own wife to marry his lover Lulu, that she had decided to marry Beverly Lamartine. For a series of complicated reasons that even he does not seem to understand, Nector then sets her house on fire. Lulu is not in it at the time, but she rushes back in to rescue her sleeping child, and while there does permanently lose her hair in the fire. Although the jealous Nector may not have been intentionally trying to singe his cat-like lover, surely it is possible that, consciously or not, he wants both to punish her for promiscuity and, through fire, to curtail that promiscuity.

And eighth, both women have gap teeth. Chaucer tells us that Alisoun of Bath is "gat-tothed" (A 468 and D 603), a feature that probably would, according to most commentary, have indicated her heightened sexuality. Lulu, also, is said to have a "gap-toothed smile" (*Love* 115) as she reminds one of her lovers about the time she saw him naked after she was victorious in a game of strip poker. The sexuality associated with both women's gapped teeth is too striking to be accidental.

So What?

I am aware that no one of the eight parallels I have suggested is by itself compelling enough to prove direct influence. And even taken together they may seem to some scholars evidence of nothing more than that two great literary artists, one an Anglo-Saxon man, the other an Ojibwe woman, writing six hundred years apart, independently hit upon such similar ways of characterizing a woman of multiple marriages and eager sexuality. Still, if I am right to suppose that as a student of literature in college Erdrich had read, somewhere along the line, the memorable prologue of Chaucer's most famous pilgrim, then it is likely that the parallels I have demonstrated suggest that we find echoes of Chaucer's work in that of Erdrich. I do not claim, of course, that Erdrich is in *Love Medicine* retelling the life-story of Alisoun of Bath, or that Erdrich had a copy of the *Canterbury Tales* open in front of her as she wrote *Love Medicine*. And I am happy to leave the question mark at the end of the title of this essay.

What does it matter? Why do I point out these various echoes? Three reasons immediately present themselves. The first is to remind readers of Erdrich that, while much is made of the Native American

oral tradition and its influences on her work, that work actually draws widely on the written record of many Indian and non-Indian writers, Chaucer among them.

The second is to give cultural critics the basis for interrogating why two cultures as different as any two can be—the emerging British culture of the fourteenth century and the re-emerging Ojibwe culture of the twentieth century—could both give rise to a fun-loving older woman who, nostalgic, gap-toothed, and cat-like, cannot keep herself from falling in love again and yet again, sometimes to men unworthy of her.

The third is to give scholars interested in the origins of Native American fiction the basis for source analyses. Just as we seek out Chaucer's sources so that we can measure Chaucer's creative and cultural originality, so we seek out Erdrich's sources so that we can measure her creative and cultural originality. If I am right that Erdrich's Lulu shows echoes of Chaucer's Wife of Bath, that fact is important in part because it lets us consider some of the ways Lulu is different from Chaucer's Wife of Bath. For example, we know almost nothing about Alisoun's early childhood, while we know a great deal more about Lulu's; Alisoun is apparently childless, while Lulu has nine children and several grandchildren and is even referred to as a "sexy grandmother" (*Bingo* 262). Alisoun is a weaver, while Lulu manages her son's reservation souvenir factory; Alisoun goes on many pilgrimages, while Lulu pretty much stays home. The growing number of Erdrich scholars may do well to consider the possibility that Erdrich knew some of the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, if only so that they can measure the vastness of her independence of those works.

NOTES

¹ See, for example, the introduction to Peter G. Beidler and Gay Barton, *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich* (1999), p. 2, and the series of articles by Thomas Matchie referenced in their bibliography, pp. 248-49. For a brief mention of Louise Erdrich's connection to Chaucer in her *Tales of Burning Love* (1996), see their p. 32. So far as I am aware, previous scholars have not discussed the connection between Erdrich and Chaucer in any detail. We find the occasional statement like that of Mark Childress in his review of *Tales of Burning Love* in the *New York Times* for May 12, 1996, section 7, p.

10: "The structure of *Tales of Burning Love* seems as shaggy and chaotic as something from Chaucer. The stories pop up seemingly at random, overlapping, circling back and forth through time and crossing one another in ways that are often ingenious and occasionally confusing."

² *Conversations with Louise Erdrich and Michael Dorris*, ed. Allan Chavkin and Nancy Feyl Chavkin (Jackson: U P of MS, 1994), reproduces a series of interviews that Erdrich and her husband have given over the years. In them Erdrich gives several catalogue lists of the writers and works she admires or that she knows have influenced her own work: "Linda Hogan. . . . Amy Tan. . . . Gretel Ehrlich . . . Annie Dillard. James Welch. Joanna Scott . . . A. S. Byatt. Jeannette Winterson. . . . Toni Morrison, Philip Roth, and Joyce Carol Oates. Doris Betts. Margaret Atwood. Alice Munro. Thom Jones. Charles Palliser. . . . Evan S. Connell. . . . Presbyter Johannes. . . . Tzvetan Todorov. . . . Ronald Sanders. . . . Samuel Eliot Morrison. . . . Hidy Ochiai. . . . John Donne. . . . George Shattock. Pliny. Columbus" (221-22); "Flannery O'Connor, Gunter Grass, Jean Rhys, Flann O'Brien, Alejo Carpentier, Mark Twain, John Barth, Willa Cather, William Faulkner, W. B. Yeats, John Tanner, Vladimir Nabokov, William Gass" (232); "Henry James . . . Angela Carter, Garcia Marquez, Marguerite Duras, Robert Stone, Jane Smiley, Robb Forman Dew, Jean Rhys, Adrienne Rich, Toni Morrison, Rene Char, Larry Woiwode, Christina Stead, Katherine Anne Porter, Willa Cather, Jim Harrison, the poets Louise Gluck, Mary Oliver, Sharon Olds and Donald Hall. I read *Madame Bovary* and Jane Austen and George Eliot over and over" (232-33); "Mark Vinz, Cynthia MacDonald, Richard Howard, Charles Newman, Edmund White, M. L. Rosenthal . . . Toni Morrison, Kay Boyle, Philip Roth, Peter Matthiessen, Anne Tyler, and Rosellen Brown" (239).

³ To give a few examples, both Chaucer and Erdrich compare the sounds a woman makes to the sounds of a bittern. In *The Beet Queen* (1986) Celestine whoops like "bitterns in the park" (170) during her childbirth contractions, while in Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale* King Midas's wife, unable to keep the secret that her husband has ass's ears, tells it to the stream the way a bittern booms in the marsh or, as Chaucer puts it, "as a bitore bombleth in the myre" (D 972). Here and elsewhere in this essay, quotations from Chaucer are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd ed. (1987). Another possible connection is that Chaucer's Prioress's "greyn" removed from

the little clergeon's tongue is what permits him to stop singing the "Alma Redemptoris" at the end of the *Prioress's Tale*. That event may have suggested to Erdrich the incident at the end of *The Antelope Wife* (1998) where Sweetheart Calico, the Antelope Wife, removes the blue beads from beneath her tongue and gives her only speech in the novel: "Let me go" (218). The difference, of course, is telling. Whereas in Chaucer removing the grain permits the boy to stop singing, in Erdrich removing the beads permits the woman to start speaking. In a more recent novel, *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse* (2001), the skeptical Agnes venerates "the relic in the altar—what was it: splinters from the true cross? a filing from St. Peter's manacles? perhaps a bit of bone, a slice of skin, a toe, an ear?" (67). These choices are reminiscent of the false relics that Chaucer's Pardoner claims to own: a pillow case he passes off as a bit of Mary's veil, a piece of the sail from St. Peter's boat, a jewel-encrusted bit of the cross, a glass jar of pig's bones that he said belonged to a saint (see A 694-700).

⁴ In *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Lulu appears again, this time flirting with Father Jude Miller, a priest much younger than she. The smitten Father Jude even gives up the priesthood to be near the woman he loves. At this point Lulu is in her early eighties. It is interesting, of course, that Alisoun's last husband had been a clerk, probably destined for the priesthood until his marriage to Alisoun.

⁵ Lulu is referred to as cat-like elsewhere. In *The Bingo Palace* (1994), for example, Lulu enters the post office "and then lingered, looking all around, warming herself like a cat at the heat register" (p. 2) and, later, we read that "maybe they are onto [Lulu] at last. Maybe they have . . . finally understood that they are playing with a cat whose claws are plump and sheathed" (p. 264). In *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, Erdrich is still thinking of Lulu as cat-like. Father Jude hears "the sound of her purring," and Lulu is said to have "lynx eyes and the face of a hungry cat" (235). Later we are told that "[p]eople thought Lulu Lamartine was heartless as a cat" (247), and she herself warns her new flame: "Even if I love you, the way I am, Father Jude, if you hurt me, I'll turn cold on you. Turn away like a cat" (253).

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Peter G. Beidler teaches medieval British literature (especially Chaucer) and Native American fiction at Lehigh University in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. In 1999 he published, in collaboration with Gay Barton, *A Reader's Guide to the Novels of Louise Erdrich* (University of Missouri Press). He has also published work on other Indian writers such as Silko, Welch, Mourning Dove, and Thomas Fall.

i hear every word

(tenequer) Ron Erwin Evans

I remember in an English Class at OU, when Dr. McAdams introduced me to Carter Revard, and I was truly astonished with the way he conveyed his identity in his work. It was so warm and unassuming, but very present. It changed my feelings toward poetry, and I actually started consuming all I could from this wonderful poet. But not as much as when I met him for the first time, and I will never forget the warmth and compassion he brought into "my" classroom. This feeling his words left me with gave me an undying notion to also write and capture my identity, as well as my family's. Following are thoughts inspired by Mr. Revard.

i remember
that big ol front room
at grandmas
we watched those scary
movies on friday nights
right after wrestlin with danny hodge nd the assassins
skandar akhbar nd haystack calhoun
watch out for flyin chairs
even grandma n grandpa enjoyed the show
in the evenin
a white n black screen castin long shadows on
the far walls that echoed
those ol comanche church songs
nd
i hear every word

nd i remember
the kitchen
at grandmas
she be askin how many honey-mookies for you ron nd
you know me i take two so all the nummies
do too
even then i played the token leader
but what i like was when grandpa abe
tried to eat his honey mookie all up

nd
everybody knew the dogs were gonna feast
on all his left overs nd
it just made grandpa miserable
to think any dog should get to eat
the rest of his honey-mookie nd
grandma as usual gets disgusted with abe cuzz
he aint gonna do it
we all know
grandpas gonna bust with one more bite
nd
i hear every word

nd i remember
the dinin room
at grandmas
half surrounded by glass all us nummies
drawin at the table with colored pencils
crayons nd
whatever we could get our hands to draw on
grandpa abe n his undershirt carryin around
a cast-iron skillet for an ashtray
cuzz its better than his cupped hand
either way it was his undoin as
grandmas yellin at him
grandpa just smiles
all he ever says is

A Little ol grandmother....

nd
i hear every word
nd i remember
that big ol bed
at grandmas
us four nummies slept together n the north bedroom
it was our room when we were there
so cold n the winter
i miss those thick homemade
sewin meetin
quilts layered on us like kraft single
cheese slices nd
grandma tellin us

to pray nd shake our heads
so those scary dreams
wont bother us when we sleep
 nd we believe her
theres newspaper laid out for the scorpions
 to read in the dark later that night
 we all felt so safe
grandmas servin oatmeal in the mornin
nd i hear every word

nd i remember
 at grandmas
we be pilin in joe n annie gomez ol 53 ford
goin to Sunday school at post oak
all of us tagged
 soldiers and nurses
brylcream still caked in our hair
liquid-polished loafers
a lite film of indiahoma dust already covered
 the pretty shine
recitin bible verses
grandma makin sure we had change for the offerin
doin crosswords tic tac toe
nudgin grandpa to wake up
 lindas on the piano
exchangin smiles with the nummie girls
all the people here are family
 grandma just nods accordingly her eyes closed
 she listens to a thy-vah preacher
sing a comanche song she smiles
at the effort
nd
i hear every word

nd i remember
 at grandmas
those wonderful mornins the reason
im there the reason im home

before father light emerged before
the crowin roosters across the road

made its way into our ears
 I hear my kaw-koo
 prayin to god
 nd
 shes prayin for everybody
 even abe
 although were not suppose to sense
 she loves him so

she prays for our earth
she prays for strength
she prays for forgiveness
she prays for us
she prays for them too

*she thanks him for another year
she thanks him for all her children
she thanks him...*

she cries she pleads she sings
 a tavetosev hymn
 a gift for god
all in comanche
nd
i hear every word

but i remember
just the other night
im at grandmas
walkin down that long long hallway again
past that hall closet with
the slidin disappearin wooden door
to grandmas room
where i stand n the doorway

mmmmmmmm
the unforgettable aroma
grandmas house
like it use to be
like it will always be
i dare not
make a sound

her arms extended
to heaven
she knows im there

her eyes never open
her voice never stops

nd kaw-koo
still today
i hear every word

Ron Erwin Evans (Comanche) writes under the family name of his father "tenequer," which loosely translated means "Singer," or as his kaw-koo (Grandma) Ethelyn would say, "Thinks he can sing." Ron is working on a Masters Degree in Native American Studies at the University of Oklahoma. A member of the Native Writers Circle of the Americas, he has self-published a chapbook *Nookin Puh Nub, part II, a collection of comanche thoughts aye* in 2000, soon to be followed by a second chapbook tentatively titled *Undying Mask*. Ron is married and has two children and resides in Norman, Oklahoma. He may be reached at DRron@aol.com.

Carter Revard in Cyberspace: An E-mail Sampler

From Bob Nelson

The following exchange took place in December 1998. It was an interesting December, and some of the events informing those weeks and alluded to in the exchange may bear recounting. On the national scene, President William Jefferson Clinton was the subject of impeachment proceedings; Carter's allusion to "Robertson" and "Robertsonians" near the end of his first 19 December post refers to right-wing televangelist Pat Robertson, like me a longtime resident of Virginia and (unlike me) preparing to launch his brief candidacy for the 2000 Republican presidential nomination. Even closer to home, it had been a record-breakingly hot month in Richmond.

It was also shortly before the annual MLA conference, where Carter and I were both scheduled to be participants in a session on Contemporary American Indian Poetry organized by Dean Rader. As part of the planning for that MLA session, Carter (who had time to spare, having retired earlier that year after delivering a reading and public lecture at my home institution, the University of Richmond [the two events were, of course, unrelated]) had requested that the three scheduled presentors—Robin Riley Fast, Helen Jaskoski, and me—get copies of our presentations to him, so that as respondent he'd have some preview of what he was supposed to respond to. The following posts are products of that request.

Readers already familiar with Carter Revard as a cyberpresence will recognize the style that characterizes his three posts—the frequent and sometimes delightfully esoteric wordplay; the interplay of the rigorous scholar with the kindly grandfather, of the medieval with the mundane, of the academic with the anecdotal; the astonishing celerity of a mind constantly at work (it may be noted that all three of these rich replies were posted within hours of the post that triggered them). What they may not be aware of is his kitten's love affair with his desk, his lap, and his laptop (which may help to explain why his computer was in the shop being "unkittened" at the time of his first post).

As usual, this exchange of posts with Carter turned out to be fruitful for me. Though I am not always (or even usually) sensitive to gently indirect criticism, I believe one product of our online conversation was a much stronger MLA paper and, beyond that, a much-improved representation of Carter's Osage materials as they inform his poem "When Earth Brings," the focal subject of an essay on

the dawn motif in the forthcoming anthology Speak to Me Words, edited by Dean Rader and Janice Gould (University of Arizona Press).

Date: Wed 9 Dec 1998

To: "Carter C. Revard" <ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu>

From: "Robert M. Nelson" <rnelson@facstaff.richmond.edu>

Subject: mla pre-draft

Hi Carter,

Got a post from Dean Rader what sez you're hoping to preview our papers prior to Showtime. Well, I got some of it onto paper over Thanksgiving break in Charlotte at Elizabeth's clan's place, in between waves of inlaws and outlaws and turkey, and will get back to it anon, but am preoccupied w/ exams to make out and grade and tenure review refereeing to read for and Elizabeth's perverse idea that some kind of holiday season is already happening (this afternoon, for instance, I and E3—Elizabeth, 2-yr-old Ellie, 22-yr-old Erin—are to go treecutting out in the boonies somewhere, and this when I still have an exam to make out before tomorrow morning, when I have to give it to 26 quivering freshmen!). Gulp. BIG gulp, as they say at the local 7-11s. But it'll be done. I have, however, drafted chunks that deal directly with "When Earth Brings" and "Celebration: Birth of a Colt," which I could send along now if you're really desperate for something to think about (actually, I could probably use the feedback—I've said some things about Osage origin story, what I've read of it in Mathews and what I've surmised from your, Dwayne's, and DeClue's work, that I ought to check with you about before go and make a ninny or a housewrecker of myself). Let me know.

Other than being way too frenetic things-to-get-done-wise, all's well here. After a week of 80 degree weather, goodbye all heat records for December hereabouts, they're calling for mid-20s tonight. Here come da flu.

All best from us all here, Bob

Date: Wed 9 Dec 1998

To: "Robert M. Nelson" <rnelson@facstaff.richmond.edu>

From: "Carter C. Revard" <ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu>

Subject: MLA

Hello Bob,

Good to hear, hope the trees cooperate and the ex-trees accept turning black and white and read all over. I know how the paper-writing goes and have very often been finishing MLA papers between end of semester and beginning of MLA session. So do as time allows and if need be I can look over the paper as you are reading it. If you want to send ahead the sections on Duane Big Eagle and Charlotte DeClue and my work you can zap it along. As of today my laptop is running a fever with certain keys sticking together and it will take some fancy end-runs involving the older Powerbook that I gave our youngest son as temporary replacement while the keys are being unkittened at the friendly local chopshop, but if lucky I will find the old Powerbook works both for my e-mail and for the frantic work on medieval matters that I am trying to finish for a collection of essays, already overdue, now being revised.

In short, retirement seems about same as previous incarnation except no final papers and exams, no committees, no conferences with students, no local academic hassles. As you may have read if you are following the NatLit and NatFilm lists I was in White Eagle over Thanksgiving, and got to visit folks there. I also, last September, went to visit John Joseph Mathews's stepson John Hunt in Provence, where he and his French wife Chantal have retired to a very neatly rehabbed three-floors apartment nestled back among medieval alleys and streets of the town of Uzes (pronounced roughly Oozezz). We hope to collaborate on some work about Mathews, a great many of whose letters and papers Hunt inherited. And while in Oxford we had a flat downstairs from a retired Merton College (and All Souls) don, Rodney Needham, anthropologist, who turned out to have edited a collection called RIGHT HAND, LEFT HAND, in which the first essay is Francis LaFlesche's on the OSAGE SYMBOLIC MAN. The collection was published by U of Chicago c. 1975, reprinting LaFlesche's essay from c. 1915. It is a highly useful brief essay with a lot of the material about the ceremonies condensed, with diagram of the Ho-E-Ga (see my "Wazhazhe Grandmother" epigraph from LaFlesche's Dictionary for that word and its importance, and you might pursue that when you get time). Have you seen Garrick Bailey's 1995/6 book from U of Oklahoma Press, THE OSAGE AND THE SPIRIT WORLD, in which the ceremonies are again distilled and presented at greater length than any other account outside LaFlesche's monographs? Alice Callahan has a book on the contemporary dances, THE I'N LO'NSHKAH, but I don't know that the Osages approve really of that. (Of course Osages never approve of anything except a rise in the price of a barrel of oil, which sure ain't happenin!)

There is an NEH application which I hope will succeed (I wrote an evaluation in September/October) to make a Dictionary of Osage and a Grammar. I hope it will succeed, but it is two or three years at least from print.

And no need to burden you with more verbiage just now. Sure glad to hear the family are going well. EEE makes for a wide footstep so I hope the 3E's and all of you continue fancy dancing.

Best wishes, Carter Revard

Date: Sat, Dec 19 1998

To: "Carter C. Revard" <ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu>

From: "Robert M. Nelson" <rnelson@facstaff.richmond.edu>

Subject: mla pre-draft

Hi Carter,

Finally, there's a moment or two to breathe easy—exams all graded and grades all in the hands of the Registrar, xmas cookies frosted, solstice all prepared for. Things are looking up. Here's a pre-draft of the MLA paper—including draft of the intro, Hogan, and Revard sections. A good page or two on ensuring survival and ditto on the motion of blue horses and it oughta come to a little under 15 minutes.

I hope I didn't make it sound (in my last post) like I was going to present on DeClue and Duane as well—I only meant that my analytical understanding of Wazhazhe origin imagery is a rude synthesis of what I've read in their work along with what I've read in Matthews and yours (quadrangulating should, in theory, yield even more accurate "place"ment than triangulation neh). I haven't yet managed to get time and memory diangulating to remind me to reread "Hoega," but now I've actually written it down on my weekend list of "things to get done by Tuesday" and so may actually get it done. Tonight I'm babysitting from 7 til midnight for another family in our babysitting co-op; I've appropriated the Dept laptop for the Duration and hope to get Luci's section drafted this evening. That is, unless those kids decide to stay up all night and/or I can't put Hillerman's latest (*The First Eagle*) down once it's opened.

Hope all's well out your way. All best from us all here, Bob

“Dawn/Is a Good Word” —Naming an Emergent Motif of Contemporary Native American Poetry

25 years ago in 1973, about the time Kenneth Lincoln was heralding the appearance of a “Native American Renaissance” in prose and poetry, a child named Rainy Dawn was born to Joy Harjo and Simon Ortiz, who were already two of the more powerful voices in Native American poetry. Almost 20 years later, in 1992, the nearly 400 participants at the “Returning the Gift” festival in Norman, Oklahoma celebrated 500 years of endurance and survival of Native American cultures and literary traditions; in this year also, Rainy Dawn became a mother herself, thus in a sense promoting her parents Simon and Joy to the family rank of elder, a rank both had long since achieved in the field of poetry. In that year also, another elder of Native American poetry, our honored respondent Carter Revard, celebrated the birth of Rainy Dawn’s daughter Krista Rae in “When Earth Brings,” which first appeared in the *Returning the Gift* anthology and later as the final poem of his 1993 collection *An Eagle Nation*. And while “When Earth Brings” is a significant text in its own right, I think it is good to take this context into account when reading it, for two reasons. One reason is that the poem’s subtitle invites us to when it names, among others, Joy, Simon, Rainy Dawn, and Krista Rae. Another reason is that Revard has crafted the poem’s controlling motif and core term, dawn, to function as what I want to call a merge site. As Revard uses it, the word “dawn” becomes a place where, and a time when, Mvskogee and Acoma, and Revard’s own Osage origin traditions not only intersect but also merge in the image of a grandchild who is Dawn’s offspring, the next living generation of The People.

I want to show how Revard’s own use of the term “dawn” may represent and reflect the emergence and establishment of a new, pan-Indian origin motif, a Dawn motif that combines elements of several otherwise disparate origin stories. I’m proposing that this motif, itself conceivable as a child of the Native American renaissance, figures strongly in the birth-celebration poetry of some other major contemporary Native American poets as well—writers whose own traditional backgrounds are otherwise about as diverse as they could possibly be. To this end, I will demonstrate that Revard’s text, while overtly paying homage to his own Osage emergence tradition, finds ways as well to allude to and respect the very disparate emergence traditions of both of Rainy Dawn’s parents, Joy Harjo (Mvskogee) and Simon Ortiz (Acoma), as well as other important contemporary NA voices such as Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) and Luci Tapahonso

(Navajo). The major intersection site for all these poets and the traditions they are committed to preserving and renewing, I suggest, is the event and image of Dawn.

[Here I have deleted several paragraphs that deal with Linda Hogan's "Celebration."]

Formally, "When Earth Brings" is composed of two sentences of 16 lines each. In the first sentence the stars, who are also ancestors to the Osage, speak to the Little Ones, the people, whom they address as "grandchildren," reminding us humans that the sun their brother watches over us on behalf of the other stars until such time as earth brings the night again and the ancestors again become visible. In the second sentence, the grandparental voice goes on to remind us that we come from the stars, and that "children/come into a world again and again," and that again and again the grandparents speak through the "rainy light" at dawn. Dawn, they give us to know, is one of those special times when "the earth meets heaven," a time when each child, who is also a grandchild, can see what the grandparents have prepared for them to see in "a small pool," where rain and daylight combine on earth to form a natural mirror. What is given for her, and us, to see is a vision of a child in the company of the stars who, for now, are "go[ing] quietly into the blue air" at sunrise; it is a moment in which she is given to see herself as she truly is, as the living bridge between "the earth and heaven in which I live/and move and have my being," this day as every day.

As does Hogan's "Celebration," Revard's "When Earth Brings" ends by relating sunrise to vision. In Hogan's and Ortiz's poems, at sunrise the land is revealed to us as the source of life, as the land is the source also in Tapahonso's; in Revard's poem, the stars, among whom are numbered the earth's sun and moon, are the beings whose light becomes life, human and otherwise, when combined with water and the stuff of earth; earth, by Osage reckoning, is the vehicle, not the source, of our being as humans. But whether the source of life is starstuff or earth, in all these poems the best time for illuminating core human identity is sunrise, dawn.

Date: 19 Dec 1998

To: "Robert M. Nelson" <rmelson@facstaff.richmond.edu>

From: "Carter C. Revard" <ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu>

Subject: mla pre-draft

Hello Bob,

Many thanks for sending along the paper, which looks very like it will be echt origami. I had possibilities of eclectic phrasing in there as I recall, the passage from the Epistle of James in chapter 2 or 3 about Every good gift and every perfect gift cometh down from above, from the father of lights, in whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning—something like that, I don't have a text of the King James Bible handy in whose language I remember that verse. And then also the other verse, I think from Paul but I can't at the moment recall just where, used to know these verses by heart and just where they were: this is the one about "in whom we live and move and have our being." I used it in this "When Earth Brings" allusively, and also in "Walking on Skye," where the same two passages are implicit, with the narrative additionally being of the climbing up to have a look, and drinking from the pool that has just been rained down but (in the peaty bogs of the watershed) is of the earth, earthy already. That of course is a birthday poem so I suppose we could think of the naming ceremony for the child, the emergence story or coming to earth from the stars, and the going up to Helicon as converging or being brought together in both the Walking on Skye and the When Earth Brings pieces.

It is pleasant to have a good reader looking carefully and intelligently at the poems. I much appreciate your taking the time and using the energy to talk about them. You will get us both in trouble by making them seem complicated and deep but what the hell, or as mehitabel or archie said wotthell, we cucarachas can't complain, or are we kafkarachas? anyhow throwing ourselves at the keys gives us headache enough. At the moment the pain of composing is yours, and I hope it is going well. Haven't read the Hillerman—myself, trying to figure out whether the scribe of Harley 2253 copied the second part of FOUKE LE FITZ WARYN as late as 1342, based on comparison with his deeds dated 1337, 1338, 1340, 1341, 1342, 1343. Or for that matter deeds from 1331, 1333, 1335. And my recreational diversion is not mystery novel but mystery TV, specifically wotthell Congress and the President will be doing ten minutes from now. It never fails, the Sanctimonious beget the Hustlers, and the Lauds (Archbishops that is) beget the Cromwells, more succinctly the butterflies beget the hurricanes. Amazing how very like the image of Clinton projected by Pat Robertson are all the Robertsonians.

Time to get downstairs and see what these grandchildren are up to. I think I smell pork chops.

All best wishes, Carter Revard

Date: 19 Dec 1998

To: "Robert M. Nelson" <rmelson@facstaff.richmond.edu>

From: "Carter C. Revard" <ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu>

Subject: mla pre-draft

And come to think of it I may not have said in February when we were only talking about Monica and Bill, not Henry, Bob, Dan, Helen, and nearly all the others, that I did place "When Earth Brings" as the bookend final poem, and as the other bookend poem at the beginning of EAGLE NATION, the prose piece "In Oklahoma," about the pond, and my Osage stepfather fishing there, and the way that is a place with a THERE there (despite the urbanities of the EuroAmerican writers like Stein, James, and all). I meant the faithful reader to notice that there were fish being caught and cleaned in that pond, and some were offered to the reader. If I were writing it again I might mention frybread too, not loaves exactly. But I figure the watermelon and blackberry poems take care of that. When I was making up the table of contents for the two books, COWBOYS AND INDIANS for Point Riders Press and AN EAGLE NATION for Arizona, I put another poem about that pond first in C&I, "To The Muse, in Oklahoma," and I thought the prose piece "In Oklahoma" would be clear enough as a way of giving thanks for and addressing the Muse and my readers, and my Osage stepfather. In C&I the book-end to "To the Muse in Oklahoma" is the poem called "Given," which is set in the St. Louis suburb where I live, and it celebrates the songs of all the creatures here, and refers both to the dawning and to the night of stars. I think you could find that the two books in their opening and closing share a number of points d'appui. (If I ever get the New and Selected collection published it may have a somewhat different set of bookends, and WINNING THE DUST BOWL will begin with the Coyote and end with Looking Before and After perhaps. I finally set, as the WDB last-poem bookend, "A Song that We Still Sing," which I thought made a good ending to a book beginning with the sonnet "Coyote Tells Why He Sings." PONCA WAR DANCERS opens with the coyote telling why he sings, and ends with us dancing with the dinosaurs that have become birds "who, learning song and flight, became beings for whom the infinite sky and trackless ocean are a path to spring"; those are the creatures singing in "Given." And you can see that in the Coyote opener it begins with him born near the stream, and the sound of the storm's and the stream's water is what makes the world so musical he *has* to sing. I was not planning, when I wrote the Coyote piece, any of the Muse and Pond and Dawn pieces. I don't expect a star intended hydrogen and oxygen

ash to be water, or figured that ninety million miles away the dewdrops would do the right thing with its photons, and let retinal pigments and neural nets delight in this. There are more surprises than the commentators on Bill Clinton imagine.

So back to paleography. Hope the Hillerman plot held up, and hope the Republican plot does not.

All best, Carter

Robert M. Nelson is a former SAIL co-editor and current custodian of the ASAIL website. A professor of English at the University of Richmond, he teaches a variety of courses in Native American prose and poetry and is currently at work on a book dealing with the embedded texts in *Ceremony*.

From Patrice Hollrah

This e-mail from Carter to the NativeLit list covers a number of topics that illustrate why Carter is such a great source of information.

Date: Wed, 3 Jul 2002

From: Carter Revard <ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu>

To: NATIVELIT-L@raven.cc.ku.edu

Subject: Re: Adrian Louis, Osage dances, Summer Reading!

Philip and all—I just got back to St. Louis from time in Pawhuska—attended the Osage Dances there, visited relatives and friends. Robert Warrior went into the arbor at the Grayhorse Dances and came up to Pawhuska and danced at the Inlonshka there, alongside Michael and Meredith, grandchildren of Aunt Arita Jump. A number of our immediate family (children of Aunt Arita's brother Addison Jump Sr.) and I danced for Uncle Kenneth Jump when they sang his song on the Sunday. My brother, Big Jim, and my sister Josephine, were there, and Jim's son Jerry who works as guard at the Corrections Facility near Hominy, and Josephine's daughter Anita and Anita's oldest son Ben, who is in the Special Forces as Paramedic and just got back from several months in Afghanistan. He said he was around Kandahar and Bagram, which though he did not remark the fact are hot spots, and

when I asked him whether he had to get out and do his thing (medical rescues) he said yes, they had to helicopter some people out. So I was thinking: Uncle Kenneth was in the Southwest Pacific in WW2. My brother Jim drove a tank in Korea, where my brother Antwine Pryor was in combat as infantryman. My Ponca cousin Craig was in Vietnam. My brother Jim's son James was in Desert Storm. His son Paul did a six months tour in Bosnia (stationed near Srbenica I think). Now Ben is doing his time. He had to drive back to Ft. Benning Ga. and could not stay for the Monday July 1st inauguration ceremonies of the newly elected Chief and Tribal Council. Says he will probably have another three months over there before finishing his three years. He was given his name not long before going into the military, and maybe when he gets out he will be able to go into the arbor. We will see. He is like all my sister Josephine's seven kids and their children, tall (6'3") and husky—sure has buffed up, looks to go about 220 and slim waist, broad shoulders. He had an exceptionally hard first few years and it is great to see him fit, happy and cheerful, but I am mostly glad his role is para-rescue and medical.

Also got to see two of my Ponca cousins albeit briefly—Casey Camp-Horinek & her husband Mike, and brother Dwain (Bucky), got to the Wakon Iron Hall just as the inauguration ceremonies were getting ready to start on the Monday, and they brought the most beautiful ribbon shirt I have ever seen that Casey and her daughter Julie and Mike had just made, and gave it to me, and I could wear it during the Inauguration. The new Chief, Jim Roan Gray, had asked me to read a poem during the prayers and speeches, so I read "What The Eagle Fan Says," and you talk about people understanding and appreciating something, I could feel that, and there were Aunt Jewell's children out there with me too. I had brought the bolo Uncle Kenneth wore (Hopi inlaid silver, Thunderbird) when he danced, which his sister Aunt Arita had given me in 1981 after he passed away, and I had that on over the ribbon shirt, and I carried the eaglefan, and it was overwhelming, hard to go ahead and do the reading, because that is the place where Grandma Josephine Jump and the elders gave me the name to carry, back in September 1952, and where many events and memories live for me.

Uncle Kenneth was for a time Commander of the American Legion Post (Osage veterans mostly) that meets in Wakon Iron Hall, and the current Commander and officers were there. This election has been, we think, a watershed, and there was a great sense of enthusiasm and hope. When I shook hands, after reading the poem and before leaving the platform, with the new Council, I thought they looked ready to go, and

I might add that two of them are Revards—Jody Revard Satepauhoodle (she’s married to a Kiowa) and Camille Pangburn. But there are Lookouts, and lots of other good new Council members.—I also got to see Vonnie Lookout, who was married to my brother Addison Jr. for a while, and who was a special favorite of my mother, and I sat with her on the Drumkeepers bench behind the microphone for one afternoon—her brother Mongraine Lookout is head of the Dance Committee this year. So I gave her and him copies of *Winning the Dust Bowl* and *An Eagle Nation* and *Family Matters*, *Tribal Affairs*—because there are photos of my mother and our Osage folks in *WDB*, and in *FM,TA* the essay “Going to College” was originally written for Vonnie and Mongraine when they were editing and publishing a subversive little journal called *INSIDE OSAGE* and asked me if I would write something to encourage Osage kids to stay in school and go on to college.

The next day, Vonnie introduced me to her husband (his name is Eaves, but my hearing aid did not catch his first name), and he was sitting there reading *An Eagle Nation*, and asked who was my brother with the tire iron ready to clobber the tough guy about to beat me up, in the first poem of that book called “Not Just Yet.” So I told him that was my brother Jim, when we were out at Sunset Lake about 1952—I had driven out there with Aunt Jewell, and her children Darlena and Bucky, and Jim, who were all then teenagers and I was just about 21, and Aunt Jewell was only about 38. We went into the little beerjoint and fishbait place to get some Cokes, and the jukebox was on and there were some sad beery people dancing kind of lecherously in there, and the toughest of them was built like Tony Galento or Paul Anderson (the guy from Toccoa Georgia who won Olympic gold as weightlifter). He came over and started hitting first on Darlena (then about 17 and VERY pretty), and then shifted over to Aunt Jewell—his breath smelled more like rotgut whisky than 3.2 Oklahoma beer.

We had to keep telling him Darlena did not want to dance with him, then that Aunt Jewell did not either, and we kind of quietly retreated outside, but he followed us, and went to threatening me because I was the oldest male. Jim and Bucky, and Darlena and Aunt Jewell, went on over to our car (beatup white Mercury, not that old though I seem to recall), but this guy laid his big left hand on my right shoulder like I had insulted him by saying as politely as possible, “She don’t want to dance with you.” And he said, “Think you can whip me do you?” with his right hand ready. I actually said more than the poem includes—the first thing being, even more politely, “No, I sure don’t think I could whip you.” But he kind of tightened his grip, which is

when I said, truthfully, “My brother has a tire iron, over there,” and he let go, turned and saw Jim (age 16) and Bucky (age 15), one with the tire iron, the other with a neat little hickory limb as I recall. But at that point Tough Guy called up reinforcements—from his car parked a few feet away, and his older friend “Grady” (I think that was the name he said, and in those days I could have heard it) got out of the car, taking a snubnosed pistol out of the glove compartment. But at just that moment, car lights swung round the gravel road to the beer joint, and Grady kind of quickly put the pistol back into the car. Turned out the lights were of either a State Patrolman or maybe an MP from the Radar Station ten miles east, with a pistol on his hip I think but maybe it is a gratefully imagined pistol. So the rest of the event you can read about in the poem. After all, the title is “Not Just Yet.”

This past Monday July 1st, Kathryn Redcorn (who is head of the Osage Tribal Museum) had put on a morning reception at the Museum, where I got to see again Frances Labadie, born in 1906 just under the deadline for being enrolled for a headright, and now one of the oldest living Original Allottees—at 96, she was lively as a cricket and we had fun talking about the 1999 whingding in Montauban France where I met her for the first time just before the local Harley Davidson Biker Club took some of us roaring and warwhooping through the medieval streets of Montauban (which is where the stranded Osages were rescued in 1830 by Bishop DuBourg, who had ministered to them when, as Monsignor, he started the St. Louis See about 1817). The Labadie allotment and ranch are upstream on Buck Creek and Rock Creek, west of the Buck Creek Valley where I grew up, and the great tornado of 1942 that killed fourteen people in Pawhuska went on and left a lawnmower track through the blackjacks of the Osage Hills, staying on the ground all the way up into Kansas for maybe two hundred miles—it was at least an F4. That tornado had passed through the Labadie Ranch and gone just northwest of our house, and I had seen it coming from the southwest twelve miles or so away. So when in Montauban I asked Frances Labadie if SHE saw it that May 3, 1942, she said, “See it?! I was IN it!” At the Tribal Museum, she was lively as TWO crickets.

Incidentally, Craig Womack was there on Saturday at the Redcorns’ house for dinner and I got to talk a little with him—it is a great thing that U of Oklahoma has hired him to teach AmIndLit along with Robert Warrior. Wherever those guys are, it will be a major center for AmIndLit, history, culture. I hope ex-Senator David Boren, now head of OU, will find a way to put them into Chairs.

I also got to meet for the first time Louis Ballard, who as a lot of you know is one of the finest composers going—he is Quapaw/Cherokee, one of the last few speakers of Quapaw along with my first cousin Ardina Revard Moore of Miami OK. (She teaches Quapaw to the younger people, and also runs a very fine crafts and clothing place. I got to sit with her at the Inlonshka for a good while on the Friday afternoon.) Louis was invited, as I was, to come and eat with the Redcorns at Kathryn's house down in Indian Camp, a couple of hundred yards from the dance arbor, and Charley Redcorn introduced me to him. Turns out he went to U of Tulsa just after I left there, and ran round with George Eugene Standingbear who was there when I was—his sons Sean and Geoff Standingbear are now respectively artist/sculptor and lawyer in Pawhuska. Louis has taught in Santa Fe at the IOIA for many years and his music is performed all round the world. I can hear Stravinsky in some of the pieces, but Louis is strong enough to ride that tiger and not get swallowed. He is great fun, stories from all over (says his favorite places musically are Vienna/Salzburg and Germany generally, likes Wagner (so my wife, a Wagnerinne, will be happy to hear), and we had both been to Bonn and seen the “piano” Beethoven used as a child there. When I saw it, in June 1954, the pedals did not work, but I forgot to ask Louis whether they had been restored. He says they have built a big music hall very near the Beethoven birthplace and some years back they put on a concert of Louis's works there.

After that Saturday night's dances, I had been invited along for a hooty-owl late session with Louis and Ruth Burns. Louis is the premiere historian and ceremony-student of the Osage people, now in his eighties—he and Ruth have lived for many years out near San Diego. She grew up on Buck Creek, between Frances Labadie's place and our Horseless Ranch, and is wonderfully funny and sharp. Louis even in his eighties is a great big Osage man, and she is a petite woman who still seems blonde, so they make a great match. Louis gave me a copy of his *History of the Osages*, which I have not yet had the chance to read through (it is 800 some pages) but from the parts I have read my opinion is this should be, along with John Joseph Mathews's great book, *THE* volume to use in discussing Osage history and culture.

And this long note had better close for now, so I can get to the dentist (which, along with some grandparenting, is why I had to get back here instead of staying in OK for the Fourth). But I will close with

SUMMER READING!! that is, let me mention again that Charles Redcorn's novel *A PIPE FOR FEBRUARY* is now

out from U of Oklahoma Press and I hope you will all be able to get it and read, because it would be in my opinion one of the first novels to use for any class where readers want books presenting Indian people as they lived, and as they found ways to survive.

This note does not tell of getting out to Lake Bluestem, where a pileated woodpecker came to inspect my Missouri driver's license. I referred him to the scissortails for full DE-tails.

Patrice E. M. Hollrah, PhD, is the Director of the Writing Center at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, where she also teaches literature for the Department of English. She has publications and books reviews in the field of Native American literature.

From Pat Onion

Everywhere I looked in my saved emails I saw over and over Carter's characteristic brew of precision and passion, scholarly thoroughness and outrage at injustice. Here's one on an FBI pamphlet I posted to NativeLit, received from Carter Revard on 2/26/01 at 9:07 PM, titled, "Re: FBI pamphlet":

What the thing claims is that they have investigated her [Anna Mae Pictou Aquash] death. What it reports is that media have claimed her death is "linked"—LINKED!!!—what a word!—to the killing, about a year earlier, of the two FBI agents. Then the report says that RUMORS, though untrue, suggested that Anna Mae knew about the murder of the two FBI agents, and that she was an informant for the FBI. In other words, this report is intended to make its readers believe that Anna Mae was killed by people who thought she knew too much about the killing of the FBI agents and that she would squeal on the killers to the FBI. This, in short, is a way of hinting that AIM people who were covering up for the killers, one of whom this report implies was Peltier, killed Anna Mae. This is a theory that has been floated a good deal. And yet this report ends by saying that the murder of Anna Mae "has not been solved." It is one of the most revoltingly scumbaggy smears and slimes imaginable. The pamphlet begins by claiming that it is wrong to say the FBI have not investigated the

killings on Pine Ridge; for instance, the killing of Anna Mae Aquash. But looked at carefully, the report itself says only MEDIA HAVE LINKED her case to the killings of the two FBI agents, and then insinuates that she was killed because people thought she knew too much about those killings and Peltier was convicted for them so (unstated, but clearly implied) she was killed by Peltier defenders to keep her quiet. Yet no evidence is offered at all, the whole thing is a tissue of insinuations and vague attributions, and ends by saying the case has not been solved.

wonderful, wonderful, marvelous.

Here's another. This email showcases Carter Revard's rapid-fire erudition, as he moves through folk wisdom to arcane medieval references. He begins answering a query about what Europeans were eating around the time of America's first "Thanksgiving," then moves through Chaucer's "General Prologue," 14th century poaching litigation, D.H. Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover, a wool merchant of the Middle Ages, rabbit-hunting medieval monks, the manuscript of the Cuckoo song, and Ezra Pound's parody of that song. Whew! This was sent on 10/5/99 at 9:34 AM with the subject "Re: Comfort Foods."

As for non-veggies, yes, they did have venison and also lots of birds—domesticated geese (hens came along in later medieval period but were common in England in 13th and 14th centuries—jungle fowl from India, domesticated and spread through Near East); swans were eaten roasted, a special big feast-bird before turkeys came from Aztecs and Pueblos). Chaucer's Monk (General Prologue) loved a fat swan best of any roast. Pigs, sheep, cattle as I mentioned. Yes, venison was off limits for most non-aristocrats, by 14th century most of England's forests were royal and only to be hunted by royalty or the aristocrats they allowed in; or they were in private baronial hands like the Earls of Hereford and Earls of Gloucester, or the bishops: there is a famous case of litigation and worse involving a Bishop of Hereford and an Earl of Hereford. But there was a lot of poaching, and I suspect only a few cases of poachers caught by the foresters whom royal and baronial lords hired to catch them. You may recall that in Lady Chatterley's Lover the Lover, Mellors, is a gamekeeper on Lady Chatterley's estate, which is one reason the book was so scandalous—not only did she do it, she did it with one of THEM. There was also a heck of a lot of fishing; some of the fish-traps along rivers (especially at the lowwater dams called weirs) were reserved for the lords who held that area in their fee or seignury. Lots of salmon recorded in the accounts, and all

kinds of river and ocean fish, as well as the occasional beached or taken whale—whales were the property of the king if taken, and I have seen in the royal account book Cotton Nero A. viii mentions of whale meat brought to the royal table. Rabbits were brought to England in the early Middle Ages, and the right to hunt rabbits was also reserved to those people who had royal license for a warren on their fees—usually these were granted to barons, but a great wool merchant Laurence de Ludlow managed, when he acquired and crenellated (fortified, with crenellations, and walled) the manor house now called Stokesay Castle in Shropshire—Laurence managed to get royal license for a warren. Monks were famous for loving to take their greyhounds out after rabbits—again, see Chaucer’s Monk; but historical records show this was the case: for instance, when a medieval Bishop of Hereford held a “visitation” to check up on the monks at Leominster Priory and at Wigmore Abbey, he found greyhounds were being kept in the big abbey church, and the monks were doing more hunting than praying. (Or should I say more preying than praying?) One of them, about 1280, had to get his carcass back to Reading Abbey because the Bishop—later made a saint, of course—found that the monk had been teaching a bit more than the bass clef to the women of the area; the monk became the Reading Abbey accountant and a musician of some note, so we may consider that he enjoyed wine, women AND song—he is one of the people who handled the famous manuscript of the Cuckoo Song, a four-part round that being Sumer is icumen in, Loude sing, cuckoo! (a parody of which was written by Ezra Pound and is probably the only poem of his that will be read a century from now—it begins WINTER IS ICUMEN IN, LOUD SING GODDAM! SKIDDETH BUS AND SLOPPETH US, AND HOW THE WIND DOTH RAM!

SING GODDAM, GODDAM, LOUD SING GODDAM . . . and so forth).

Pat Onion is Professor English at Colby College in Waterville, Maine, where she teaches (among other things) American Indian literature. She is currently working on a study of the structured balance between good and bad tricksters in Penobscot storytelling.

From Lauren Stuart Muller

On reading and writing poetry and song:

Date: Wed, February 02, 2000 7:27 AM
From: Carter C. Revard <ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu>
To: nativelit-l@raven.cc.ukans.edu
Subject: against power-tripping theory

Here is one perspective. A poet/novelist/storyteller offers certain kinds of implicit theory, you could call them lodgepoles for the dwelling of words into which readers are invited, and as they arrive they help construct the lodge, participate in the storytelling, and if all goes well leave well nourished and on good terms with the person or persons in the lodge. A theoretician offers a story with the lodgepoles outside, sort of like a geodesic dome, but it is called a cathedral and people have to come in and genuflect, let other people do the sacred things, nibble wafers that are said to have so many vitamins they are Godlike, drink some wine that is deconstructed grapejuice, and then contribute a huge fee to help the architect construct the next cathedral. I want these analogies to show plainly my sense that the artist/writer is relatively willing to leave readers to come, stay, take what they can or will, and go freely on—and, in contrast, to show my sense that theoreticians are basically dictators in attitude and in procedures. Critics and theoreticians try to show that all the others are wrong, try to prove that everything is as they say, and aim at intellectual imperialism. Poets, novelists, storytellers may end up showing their own imperial ambitions when they write essays or books of critical theory or practice. And they work within traditions which are as powerful as any imperial structure of ideas a critic may try to impose on all readers. So the dragon does swallow its tail, what goes around from the writer may come around in the critic. But by and large writers are too damned sensible to believe theoreticians know how the writers do what they do, or why, or how other writers and storytellers must now work to conform with the theory as set out. And however much a novelist may be on a power trip—like Joyce, or Beckett, or Lawrence as now-distant examples—they seem to me less the tinstar jailkeepers that critics and theoreticians try to be.

Date: Wed, 1 Mar 2000 19:42:58

From: "Carter C. Revard" <ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu>

To: NATIVELIT-L@raven.cc.ukans.edu

Subject: From the Trenches, and the crow's nest

About the need to understand so much that is involved in a very brief "Indian song"—two brief comments. First is that any song to be rightly understood ought to come with its whole culture around it, although it is easy not to think about this when we are supposed to understand Blues (and don't unless we are Leadbelly or Billie Holliday?), and Psalms (and don't unless we are rabbinically trained or are people at King David's court?), and "Amazing Grace" (hey, what is this thing called Grace, and why did Nygren spend three volumes explaining Agape, and all that, and why did people burn each other over the meaning of it?), and "singin' in the rain," (which needs to be connected to Technicolor and the biography of Gene Kelly and....) and "Somewhere Over The Rainbow," (which requires a bio of Judy Garland, another of L. Frank Baum, a history of Hollywood and the reason the movie shifts from black and white Kansas to Technicolor Oz, and how to plagiarize Chopin if you are a Hollywood songwriter in desperate need of a singable tune and have to watch out for ASCAP copyrights but not some dead European classic...).

Well, that was the first point, I think. As for the Second Point, how people teach "Indian Songs" is a great study in itself. If you look back at the anthologies and the rewritings and the presentations. . . it is astonishing how every generation's critical theory changes the meaning of every Indian Song so that the songs illustrate perfectly how perfect the theory is for explaining them. Just look at the anthologies, and then at the commentators and critics. If you are lucky, you will find somebody who has just written an intelligent critical discussion using currently hot theory, and the songs will make perfect sense and all your students will agree unless they are Indians and actually know the song being explained and still sing it. Then there may be some little debate, but probably not. The Indian students would know you have to be there before a there becomes a here. But then sometimes the Poncas and the Lakotas do swap songs. And if you got the right drum, maybe you can hear an old song with a whole lot of new meanings. And maybe it will help with the snagging too.

Date: Tue, 13 Jun 2000 16:20:13
From: ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu(Carter Revard)
To: NATIVELIT-L@raven.cc.ukans.edu
Subject: Vizenor

[This one responds to a query about whether figurative language can “really” be understood by the reader of a poem. I have omitted most of the discussion of Vizenor. Ed.]

You’re damned right I think I can communicate clearly and simply in figurative language. To do this, there must be both a writer and a reader, however. I do not believe every reader “gets” just exactly “the” meaning of any piece of writing. Instead, every reader puts what is written together with the reader’s angle and range of vision, and “sees” from and within those. If I set a pinoak and a sugar maple in their fall colors outside a wide picture window, and inside it there are sitting two people, one of which sees the pinoak but not the maple, and vice versa, each viewer will report a tree with beautiful leaves and colors—and if they want they can fall to quarreling over whether it be a pinoak or a maple. (This once happened to me when I was teaching at Amherst College, when the old departmental bull tried to correct me for saying that the tree I was looking at was a maple in splendid fall colors—“Why, that’s one of the finest pinoaks on the campus!” he said, and he seemed to get even madder when I said, come and look from where I am viewing it, and discovered that I did know a pinoak from a maple. It was one more instance, as it must have seemed to him, of my not appreciating Revelation as mediated solely through him.)

So if I am communicating clearly and simply by figurative language—as I think I have just done with the pinoak/maple viewing story—I have to have a reader willing to take virtual views from both figurative positions, or willing to believe a report from either viewing place is accurate. The reader has to be willing to believe a writer is being honest and not trying to fool the reader or is unable to see and report accurately. This is true whether the view described is visual, virtual, or fictional.

I have a good many different poems, and the place each comes from is its own, though it is likely that as with almost every human there will be carryovers from one to another, so that my pinoak has certain features in common with my maple. If I am viewing things from childhood in Oklahoma, that view will have features in common with one I describe from a villa in Bellagio. I am by no means persuaded that [the querier] is incapable of understanding both the

differences and the likenesses in these scenes, and I am convinced that he is a good enough reader—if he is willing—to put these together and say “Ah, one of the common features is X, so Revard in some fashion is definitely X-y all right.”

One of the stories Sherman Alexie tells is that when he was showing *SMOKE SIGNALS* to a group of grade-school kids, and the sound track went out, the kids never missed a beat, but repeated the dialogue. They had heard, they had understood, they REMEMBERED it, because it was FOR THEM. I have no story as good as that, but stand back while I brag a little. I had an e-mail last week from Milwaukee, from someone I had never met, and he was sending me the post to ask where he could get a copy of my poem “Driving in Oklahoma.” He said he was sorry to bother me, but he had just come back from driving across the plains for the first time in a while, and as he drove he had been saying the poem to himself, and he had lost a few of the lines—so he hoped I could tell where to get a copy. I did not consider this request a bother, and I did not stop to wonder whether he truly understood the poem or me. I sent him a post saying that he could find a copy in the 1980 collection *PONCA WAR DANCERS*, or possibly (I can’t remember) in the 1975 anthology *VOICES OF THE RAINBOW*, and if he could not locate one of those in a library (he mentioned having done a degree at U of Wisconsin Milwaukee in, I think, the 1980’s), I would e-mail a copy to him, not being able to send him a copy of the book because I have only the one left, having given away most of them in California and Oklahoma last month, and having heard that there are none available now. So he went to the U Wisconsin Milw library and found that they had PWD locked away in Special Collections, but after he went up and (he said in his next post) signed his life away they got it out and let him make a photocopy.

But very soon after that, he sent a post asking whether the photocopied text was correct in one line—the one about the meadowlark’s five notes piercing the WINDSHIELD. As he remembered the poem over the years, he said, the word should be WINDROAR. This took me aback. It showed that he DID have the thing by heart, and that must have read it in some anthology printed before 1980, or separately from PWD. I sent him a note saying I had a vague memory of changing Windroar to Windshield because I thought that captured better the simultaneous Hearing/Seeing as the bird crossed in front of me. I told Stella about it and she said she liked WINDROAR better. Now I am in a dilemma: so do I, and I wonder which damned anthology may have that version of it.

But the point for this present discussion is that somebody read a poem, found it enough to his liking that he got it by heart and would say it over while himself driving across the Great Plains with meadowlarks around the car and crossing the road. That suggests to me a certain clarity of communication was taking place. (He said it was South Dakota, not Oklahoma, and that he was studying the way bird species were going down in numbers or presence, and the factors involved.) It is not the first time strangers have told me they like that poem: I have heard from high school students in Texas, California, Kentucky and elsewhere about that, and “Discovery of the New World,” and some other pieces that have got reprinted in various anthologies. In summer 1982 I was walking along a street in Oxford when somebody called out my name, and it turned out to be a former student in a Chaucer class of about 1963 at Washington University, St. Louis, whom I had lost track of. He said, “Hey, I have just finished a couple years of teaching English in Turkey, in Tarsus, and we were just reading a few weeks ago one of your poems.” It was “Driving in Oklahoma,” so it may have been the same anthology that the Milwaukee man read it in. I have no idea what the Turks in Tarsus made of the poem, and they may for all I know have done better if it were some of Vizenor’s early haiku. (By the way, Lee Gurga, whom I met in Long Beach, who is past president of the Haiku Society of America and has won some the top prizes for that, tells me that Vizenor is or recently was in Japan where they much appreciate his haiku. Gurga had come to the Long Beach reading and asked me if I wrote haiku, so I gave him a copy of *Ponca War Dancers*, in which the elegy for my Uncle Dwain is in the form of five haiku. It was in exchange for PWD that Gurga sent me a copy of his prizewinning volume.) So even if the poem has been taught in Tarsus, I have not heard that it converted any persecutors of meadowlarks there. But then there are no meadowlarks in Turkey, so its political activism is not to be downplayed for its failing to convert those NRA zealots breathing out fire and slaughter and birdshot such as the narrator describes in the book of Acts.

Which reminds me: my new friend Jim Hess in Bartlesville has just written that the poem about my older brother’s shooting of a meadowlark (the one called “Brothers” in *AN EAGLE NATION*) has persuaded him to give up hunting. Jim read the poem aloud as he introduced me when I had to talk to the Bartlesville College-High graduates (from 1940 to 2000) this past May 27 in the football stadium there—where, by the way, Mickey Mantle used to play shortstop for a Yankee farm team, just after I graduated from high school. Evidently

he thought it was pretty clear. Of course he runs a liquor store and may have been under the influence—he introduced me to some good ole boys there from the area I used to run around in who knew the bootlegger with whom I used to mow, rake, and put in stacks a lot of hay (and ryegrass) in the Buck Creek Valley. And one of THEM was from over by Okesa, which is where the poem called “Communing Before Supermarkets” describes finding the finest watermelon of modern times. And this guy, Dean Garrett, said “By God I know exactly where you guys picked that melon!” and his description was exactly the way I remembered things about 1939 or so. So he also must have found the poem fairly clear. I take considerable pleasure from having met these readers, who allow me to think somebody other than academics may be able and willing to read poems, and listen to them, with a good understanding. Of course I did not mention to Dean Garrett that it was from one of the Okesa farmers’ fruitstands out on the west edge of Bartlesville that Buster and I, trying to hitchhike back after Saturday-night strikeouts galore, purloined a pear and ran. But if I had mentioned it, he had almost certainly “been there” too.

A great deal of writing and reading actually involves the small community of people who HAVE “been there.” If you sit where you see the maple tree being described or referred to, you see it too. And the more fully writer and reader “see” the tree, the less description is required, the more a few words will put the common landscape and beings around the two, writer and reader, the more a “literary community” is present. Does not have to be trees. Can be quarks if necessary, but I still don’t understand Joyce’s THREE QUARKS FOR MUSTHER MARK, and I don’t enjoy Finnegans Wake because I have not been there.

Date: Mon, 29 Apr 2002 22:52:21

To: SAIL Discussion Group <ASAIL-L@LISTSERV.UGA.EDU>

From: Carter Revard <ccrevard@ARTSCI.WUSTL.EDU>

Subject: Book Costs

I doubt that the picture is more bleak for poetry and writers of it than for other occupations or callings. And I think it is a good idea for those writing poetry to be “working for a living,” if only because doing nothing but write poetry and hang out with others who write/read it sort of puts you downstream of your own sewage, as it were. Yet the notion that writers either do or ought to live up on Parnassus is harmful, and it is time that was dumped. Writing should be of some use to other

people than the writer. We recognize this for most forms or genres—journalism, scholarly work, movies and even fiction. The use of language to inform, reveal, bring together, make necessary and useful distinctions, clarify, is at the center of any kind of good writing. As for what is “good enough to call poetry,” whatever hoops we put up and rules we make, and however we shape the game so that only a few are “major league players,” nevertheless just getting the ball through that hoop feels good, so to hell with the notion that only Michael Jordan can be called a real basketball player. The game is useful to all its players, not just a few of them, and to anybody interested in being there. Nearly all the tribal games went deep into all the four or six directions, and the same is true for fiction, poetry, journalism, scholarship.

So much for general blathering.

Lauren Stuart Muller’s publications include “Collaborative ‘Life Stories’ and Anonymous Team Journals: Fostering Dialogue and Decentering Authority in the Classroom,” *American Quarterly*; “Native American Literatures, 1994-96: A Selective Annotated Bibliography” *ADE Bulletin* (with Hertha D. Sweet Wong); “Paula Gunn Allen” in *American Writers Supplement* (with Jacqueline Shea Murphy); and *June Jordan’s Poetry for the People: A Revolutionary Blueprint* (ed.).

From Maggie Dwyer

On the differences between poetry and prose:

Date: Sun, 2 Jul 2000 09:29:56
From: ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu (Carter Revard)
To: NATIVELIT-L@raven.cc.ukans.edu
Subject: Re: Nebraska and My Antonia

Now let me wonder about our splitting “prose” from “poetry” and inventing the term “prose poem” as a way of stepping over the crack without breaking our academic backs. (I have to offer a few Roman candles in honor of the weekend, but my aim is upward into the critical stratosphere, not at colleagues on this list. In other words, this is a little

off center musing on the Muses, not meant as polemic but as mulling over some things.) The difference between poetry and prose since about 1950 has been mostly a question of how the writer manages line-endings. In prose the line endings are set by the machines involved in typing/printing, based on the page size of what is called "typing paper" (for writers) and what is called "book design" (by publishers), or to some extent now in cyber-"publishing" screen-and-font parameters. The lines are supposed to be all of the same length, not in terms of syllable-count, nor yet in terms of phoneme-count, or stress-count, or poetic-foot count, but in terms of written-character count (with some of those characters being "space" between words, others being punctuation marks). Book designers usually require all lines to be the same length except at the ends of paragraphs or for dialogue-patches. They designate blocks of verbiage called Chapters, or Sections, or the like—in effect, they allow for all the stylistic features designated by the "icons/buttons" on a control strip for such a program as Microsoft Word as customized on a computer screen like this one or perhaps like that on yours.

I see those as the chief identifying features of what we call prose. Everything else is optional: the rhythms, the placement of modifiers, the inversions of sentences, the grammatical constraints linked to the post-medieval notions of "sentence" for instance—all of those features are called "stylistics" and the patterned selection and deployment of these is considered the hallmark of a given prose writer, the "style-identity" of that writer.

How then does "poetry" differ from "prose" as so defined? I think maybe the only discernible difference is in how line-lengths and "empty" space are used. In "poetry" there is usually a lot more "empty space" both before each "line" and after each "line," and the amount of space is not predetermined by the pagemakers or the bookmakers, but is at the will of the writer. Where a "line" is broken, and how each line is spaced from the left margin, from the right margin, and in relation to preceding and following "lines," is more at the will of the writer for "poems" than for "prose," although writers like Tom Wolfe have made more poem-like use of spaces and line-breaks than was done in most 19th and 20th century prose earlier than Wolfe's. Such poeticizing is not confined to essay-writers though; it was anticipated in the balloons of comic strips, because the language in those is very often "imitated" from "real speech" or the kind of "real" speech allowed and used in the conventions of comic strips, where the constraints on language are much greater than in a book of essays (in older books at least). Mark Twain's use of his own pretended drawings in his Travel Books is

maybe one place where the comic-strip conventions are anticipated, and he was in a tradition that should be traced back to Aretino at least and actually to lots and lots of medieval, Roman, Greek, Egyptian, Sumerian, Chinese, Mayan things I'm sure but ignorance here prevents my explaining, all THAT and wasting a whole lot of phosphorescent pixels by doing so.

So, in short, prose is what page and book designers do with the spatial arrangement of words; poetry is also that, but writers of "poems" are allowed more freedom to arrange the words spatially, and to use machines to fix these arrangements so that editors won't change them or force them to fit into squared-off line-formats. Poetry is "more marginally free" than prose. Otherwise there is no necessary and sufficient difference, since we do not require differences in content, in treatment, in linguistic patterning, or anything OTHER than line-endings and spatial arrangements.

To come back then to my "prose poem"—what makes it a PROSE poem is nothing more than its mostly having each line fill the whole breadth of a prose page. Each "line" is really a line of dialogue and the pretended format is that of an INTERVIEW: one line is a question, marked as Q, and the next is an ANSWER, marked as A. Since this means that the language imitates that of "spoken English," there is little if any use of "rhyme" or "periodic-sentence structure" or other indicators of "enriched" language such as might have been used in either a poem or prose passage; stylistically the language is therefore "neutral." (The stereotype is that all poetry should use "enriched" language, but that if it is used in prose it results in "purple patches," which are regarded not as honorable bruises of passion but as tarting-up eyeliner or cheap tattoos.)

In other words, what I wrote is a poem, and it has certain features associated by most readers with prose, so it is called a prose poem, mostly because it uses space and line-endings in a prosy way.

But now for Areopagitica: I bet if you were to read it carefully again you would think it is a prose poem, or a poem arranged as prose on the page—if not in its entirety, then in a good many "purple patches." I think Milton worked very hard to get the rhythms and cadences of his sentences in English (and even more his sentences in Latin) to carry his arguments with full poetic justice. And then there is David's lament for Jonathan, or eulogy for Saul, and there are the Psalms.

But this post which was to offer Roman candles has given neither heat nor light so I will close it and wish you all a Happy Independence Day, whatever that means in prose or verse.

Date: Sun, 2 Jul 2000 20:00:47
From: ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu (Carter Revard)
To: NATIVELIT -L@raven.cc.ukans.edu
Subject: "prose" and "poetry"

I sometimes think it is harder to write prose, simply because people keep insisting that it not be too poetic. There are technical ways of race-walking that allow the walker to go faster than most people run. There are technical ways of race-running that help runners to shave hundredths of seconds off the time it takes them to run a hundred yards. But now try and define the differences between walking and running. You can do this if you are making them into sports with arbitrary definitions involving whether both feet are off the ground at the same time or whatever, and the fact that we have two different verbs in English (derived from two different Indo-European roots, therefore pretty old distinctions I guess) suggests that for speakers of English (and probably over a long period) there has been good reason to make the distinction. "Walk, don't run!" means something. So does "Prose, not verse!"

Now come back to poetry workshops teaching how to distinguish these, and how to write a prose poem, and so forth. Children have a natural disposition to walk and to run. How to walk is learned as a gendering activity with the gendering probably linked to evolutionary development of sexual signals and as I understand it this is one of the points dealt with in acting and modeling schools, as well as informally (in the olden days) by the macho and the mojo and the moltabella types in their gendered how-to-get-the-Other-Sex-to-come-hither conclaves.

Something like this learning to walk, with social and gendering arrangements, probably also takes place with every part of language learning and "training," including talking and singing and chanting and making poetry or prose, even after the area of compositional labor is transferred to the alphabetic transcriptions. We talk: and we have to learn to talk. We talk differently with different auditors and according to the circumstances and the expectations. We learn to talk School Talk and Baby Talk and LitCrit and TheoryThuggery. We learn the best kinds of PillowTalk and the tones of Baroque Argument in contrast to those of Romantic Tirades. All these are ways of walking the walk and talking the talk. Then it gets profession-alized. It gets into corporations and Big Mac and Walmart chains of Po-Biz Workshops at an Iowa or a Montana say. The practitioners tell

everybody to do it like THEY do it, or they try to keep the aspirants from doing it that way because after all it is THEIR way and not for the masses. The aspirants listen, and try, and get encouraged or discouraged.

And of course a whole lot of people “make money” off this. It is a lot easier to write poetry or even prose than to write laws, so the poets or prozers do not make as much money as the lawyers and politicians. But there are whole castes and sets of EXPERTS among the lawyers, poets, prozers, journalists, footnote-writers, all willing to teach if paid to do it.

Maybe from the tone of this it has become apparent that I think people ought to learn to write footnotes, a more difficult and useful art than writing sonnets. They ought to UNwrite laws, a much more useful and supremely difficult art. But if they insist on any kind of writing, they should start with the premise that it cannot be taught unless they are able to learn, and that most of the teachers can’t teach it anyhow, but practically always a learner will learn. Same as walking, talking, running, singing. Lots of craft, lots of learning. Unpredictable, some fast, some slow, some gradual, some never, some usually. What was unlearnable is suddenly simple and easy. What was simple is suddenly baffling. Slumps, streaks, zones, hamstrings, a series of nouns becomes the key part of a sentence that is “supposed” to require a finite verb, and the nouns are sports-metaphors though this is prose: so is it a poem or a prose? Depends on the definition of IS. Does NOT depend on final truth being discovered, or definitive defining taking place. Practice does not make perfect but if you are Shaq then hack-a-Shaq makes you better. And if you do not understand the allusion here you probably had better things to do than look at or read about the NBA championship games.

Date: Sun, 2 July 2000 20:12:32
From: ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu
To: NATIVELIT -L@raven.cc.ukans.edu
Subject: Re: Nebraska and My Antonia

The best way to write a poem is to realize you want very much to talk about something and have at least a vague idea of what you want to say. Then you want to say it as briefly and memorably as possible, which could well mean finding a figurative way to do it—that makes it both briefer and more memorable, usually. Then you want it to sound really good, really almost as good as music or singing. Then you want

to say it to somebody special, family or friend or lover, or deadly enemy or philosophic opponent. Or “your people” who will understand best.

And it is always possible that you are hoping this will be useful in direct or indirect ways. Those are also the best ways of writing prose, or prose poems.

And “figurative” could mean storytelling. It also might mean being humorous, joking and having fun with the subject and the people you are talking with as you compose it.

In short, the hell with rules and forms. Say something the best you can as briefly and memorably as you can because it matters to you, and let everybody else worry whether it is prose, poetry, neither, both, or angeltalk.

Date: Sun, 2 Jul 2000 22:13:49

From: ccrevard@artsci.wustl.edu (Carter Revard)

To: NATIVELIT -L@ raven.cc.ukans.edu

Subject: Nebraska and My Antonia

Yes, I don’t mind working within a strict form sometimes, if it happens to guide the mind as it plays around. Baseball rules used to allow the batter to hit in any direction, even backwards past catcher or to that “field,” but then constraints were imposed. I saw, about 1959, the playing of a baseball game between the Williams College and Amherst College baseball teams using 1859 rules, since they had first competed in baseball in 1859 and this was their centennial game. The winning hit was hit by the batter when he reversed and swung at a pitch lefthanded to hit it BACK into the field behind the catcher—home run. Unfortunately he was a Williams batter.

But I have tried some haiku—you know, the form requires that syllables total only seventeen and these be arranged in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 syllables respectively. (I am not trying to claim knowledge of the “real” Japanese forms and all the constraints and stylistic expectations beyond this syllable-and-line matter.) Here are some I came up with in the late 1970’s or so:

FOUR HAIKU

1.

This is an odd world,
its bridges only appear

at the ends of roads.

2.

Thinking without words
is hard, like laying an egg
with no shell round it.

3.

Those who want the earth
to shine like a star must be
completely spaced out.

4.

Never try to keep
the snow from melting, unless
you love the snowman.

5.

Juncos hang on sweet-gum
seedballs amid crimson leaves—
Dakota blizzards.

6.

Las Vegas: Sistine
sky over heart of gold,
soft breasts of silicone.

7.

Well, I thought maybe
readers would see I'd left some
margin for error.

WHAT RAVEN TOLD HIS PEOPLE

White bones in the rain
can't hear what that high rainbow
is telling Noah.

Passing through glory
my feathers keep their darkness—
the earth will come back.

Margaret Dwyer, who is currently employed as a writer for the University of Texas at Arlington Libraries, finished her Master's Degree in English at UTA in 1999. She studied with Kenneth Roemer in order to focus on American Indian Literature. She is now working toward a Master's in Philosophy (Environmental Ethics) at the University of North Texas.

Carter Revard: A Selected Bibliography

WORKS BY CARTER REVARD

Books

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Articles and Critical Studies

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Announcements

2002 Wordcraft Honors and Awards Recipients

These awards are for excellence in a 2001 publication, presentation, or accomplishment. Please join us in congratulating these awardees.

Wordcrafter of the Year

Kimberly Blaeser (White Earth Anishinaabe)
for your excellent work on behalf of Wordcraft Circle

Wordcraft Circle Mentor of the Year

Janet McAdams (Alabama Creek)
for your excellent work inspiring beginning and emerging Native writers and storytellers

Steve Russell (Cherokee)
for your excellent work inspiring beginning and emerging Native writers and storytellers

Wordcraft Circle Intern of the Year

Beth Bred
for your demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Wordcraft Circle Writer of the Year

Kimberly Blaeser (White Earth Anishinaabe) - Creative Prose: Personal Essay
for *The Voices We Carry* in *After Confession: Poetry as Autobiography*. Kate Sontag and David Graham, editors. (St. Paul, MN: Gray Wolf Press, 2001)

Win Blevins (Cherokee) - Creative Prose: Reference Work
for *Dictionary of the American West: Over 5000 Terms and Expressions from Aarigaa! to Zopilote*. (Seattle, WA: Sasquatch Books, 2001)

A Selected Bibliography 151

Joseph Bruchac (Abenaki) - Creative Prose: Children's Literature
for *The Journal of Jesse Smoke: A Cherokee Boy* (New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2001)

Margaret Bruchac (Missiquoi Abenaki) - Creative Prose: Historical
for *1621: A New Look At Thanksgiving*. (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2001)

Mitchell Bush (Onondaga) - Specialty: Newsletter Editing
for American Indian Society of Washington, DC Newsletter

Gabrielle David - Specialty: Literary Magazine Editing
for *Phati'tude Literary Magazine* (Vol. 1, No. 2 - Indian Summer: A Special Issue

Donna Dean (Cherokee) - Creative Prose: Fiction
for *Deep Six: A Novel of Life, Death, Deception, and Betrayal* (Palo Alto, CA: Palo Alto Books, 2001)

Nicolle Dragone (Lakota) - Academic: Master's Thesis
for *Haudenosaunee Literature*. (Norman: OK: University of Oklahoma -Department of English, 2001)

Carolyn Dunn-Anderson (Muscogee/Seminole/Cherokee) - Creative: Poetry
for *Outfoxing Coyote* (San Pedro, CA: That Painted Horse Press, 2001)

Larry Evers and Barre Toelken - Creative Prose: Anthology/Collection
for *Native American Oral Traditions: Collaboration and Interpretations*. (University of Utah Press, 2001)

Thurman Lee Hester Jr. (Choctaw) - Creative Prose: Critical Analysis/Criticism
for *Political Principles and Indian Sovereignty*. (New York: Routledge, 2001)

Rick Hill (Tuscarora) - Specialty: Periodical Editing
for *The Runner*

Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) - Creative Prose: Memoir
for *The Woman Who Watches Over The World. A Native Memoir* (New York: Norton, 2001)

LeAnne Howe (Choctaw) - Creative Prose: Fiction
for *Shell Shaker* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 2001)

Helen Hoyt - Creative Prose: Critical Analysis/Criticism
for *How Should I Read These: Native Women Writers in Canada*. (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2001)

Emory Dean Keoke (Standing Rock Lakota) and Marie Porterfield -
Creative Prose: Reference Work
for *The Encyclopedia of American Indian Contributions to the World: 15,000 Years of Inventions and Innovations*. (NY: Facts On File, 2001)

Clara Sue Kidwell (Choctaw/Anishinaabe), Homer Noley (Choctaw),
George E. Tinker (Osage)- Creative Prose: Anthology/Collection
for *A Native American Theology*. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001)

MariJo Moore (Cherokee) - Creative Prose: Fiction
for *Red Woman with Backward Eyes and Other Stories*. (Candler, NC: rENEGADE pLANETS, pUBLISHING, 2001)

W. S. Penn (Nez Perce/Osage) - Creative Prose: Fiction
for *Feathering Custer* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001)

Malea Powell (Indiana Miami) - Specialty: Literary Quarterly Editing
for *Studies in American Indian Literature (SAIL)*.

A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff - Specialty: Series Editing
for *Indian Lives Series*. (University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE)

Kathryn Shanley (Assiniboine - Fort Peck Nakota) - Specialty: Literary
Quarterly Editing
for *Native American Literature: Boundaries & Sovereignities - Para. Doxa: Studies in World Literary Genres # 15* (Vashon, WA, 2001)

Antone Treuer (Red Lake Anishinaabe) - Creative Prose: Oral History
for *Living Our Language: Ojibwe Tales and Oral Histories* (St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001)

Sandra Trupp - Technical: Public Relations
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Jace Weaver (Cherokee) - Creative Prose: Non-Fiction
for *Other Words: American Indian Literature, Law and Culture*
(Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001)

Ron Welburn (Gingaskin Assateague/Cherokee) - Creative Prose: Non-Fiction
for *Roanoke and Wampum: Topics in Native American Heritage and Literatures* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2001)

Craig Womack (Creek/Cherokee) - Creative Prose: Fiction
for *Drowning In Fire* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001)

Karenne G. Wood (Monacan) - Creative: Poetry
for *Markings on Earth* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2001)

Wordcraft Circle Storyteller of the Year

Jennifer Nez Denetdale (Navajo) - Lecture/Presentation
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Lee Francis IV (Laguna Pueblo) - Professional Theatrical Road Tour
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Geraldine Kearns (Navajo) - Contemporary Stories
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Stella Long (Choctaw) - Contemporary Stories
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Chuna McIntyre (Yupik) - Traditional Stories
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Michael D. Nephew (Cherokee) - Acting
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Dovie Thomason (Lakota/Kiowa-Apache) - Traditional Stories
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Robert Vann (Cherokee) - Traditional Stories
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Wordcraft Circle Publisher of the Year

Carolyn Dunn-Anderson (Muscogee/Seminole/Cherokee) - Small Press
for That Painted Horse Press, San Pedro, California

Ted Genoways - Regional Publisher
for Minnesota Historical Society Press, St. Paul, Minnesota

Joan Pinkvoss - Small Press
for Aunt Lute Books, San Francisco, California

Luther Wilson - University Press
for University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, New Mexico

Wordcraft Circle Foundation of the Year

Jone Stromberg - President: Indian Community School Foundation for
demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Wordcraft Circle Sovereign Nation of the Year

Comanche Nation, Anadarko, Oklahoma - Honorable Johnny Wauqua
(Comanche), Chairman
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle vision

Wordcraft Circle Special Honors

Joe Sando
for demonstrated commitment to the Wordcraft Circle