

Studies in American Indian Literature

NEWSLETTER
of the
Association For Study
of
AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURES

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STUDIES IN AMERICAN INDIAN LITERATURES

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Study of American Indian Literatures

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A GOOD DAY TO BE ALIVE:
Some Observations on Contemporary
American Indian Writing

American Indian contemporary writing is now, I feel, at a very interesting crossroad. There have never been as many good American Indian poets writing in English and being published regularly in magazines as there are now. In addition to the writers of my own generation, those born in the late 30s and early 40s, a whole new generation of Native American poets and fiction writers are beginning to produce substantial work--many of them students of such people as Joy Harjo. Philip Yellowhawk Minthorn, a Nez Perce poet still in his early 20s with a book of his poems forthcoming from Strawberry Press, is one example. A graduate of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, he has grown up with more of a feeling for the acceptability of

American Indian contemporary writing, perhaps, than have many of those Native writers in the late 30's and 40's who found themselves in public schools or BIA schools where THE Western Literary Heritage was all they were ever shown. For the younger American Indian writer today, perhaps, some things are easier and clearer and those dual myths of the "Melting Pot" and the "Vanishing Redman" may not have been so omnipresent. They may not have had to deal with the confusion and self-hatred of friends and families who wanted to lose or deny an American Indian heritage. At least I hope this is so.

With the reissue of Geary Hobson's THE REMEMBERED EARTH by the University of New Mexico and the reissue in paperback of CARRIERS OF THE DREAM WHEEL, we have been assured of at least two major (and excellent) anthologies of contemporary American Indian literature which we can draw upon as teachers of literature and creative writing. However, the response I received from a major publisher which was interested (I was told) in publishing a new anthology of American Indian contemporary writing, is interesting. Yes, they do want to do such a book, but only if they can find a well-known American Indian writer to edit it since the material, they felt, would not sell without a recognizable name. I was clearly not the person to do it--which left a field of perhaps two or three people they felt were well known enough, N. Scott Momaday or (and here their real interest lay) Jamake Highwater.

When I look over the list of the most recent new books of poetry published by American Indian writers, I note this same lack of interest of major publishers in anything but the "recognizable" writers. In the last 3 years the only American poet to be published by something other than a university or small press is Ray Young Bear whose superb collection WINTER OF THE SALAMANDER was published by Harper and Row in 1980 as a volume in their "Native

American Publishing Program." (At least one American poet I know was asked to contribute a volume to that series. When he refused and said he'd only send to their regular series, not one in which he was earmarked as an "Indian" they agreed to consider a book. That book was rejected as not being "up to their standards." The implication he read into it was that he was only good enough to be published as an "Indian" since "Indian" writing isn't as good as "real" literature.) The controversies about certain volumes by supposed Indians in the Harper and Row series still go on and I don't want to comment any further on those controversies. I would like, though (not that I mistrust Harper and Row, especially since I just got a royalty check for paperback sales of CARRIERS OF THE DREAM WHEEL) to know just how and where, specifically, their Native American Publishing Program's profits are (as advertised) being "used to support projects designed to aid the Native American People."

Some of the other important American Indian writers to have books published in the last 3 years include Simon Ortiz--with volumes from Thunder's Mouth Press and the Institute for Native American Development, Jim Barnes with his important THE AMERICAN BOOK OF THE DEAD just published by University of Illinois, and Maurice Kenny's epic treatment of Isaac Jogues and his relationship to the Mohawks, BLACKROBE, brought out in 1982 by North Country Community College Press. Paula Gunn Allen's new book of poems will soon appear from UCLA's American Indian Studies Center and Luci Tapahonso's ONE MORE SHIPROCK NIGHT was published in 1982 by Tejas Art Press. Those are only a few examples and there are many others--all from small or university presses.

Before going further, of course, I should point out that it is a problem shared by all American writers, not just those of ethnic minority background. America's "major" publishers want big

names and the big money. Literary fiction, poetry and short story collections are not being published as they once were. Without the small and university presses they'd hardly be published at all. And since the small and university presses pay little (if anything at all) in the way of cash to those who publish with them, it is clear that writers find it harder than ever to support themselves by their writing.

Which means, of course, it is even harder for the Native American writer. I have been told that the "theme" of Indians is still hot with the major publishers. They want "indian" books. By this, however, is meant SACAJAWEA or HANTA YO. They do not want books by Indians but about them. About Indians which bear the same relationship to the American Indian writers and people of today as the "natives" in the old Tarzan films do to Chinua Achebe or Leopold Senghor. The American Indian writer has a double cross (pun intended) to bear.

In viewing the field of writers and publishers, I note several encouraging things. One is the continuance of several important small presses which have nurtured American Indian writers--often at the very start of their careers. The two most important of these presses are Brother Benet Tvedten's BLUE CLOUD QUARTERLY series and Maurice Kenny's STRAWBERRY PRESS. By supporting American Indian writing and by consistently publishing strong work they have done an incalculable service. The second is the move on the part of a number of new or already established small presses to publish work by American Indian writers--not because they are American Indians, but because their work is good. Here, too, most of the books are books of poetry. We have yet to see small presses devoting themselves with some consistency to the publishing of American Indian stories, long fiction or plays. Perhaps the publication of Bruce King's play DUSTOFF by The Institute

of American Arts in Santa Fe is a start in that direction and perhaps certain University presses which have a long history of publishing predominantly non-literary works devoted to Native American studies will see this opportunity and step in... University of New Mexico, perhaps, or University of Oklahoma. Cross Cultural Review is a small press in Long Island which I have been assisting in the role of a contributing editor and they have begun a series of bilingual chapbooks by American Indian writers which I feel are especially important. With the native language facing the English, these chapbooks range from 12 to 40 pages and are beautifully printed and well distributed. The first three in the series are ROUNDS by Carroll Arnett, HORNED SNAKE by Louis Oliver and IN A DARK MIST by Lance Henson. (Anyone with ideas for further bi-lingual chapbooks should contact me.)

Indiana University Press (Bacone) is also undertaking a bilingual format book with the forthcoming publication of Robert Conley's poems THE RATTLESNAKE BAND in Cherokee and English. Since the survival of American Indian languages is, in a way, the survival of cultures, I have hopes that such bilingual publications will occur elsewhere in the country.

Two projects which I have been working on myself might bear mentioning here. The first is an anthology I have put together of poems by 36 different American Indian poets. There is a great interest in Native American people in Europe and also a great lack of knowledge about them there. To create an interest in further translations of work by individual authors and to give them a taste of the real American Indian writing I've been working on placing that anthology in various European nations for translation into their native language. Thus far it has been translated into Macedonian in Yugoslavia (where it will be made available at the great international Struge Poetry Festival this August) and is

being translated into Sicilian. I'm now working on contacts in other European nations and elsewhere throughout the world. I'll also be working on a larger version of that same anthology (which is called SONGS FROM TURTLE ISLAND) which will be published in this country in English--probably by a small press, perhaps by our own Greenfield Review Press.

The second project is a major study of American Indian contemporary writing and survival. I've received a Rockefeller Foundation fellowship to do this and will be interviewing American Indian poets throughout 1982 and 1983, doing a good deal of travelling to do so. (Last year Geary Hobson received a Rockefeller foundation fellowship to do a major study of Cherokee writing and I consider the granting of two such fellowships to people working in contemporary American Indian writing a good sign.)

Survival is, I feel, the key. American Indian writers are surviving and their survival and growth is related to the reawakening and growth of Native people throughout this hemisphere. It is a good day to be alive.

Joseph Bruchac
Greenfield Center, NY

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Duane Niatum. Songs for the Harvester of Dreams.
Seattle and London: University of Washington
Press, 1981. 64 pp.

With this gathering of poems, his fourth major collection in ten years, Duane Niatum stands out all the more clearly as one of the most accomplished and praiseworthy American poets of his generation.

What is his generation? I refuse to call Niatum a "younger poet," remembering that reviewers were still faint-praising Roethke as a "promising younger poet" within a few years of his death at 55. Does "younger" mean not too old to be embarrassed to compete for the Yale Younger Poets Prize? Better to speak of a poet's generation--as Casey Stengel would say, you can look it up--and for Niatum (born in 1938) that would properly include writers like Marvin Bell, William Matthews, Marge Piercy, Charles Simic, Stanley Plumly, Louise Gluck, James Tate, James Welch, William Heyen, Dave Smith.... To put it simplistically, a set of poets for whom World War Two is a terminus a quo of historical and personal memory; a group about whose literary recognition now there is a sense of confusion, its members being neither securely identified by Big Prizes and Honors, nor identifiable with the numerous and boisterous crew of writers for whom the Viet Nam years were formative. Maybe the literary generation of which Niatum is an illustrious member (I confess it is mine, also) is that social entity we heard so much about a few years back: the Generation Gap. Some gap!

Readers of ASAIL Newsletter may well wonder why, beyond locating my praise of Niatum by generation, I haven't yet identified him as a native American poet. Indeed it is with that identification that most reviews of his work (or Silko's, or Welch's) begin and end. But Niatum himself has recently expressed his "resentment at being categorized as 'Indian poet and fiction writer.'" Writing in a polemical vein in "On Stereotypes" (Parnassus: Fall/Winter 1978, pp. 160-6), he argues against the supposition on the part of many native writers today, and most of their Anglo advocates, that there is a special pan-Indian aesthetic, separate in spirit and principles from what passes as a general American aesthetic, and that (so the doctrine runs)

contemporary Indian writing must be judged as something wholly set apart. On the contrary, says Niatum, to do so "encourages a conventional response from both Indians and non-Indians, and as a result actually inhibits the reader's imagination. If the Native American artist has something to offer us, he should be able to offer it to anyone who will take an active part in the experience.

Niatum's against-the-tide protest seems to me to be both cogent on principle and timely. Having finally been "discovered" and (let us hope) officially established in some degree by the academic and publishing establishments over the past decade or so, native American writing is in some danger of being fenced off (reservationized?), at worst ending up as something to be supported as another latter-day white man's burden. How often are books of poems by native writers like Niatum reviewed as a matter of course (rather than in some special "American Indian Writers" omnibus) in, say, the Atlantic, or even in the Little Magazines? Helen Vendler's magisterial collection of reviews, Part of Nature, Part of Us, contains notices of 48 books by 30 poets, none Indian: if there is to be a sequel, will she pay attention to Niatum, or Ortiz, or Young Bear?

In this issue of the Newsletter, Joseph Bruchac comments on a commercial aspect of this problem: how Harper and Row's generously-intended "Native American Publishing Program" (of which Niatum was for a time an editor) may now in fact be perpetuating a set of double standards, whereby Indian writers get published within the Program--or not at all, at least not by Harper and Row. (All the more credit, then, to a few academic presses like Washington, whose sole poetry publication in 1981-2 was Songs for the Harvester of Dreams.)

How then, following Niatum's stricture, should we engage his book, the latest work of a member of

the North Coastal Klallam tribe, born Duane McGinnis but re-named by tribal elders after an illustrious ancestor; student of Theodore Roethke; editor; teacher (most recently Indian Heritage consultant with the Seattle public schools)? What else but as an American poet, self-conscious both of his personal native heritage and of his birthrights, likewise "native," in the English language and its Anglo/American literary traditions, and committed as an artist to bring the two kinds of knowledge into harmony or at least complementarity with one another.

Looked at from this angle, Songs for the Harvester is, I repeat, one of the most impressive books yet to come out of Niatum's generation, and incomparably his finest poetry to date. Its two sections, "Voices from the World and Its People" and "Spinning the Dream Wheel" in themselves suggest the growing urbanity of Niatum's art. The first consists of short, delicately-rendered, often riddle-like songs, each evoking the thereby invoking personages important in Puget Sound Indian lore and still to be conjured with in those parts today: Bear, Raven, Loon, Cougar, Heron, Eagle, Whale....

I call to it roaming beneath fog's way,
Paddle towards deeper waters to find myself,
Be shade for every creature moving or still,
Dream when it follows the storm down the
night.

So I may again see the village fire
Wild with a trail of dancers.

Many of these poems sound in their oblique terseness and objectivity like adaptations of traditional Salish songs: as if the anonymous and tribal genius that once created the myths and lyrics of the North Pacific peoples were somehow speaking in 1981 in American verse--and that impression is surely one

of the achievements to be praised in Niatum's book. But even as a poem like "Whale's Song" gracefully celebrates the poet's imaginative access to his ancestral heritage, it points to the circumstantial remoteness of that heritage from his everyday life ("So I may see again the village fire...."), and the crucial poem in this first section (and one of the finest I know of by Niatum), "Raven and the Fear of Growing White," mordantly engages the prospect of utter deracination--loss of personal connection with a storied collective past. In its ironic form it is like the Fool's prophecy satirizing the present age in *King Lear* III. ii., or like the bitter "retro-active prophecies" that are widespread in Western Indian tradition, "foretelling" in aboriginal terms the disastrous coming of the whites.

When the legends cannot feed the village
fire,
When mother spruce answers no child in the
dark,
When hawk fails to reach his shadow on the
river,
When First Woman beats humming bird to the
earth,
And salmon eats the rapids until his bones
shatter,
When otter steals the long-awaited promises
of stars,
And blue jay stops naming each new storm,
It will end its fear of growing white.

Raven's fear is, of course, a major theme in modern native American writing, but it can hardly be labeled and packed away as just an "Indian theme"; and one measure of the virtue of Niatum's poem is that through its special and resonant Klallam details it speaks to all our modern fears of "growing white"--drifting irretrievably, that is, out of

touch with our true and sustaining origins.

Then there are the stories and after a while
I think something
Else must connect them besides just this me.
(W.S. Merwin)

What to do with our ancestors?--I believe
that the spiritual man must go back in order
to go forward.
(Theodore Roethke)

Men die because they cannot join their ends
to their beginnings. (Alkmaon)

Alkmaon's dictum images, of course, the impossible circle that haunts our linear, headlong lives, and it suggests the title and the imaginative key of Niatum's second section, "Spinning the Dream Wheel." Now from his first book on, the dream wheel has been a central emblem in this poet's work, and although its specific ethnic source--whether in some Klallam custom or perhaps in the ceremonial shields and drums of the Plains cultures--is unknown to me, it generally symbolizes the poetic imagination joining present and traditional past together, a "dreaming back"--as in the first section of this book--to what may be seen as mythically permanent and whole. Here in the second section, in longer and more personal (but still never hectic or merely confessional) poems, the poet turns to confront what his life materially consists of: the impulse to invoke the ancestral native past somewhat recedes, and other, more immediate and troublesome pasts come to the fore, more directly than heretofore in Niatum's work. His boyhood memories of and adult search for an absconded father; finished love-affairs; poetic apprenticeships (the spirit of his teacher Roethke is palpable in some of these poems, and Merwin, Hughes, and Rilke are also invoked

stylistically); urban scenes and situations (some rather too privately rendered I think, to register-- some of these memories seem to represent threats to the operations of the dream wheel, and there are suggestions of possible solipsistic perversions of its power:

Mostly we chose to circle in regret.
What was lost was the circle, not regret....

My friends say I am a hermit.
The last two women who entered and left
my circle agreed with them.
("Album of the Labyrinth Doors")

But even as he unsparingly questions a symbol that has long been at the center of his work, Niatum seems in the best of these poems to find a new kind of strength in the questioning. Not that he is abandoning the dream wheel and the mythic Indian consciousness it represents (to do so would surely be to realize Raven's "fear of growing white"), but rather that he sees that his own personal past must be come to terms with, honestly, perhaps ruefully, whatever clarity requires; and the turning of the Indian dream wheel becomes, with no loss or personal meaning, a telling human act. The first and last stanzas of the book's final poem, auspiciously titled "First Spring," will illustrate I hope what this gifted American poet of the Klallam tribe is coming to with his gifts--

Drifting on the wheel
Of a past looking like
A redskin American gothic,
Staring through forty-one years
Of rain-pelted windows, I bear
With modest grace, diminished nerves,
Narrowing light, half-formed figures:

The memories floating in purgatory....

It is called giving your body
A field to get lost in.
It is called standing on your head
Before the women you lost.
It is called sleeping
In the embers of your name.

Jarold Ramsey
University of Rochester

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ASAIL bibliography no. 3
Duane Niatum

Books

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2. A Cycle for the Woman in the Field illustrated by Jane Berniker (Laughing Man Press, 1973)
3. Taos Pueblo and Other Poems illustrated by Wendy Rose (The Greenfield Review Press, 1973)
4. Ascending Red Cedar Moon (Harper & Row, 1974)
5. Carriers of the Dream Wheel: Contemporary Native American Poetry edited by D. Niatum (Harper & Row, 1975)
6. Digging out the Roots (Harper & Row, 1977)
7. Turning to the Rhythms of Her Song (The Jawbone Press, 1977)

8. To Bridge the Dream (A Press Ltd., 1978)
9. Songs for the Harvester of Dreams (University of Washington Press, 1981)
10. Pieces (Strawberry Press, 1981)
11. Words for Awkward Departures illustrated by Freda Quenneville (seeking publication)

Contributions to Anthologies

1. An American Indian Anthology (The Blue Cloud Quarterly, 1971)
2. American Indian II (University of South Dakota Press, 1971)
3. From the Belly of the Shark edited by Walter Lowenfels (Random House, 1973)
4. Voices from Wahn-Kon-Tah: Contemporary Poetry of Native Americans (International Publishers, 1974)
5. American Indian Prose and Poetry: We Wait in the Darkness edited by Gloria Levitas, Frank Robert Vivello, and Jacqueline Vivello (G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1974)
6. The Uses of Poetry edited by Agnes Stein (Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1975)
7. Giant Talk: An Anthology of Third World Writings edited by Quincy Troupe and Rainer Schulte (Vintage, 1975)
8. The First Skin Around Me: Contemporary American Tribal Poetry (The Territorial Press, 1976)

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10. The Remembered Earth: An Anthology of Contemporary Native American Literature edited by Geary Hobson (Red Earth Press, 1978)
11. Arrangement in Literature (Scott, Foresman and Co., 1979)
12. This Song Remembers: Self Portraits of Native Americans in the Arts edited by Jane B. Katz (Houghton Mifflin, 1980)
13. A Nation Within edited by Ralph Salisbury (Outrigger Publishers, New Zealand, i.p.)
14. Songs from Turtle Island edited by Joseph Bruchac (Sovremenost Press/Macedonian Review, i.p.)

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Bilingual Poetry

Cross-Cultural Communications (239 Wynsum Ave., Merrick, NY 11566) has inaugurated an important bilingual series of Cross-Cultural Review Chapbooks, presenting Native American poetry in the original language with accompanying English translation. So far published are #15 The Horned Snake (1982, \$2) by Louis Oliver (Muskogee-Yaqui), #20 Rounds (1982, \$3) by Gogisgi/Carroll Arnett (Cherokee), and #32 In a Dark Mist (1982, \$2.25) by Lance Henson (Cheyenne-Sioux). All three are illustrated by Kahionhes and compiled by Joseph Bruchac.

Native Americans writing in English inevitably

take on some of the generic characteristics of ethnic literatures. By writing in their native languages these authors can draw more directly upon the formal heritage of their specific tribal cultures. Only writing in a native language makes possible continuation of genuinely independent literary traditions. The bilingual format of this series makes writing in an Indian language economically viable, since in these chapbooks truly native art becomes accessible to English speakers. Teachers of Native American literatures should do everything they can to encourage publication of such bilingual texts--such as getting their libraries to put in standing orders.

In a Dark Mist perhaps illustrates best the virtues of this series. One sees clearly Henson's reliance on traditional song, for example, in his relatively heavy reiteration of sounds within a brief text in the Indian, but not the English, version of "Nam Shim," "Grandfather."

nam shim	grandfather
ni hi i ssta vi ho mi vi	my heart looks toward you
i ma o vi no ss si i di ni	red sage of sunset
voo ho do gi	evening star
bi i ni min ni	the night hawk sings
ni vi hist ta zi	your name

The English version, however, does render the imagistic progress "sunset/evening star/the night hawk," and what might be called the personal yet not private quality of the poem's emotion. The latter characteristic accompanies the Indian tendency to stay free of overly specific, intensively unique experience in song-subjects. The feeling of the singer for his grandfather sustains and is sustained by the sense of their relation as simultaneously a tribal relation. This conveying of the personal in the social and the social in the personal depends, I

believe, in good measure on the simple reiterativeness of the Indian words that compel recognition of this song manifesting our language. Such resonating of the very simple, that is, elemental, aspects of language is unavailable in the English version alone.

We hope the Cross-Cultural series succeeds and encourages other bilingual publishing ventures.

Karl Kroeber

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SAIL is committed to the absolute value of Native American literatures; the merely ethnically interesting is not our business. The claim of excellence for traditional oral art, paradoxically, seems easier to establish than that for contemporary writing in English. With this issue of SAIL, therefore, we inaugurate a continuing series of commentaries on present-day Indian fiction and poetry by invited critics not heretofore familiar with Native American materials. The essays will engage first-rate scholars in detailed analyses of our subject-matter and their work will broaden the audience for Indian writing. We are grateful for the aid and encouragement of this project, which in time should substantially increase recognition for Native American literary accomplishments, of Sacvan Bercovitch, President of the American Studies Association.

Critical Commentary (1)

Leslie Marmon Silko. Storyteller. New York: Seaver Books, 1982.

Leslie Marmon Silko confronts the ethnic writer's unspoken dilemma in her work: she must speak both as a member of a group that stands in opposition to mainstream society and as an individual who necessarily (as an individual) stands in opposition to the group. Silko integrates this dilemma masterfully into her work. She tells us from the start that,

As with any generation
the oral tradition depends upon each person
listening and remembering a portion
and it is together--
all of us remembering what we have heard
together--
that creates the whole story of the people.

She chooses not to use the possessive "person's," which would be grammatically correct before the gerunds "listening" and "remembering," for that would emphasize the listening and the remembering. Instead, she clearly wants to focus as much on the person, the individual, to whom her choice of the more colloquial "person" and her use of enjambement attest. And, indeed, in Storyteller she interweaves details of her personal life with Indian mythology until it is unclear which is the basis; after all, the myth breeds the individual, but the individual creates and perpetuates the myth. Silko's concern is the self that the tradition has bred and the tradition that has bred that self.

Appropriately, then, she begins this collection of stories, memories and poems by recalling her Aunt Susie, a schoolteacher and storyteller, who

...must have realized
that the atmosphere and conditions
which had maintained this oral tradition in

Laguna culture
had been irrevocably altered by the European
intrusion--
principally by the practice of taking the
children
away from Laguna to Indian schools,
taking the children away from the tellers who
had
in all past generations
told the children
an entire culture, an entire identity of a
people.

She sees the situation as a kind of poem, and she reports it that way. Furthermore, poetry offers her certain devices, such as enjambment, useful for telling a powerful story. Note, for example, the striking stress she places on "children" before she spills into the following "away": European (as opposed to true American) culture is undermining Laguna culture by plucking its very buds. And Silko is clearly the self-acknowledged, self-appointed heir to Aunt Susie who will, by telling, teach. She will recall and thus re-call--that is, summon back to a tradition those who have forgotten and those who have never known.

"Lullaby," one of the most moving stories in the collection, tells the story of some who have, and some who are, forgotten. The story opens with an old woman's recollection of her oldest son who "never came back" from the army. And the woman whose "life had become memories" moves from that loss to the loss of her two younger children. The white doctors came one day and "wanted her to sign the papers, and Chato had taught her to sign her name. It was something she was proud of. She only wanted them to go, and to take their eyes away from her children." Instinct prompts her suddenly to run with the children into the hills, but the doctors

came back with a policeman and Chato explains, "'You signed the paper.'...She hated Chato not because he let the policeman and the doctors put the screaming children in the government car, but because he had taught her to sign her name. Because it was like the old ones told her about learning their language or any of their ways: it endangered you."

Silko makes the figurative danger literal both in the plight and in the thoughts of this baffled woman: the white doctors and policeman have literally separated the Indian children from their emotional roots as white educators figuratively rend them from the knowledge of their tradition. Not knowing where to direct her anger, "she listened to Chato sullenly: she hated him when he told her it was the old woman who died in the winter, spitting blood; it was her old grandma who had given the children this disease." Perhaps she hates Chato for excusing a white injustice by attributing it to an Indian cause; and perhaps Ayah is not entirely unreasonable in this objection. For Silko evokes, in the reader's historical memory, the recollection that it was the white culture that originally introduced the disease (presumably tuberculosis) to the Indians. And finally, when Ayah protests, "'They don't spit blood....The whites lie....I want a medicine man first,'" we can almost hear the white doctors' condescending condemnation of the ignorant Indian woman who doesn't know what is good for her own children and who will destroy them with her ignorance. But the whites never attempt to explain or re-educate; they merely impose their own culture while removing the children from the pernicious influence as completely as whatever war (Viet Nam, the imperialist war?) they are fighting has made certain that Jimmie, the oldest, will never come back. Ayah recalls the children's first visit as she encounters the hostile stares of the men in the bar into which she has entered to search for the now

unemployed and alcoholic Chato:

They reminded her of the first time the white people brought her children back to her that winter. Danny had been shy and hid behind the thin white woman who brought them. And the baby had not known her until Ayah took her into her arms, and then Ella had nuzzled close to her as she had when she was nursing. The blonde woman was nervous and kept looking at a dainty gold watch on her wrist. She sat on the bench near the small window and watched the dark snow clouds gather around the mountains; she was frightened by what she saw inside too: the strips of venison drying on a rope across the ceiling and the children jabbering excitedly in a language she did not know. So they stayed for only a few hours. Ayah watched the government car disappear down the road and she knew they were already being weaned from these lava hills and from this sky. The last time they came was in early June, and Ella stared at her the way the men in the bar were staring. Ayah did not try to pick her up; she smiled at her instead and spoke cheerfully to Danny. When he tried to answer her, he could not seem to remember and he spoke English words with the Navajo. But he gave her a scrap of paper that he had found somewhere and carried in his pocket; it was folded in half, and he shyly looked up at her and said it was a bird. She asked Chato if they were home for good this time. He spoke to the white woman and she shook her head. 'How much longer?' he asked, and she said she didn't know; but Chato saw how she stared at the boxcar shack. Ayah turned away then. She did not say good-bye.

Language serves as a measure of cultural distance:

Danny has forgotten some Navajo words, the blonde woman is put off by the strange language, and Ayah has already been induced to give up her children because of her inability to speak English. It is Ayah, however, rather than Chato, who has ultimately understood the true significance that lies beneath the white words; similarly, the richness of Danny's imagination links him to his culture despite his loss of language. Ayah declines to say "good-bye" because she refuses to allow the convention and continue the pretence that they will return; but she also does not need to say a final "good-bye" because she knows they can never be completely severed from the tradition. Silko respects her silence and the story returns to the bar.

In her final re-union with Chato, who turns for consolation to tradition, to a song that establishes a family bond with the natural world:

She tucked the blanket around him, remembering how it was when Ella had been with her; and she felt the rush so big inside her heart for the babies. And she sang the only song she knew to sing for babies. She could not remember if she had ever sung it to her children, but she knew that her grandmother had sung it and her mother had sung it:

The earth is your mother,
 she holds you.
The sky is your father,
 he protects you.
Sleep,
sleep.
Rainbow is your sister,
 she loves you.
The winds are your brothers,
 they sing to you.
Sleep,

sleep.

The final hope is the assertion that

We are together always
We are together always
There never was a time
when this
was not so.

And Ayah and Leslie Marmon Silko (whose very name calls together her maternal and paternal ancestors) are silent.

But whereas Ayah ultimately ends with the words of tradition, and the author does not disturb the silence at the end of this story, Silko does go on, commenting on and supplementing the tradition. Like Zora Neale Hurston, she uses the tradition to enrich the story and she uses the details of the story to instruct about the tradition. Ayah's suffering, for example, adds special significance to the song's words, which are appropriate both for the world view they bespeak and for the consolation they provide.

In other pieces, an italicized "voice" will interrupt the story with an educational detail:

First she called her mother
as she got home.
She said

'Nayah, deeni!
mother, upstairs!'

The pueblo people always called 'upstairs'
because long ago their homes were two, three
stories high
and that was their entrance
from the top

It is unclear whose voice offers the explanation. Perhaps it is Aunt Susie's, since Silko claims her

as a kind of Muse, remembering

...the way Aunt Susie told the story.
She had certain phrases, certain distinctive
words
she used in her telling.
I write when I still hear
her voice as she tells the story.

But if the voice is in fact Aunt Susie's, it is still unclear whether she has added the explanation or whether it is part of the myth. In fact, Silko often refuses to guide the reader through the book--that is, to explain the myths, their relation to each other, and even the explanation. Sometimes the feeling of being lost adds a mystical quality to the myths, transforming the reader into the child that Silko hopes to re-integrate into the tradition; at other times, however, as in the above example, the detail is not crucial to the story and the interruption serves only to call the reader's attention to the teller with no apparent reason for doing so (we don't even know who the teller is much less why he is present). Unlike the explanations and details, the inclusion of photographs serves a clear and useful function: the photographs provide a personal history and a landscape that supplements the reader's understanding of Silko and her world. She confesses that they were an afterthought:

It wasn't until I began this book
that I realized that the photographs in the
Hopi basket
have a special relationship to the stories as
I remember them.
The photographs are here because they are
part of many of the stories
and because many of the stories can be traced
in the photographs.

The exquisite photographs artfully bring Silko, the storyteller, into the foreground in a way that the details do not.

Finally, Silko incorporates the exploration of her role into a story; she, like the storyteller in "the Storyteller's Escape," recognizes that

...'With these stories of ours
we can escape almost anything
with these stories we will survive.'

She keeps the stories for those who return

but more important
for the dear ones who do not come back
so that we may remember them
and cry for them with the stories.
'In this way
we hold them with us forever
and in this way
we continue.'

Too old to continue, the storyteller is being left behind her fleeing tribe. And, while dying,

She was thinking
I could die peacefully
if there was just someone to tell
how I finally stopped
and where.

In memory, in tradition, there is hope; the individual lives on through the group. The "escape," the consolation, is twofold: it is escape, through social cohesion, from the alienation caused by invading culture and from the final separation caused by time.

Silko knows that

Photographs have always had special significance with the people of (her) family and the people at Laguna.

A photograph is serious business and many people still do not trust just anyone to take their picture.

She knows that, like the photographer, she must not betray this trust. With the album that she presents in Storyteller she must walk the line between anthropologist/observer and participant/celebrator; she must show and tell, but not betray. It is a line that, perhaps, she inherits from her Marmon grandfather and his brother who married into the tribe. And it is a line she walks skillfully as she uses the ambiguity of her role as an analogy for the ambiguity of the roles of the children who have been raised in Laguna since "the European intrusion" and educated in the culturally ambiguous "Indian schools." The result is Storyteller, a powerful introduction into Laguna culture and the private life of Leslie Marmon Silko.

Priscilla Wald
Columbia University

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James Magorian. The Great Injun Carnival: The Secret Diary of General George Armstrong Custer. Black Oak Press, 1982. \$5.

Using anachronisms, anagrams, and malapropisms, The Great Injun Carnival is a hilarious collage of the General George Armstrong Custer mentality in

America. With a minimal yet potent reminder of the history of massacres leading up to Custer's Last Stand and a maximum of American kitsch--baseballs, juke boxes, condoms, and hot fudge sundaes--James Magorian creates an all-time carnival with Custer as the ringmaster and raconteur.

Each day's entry, leading up to June 25, 1876, explores several facets of Americana. Typical of the original juxtapositions and insights is the June 17 entry:

Private Annuet Coeptis went AWOL last night. It's ok with me. It just means more grub for the rest of us. In my Fireside Chat this evening I told the men about genetics, the double-helical molecule of good ole deoxyribonucleic acid. The men cheered. Before long we'll be able to hold all our massacres in test tubes.

Magorian's book may be ordered from Black Oak Press, Box 4663, University Place Station, Lincoln, Nebraska 68504.

Jan Garden Castro
Lindenwood College, St. Louis

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Announcement

The National Association of Interdisciplinary Ethnic Studies (NAIES) promotes research, study, curriculum design, and publications, including Explorations in Ethnic Studies and the review supplement Explorations in Sights and Sounds, a Newsletter, and occasional monographs. Membership, including an annual subscription, is \$25/year.

Also available from NAIES is American Indian Literature: A Selected Bibliography for Schools and Libraries. This publication is divided into sections of books for elementary, junior high, and senior high levels and includes resources for teachers.

Mailing address: Gretchen Bataille, Treasurer, Department of English, Iowa State University, Ames, IA 50011.

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