

**AMERICAN INDIAN CHAPBOOK**  
**Edited by Gogisgi/Carroll Arnett**

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Drawings: *Cover - Kohonhes (Mohawk)*  
*Page 32 - Wendy Rose (Hopi)*

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**ALWAYS THE PEOPLE**

Why another collection, another special issue of contemporary American Indian poems when there've been a dozen or more good ones\* in the past five years? Two reasons. First, because like the mountain it's there: an ever-growing body of fine work produced by what may be the sanest group of writers currently identifiable. Both the poems and their readers need and deserve such publication. Second, because readers, Indian and non-Indian, also need and deserve the reminder to be found in these poems; namely, that the quality of a community's artwork and of its social life is an index of that community's spiritual experience. If your spirit is depleted, so is your art, so are your days—and nights. If your spirit is renewed or renewable, so is the whole cycle that makes up community life or any life.

Here are twenty-nine poets and two graphic artists from twenty-two of the Indian nations. The youngest of these poets is seventeen, the oldest seventy-three. Their themes are the old, old, important ones of discovery and loss, re-discovery, sorrow and gladness, gladness and sorrow, always the circle. Always the People. This issue is dedicated to them, the People.

A more than special thanks goes to David and Marion Stocking, who've made this issue possible.

**Gogisgi / Carroll Arnett**

\*The best, most comprehensive anthology of contemporary Indian writing is *The Remembered Earth*, ed. Geary Hobson (Red Earth Press, P. O. Box 26641, Albuquerque, NM 87125), \$8.95. Strongly recommended.

**CUCHILLO**

cuchillo

sky

is blood filling up my belly

cuchillo

moon

is a white horse thundering down  
over the edge  
of a raw red cliff

cuchillo

heart

is the one who leaves me  
at midnight  
for another lover

cuchillo

dog

is the noise of chains and collar  
straining at the neck to bite  
the small of my ankles

cuchillo

silver

is the shell of black sky  
spinning around inside  
my darker eyes

cuchillo

dreams

are the living bones that want out  
of this voice dangling  
that calls itself

knife

(cuchillo).

Joy Harjo

## WALKING BEAR

“Hello! My Name Is Linda!”

Her bright clean face  
behind shiny glasses  
is vacant as the ecstatic moon.

“What a Neat Necklace. Is That Ivory?”

A flower, slightly wilted held  
in her hand like the one a gypsy boy  
tried to sell me one day in the city,  
fasttalking thus:

MistahbuyaflowahforthublindIndianchildrun,  
MistahonlyadollahforthublindAmerikunIndian-  
childrun.

Other flowers, clipped tight to her belt,  
ammunition for a religious war,  
bob up and down as she strides eagerly,  
stiffly up to me in O’Hare’s Main Terminal.

My eyes hold hers for one split second,  
stopping the talk as I walk by.  
Then I say softly, “Goodbye, Linda.”  
And she does not follow.

Two hours later on the plane,  
I wonder if I should have said  
instead to her:

No, my necklace is made of bone.  
It is Walking Bear.  
It walks beyond all faded smiles.  
It walks into your dreams.  
It asks you to change your heart.

Joseph Bruchac

**BY THE FIRE**

he squats down by the fire  
on those long bones of legs  
his back a circle with the fire  
which he takes into his body  
heat and smoke to give him life  
he moves no more than the stone  
his eyes are closed

in his mind i think  
the world grows and grows  
he is so large with thought  
he swallows stars

always when he wakens  
he smiles  
the world comes rushing out of his eyes  
it is warm.

**Norman H. Russell****WINTER FOOD**

Cold stillness rests on  
    the mountainside  
Listen for the crackling of the cones  
When three more moons have passed  
    we will gather pinons

We will bite their tiny shells  
    on many winter nights

We will remember how the pinon trees  
    opened their hands  
    to feed our sons.

**Lucy Tennyson**

**MEETING ANDREW JACKSON  
IN AN ALBUQUERQUE BAR**

I almost fell off the barstool when I saw him  
coming from the pool room last night  
ash-gray hair the color of an old fox's back  
a pool cue in hand like the militia saber  
he used on the Creeks.

A little too loud and much too quickly  
I said to him like a fool "You  
son-of-a-bitch. What about Horseshoe  
Bend Dancing Rabbit Creek The Trail  
of Tears  
And what about that string of dead  
Seminole towns all along the forgotten  
Florida backlands?"

He looked at me like the bar-drunk  
I guess I was for the longest time  
he held the pool cue poised I waited  
for the blade to fall to see my trail of blood  
lost in the history of the bar's cracked floor.

But he just glared at me an old stern father look  
with crazy Tennessee eyes  
that sentenced me to walk a thousand miles  
to a new land of shame.

And then I spoke again  
old wiley rabbit  
though bent on survival  
yet out to trick the fox  
I said  
"I am a man, and you are another."  
He turned and stalked out the door

but I still see the saber leaning against  
the bar blood-caked and anachronistic  
there for all to know  
a thing to marvel at  
a thing to revile.

Geary Hobson

#### BARBARA'S LAND REVISITED—AUGUST 1978

This time you're with me  
and we pull into Claude  
much cooler than it was that other time  
thanks to your new Toyota's air-conditioning.

The clouds around the town  
are still buffalo-shaped  
and dust-devils still skitter  
along the interstate.  
Claude's like a white adhesive bandage  
lying on the blister  
of the Staked Plains' northern rump  
and we come to the same ice-cream stand  
though now called the Dairy Mart.

Claude looks like it's changed a bit.  
"Prog-gressed"—as they say here.  
A big new grain elevator loomed  
a bland castle of commerce  
as we came into town from the west.  
I see they've got a new Chevy place  
spic-'n'-span models all ready to roll  
Yes things have changed.

Meanwhile back at the Dairy Mart  
(formerly the Tastee Freeze)  
Connie Sue—as her name tag says—  
waits to take our orders.  
“What y’all gonna have?”  
And as usual you take all day  
to make up your mind.  
But I know what I want.  
“I’ll have a chocolate milkshake”  
Connie Sue smiles she is young  
blonde high-school seniorish  
probably dreaming of fall cheerleader tryouts.

I drink the milkshake  
celebrating this time nothing in particular  
no Comanche centennial no Palo Duro Canyon fight.  
With you here with me there’s at least  
one Comanche now in Claude again.

I’m feeling good about Claude  
as we leave heading east—Oklahoma-bound.  
The browning-green land all around  
Connie Sue who was “nice as pie”  
as they say here.  
Feeling good that is until someways  
out of Claude and a state cop pulls us over.  
“Lemme see your driver’s li-cense”  
and all the old fear comes back  
the wound beneath the flesh.

Claude, I’m not writing anymore poems about you.

Geary Hobson



**for white antelope**

i lift toward the sun  
as the wind lifts feather by feather  
redtail hawk and crow

my sorrows are circling  
they are a bird my relatives hear

as the earth remembers  
we will remember

nothing endures  
only the earth and sky

**Lance Henson**

**impressions of the cheyenne way**

it is dawn  
pity the names we have spoken

touch these feathers that have flown  
your road

grandfather cedar  
i am picking up your ways

maheo walks among us  
in a wind of sage the world  
is dreaming

scent of water  
the smoke has circled

i am looking for your face

**Lance Henson (Cheyenne)**  
**Maurice Kenny (Mohawk)**

9

our father  
maheo

i send my song  
the darkest sinew of my life

pity me  
this night opens on my small spirit

i am alone

**Lance Henson**

**YAIKNI**  
**Strawberry Moon**

a fierce serpent's tail  
lies across my legs;  
its mouth breathes into my mouth  
    (when elms were sweet  
    and squash tasted of sun,  
    corn grew in circles  
    outside the village  
    near streams where trout  
    dove through air for spiders  
    and cedar scented afternoon)

it has lain upon my back  
under the west wind . . .  
muskrat in its jaw . . .  
more days than needles  
on the tamarack

(sweetgrass is for weaving  
and summer berries  
for a child's tongue;  
eagles soar, wolves trot  
mountain slopes)

a youth will come  
and his arrow  
will rid my spine of this serpent

. . .  
together we will watch  
it quiver in the falling dusk  
(turtle eyes the east  
smoke rises from a house  
though snow covers pine  
the roots are deep  
and will survive winter)

the serpent will return to the sea  
and though it leaves a fang mark  
on my throat it will fade  
(the bear awakens  
to the smell of crocus  
it is time for bathing  
and then for planting  
and for a good smoke by the fire

. . .  
I will talk with shadows  
seek the May thistle  
the June berry . . .)  
and be healed

Maurice Kenny

## SIXTEEN POSTHOLES

Sixteen postholes is what we dug. These were for a roofed shelter over the gambling place. It was right next to the roundhouse where World Renewal Dance is held every spring. The shelter was for shade, we said, but it was really for rain.

Rain happens a lot at Renewal time. Great, jagged-legged lightning beings walked down the mountain and the forks of their fingers threw heavy solid sheets of water all down the mountain. The People would crowd the roundhouse, and the other house and barn, and families would be laughing soaking wet in their cars, waiting for the rain to pass. "It's a good sign." Yes, this is what most everybody said.

Sixteen postholes is what we dug, for tomorrow. Then Charlie and I began raking the grounds, starting at the dance circle right next to the big tan oak. Raking outward from the fire hearth, to the east, then south, and west and north.

A good busy day, getting firewood ready for six fires, taking benches and tables out of storage, washing pots and pans. Then pretty soon the sun is over Storm Mountain and Charlie says softly, "They're here." And we stop to watch the pair of redtail hawks who always come to circle the grounds.

And we hear Gladys: "Come and get it," and we go down to the creek to wash up. It's beans and fresh baked bread and big, lean steaks, then fruit pie and coffee, and who feels like working after that?

A little later, we're hoeing the small garden, working real slow. Gladys is sitting on the porch with a bowl of something, getting it ready for tomorrow. She never sits still. "Gladys, you never sit still," I once said. "Well, I'm not a stone," she answered. So maybe I was given

something to think about. I wasn't sure, but I thought about it anyway.

After a warm, wet night, fanned to motion  
by wings of nighthawks, we found  
an early morning laughter in the sun,  
the kind of good feeling given, not often  
but just enough to let you know  
that you're really lucky to be,  
just to be.

Twelve fat toads, maybe slightly  
indignant at being captive  
there at the bottom of postholes,  
two in one hole, mating, "Ah,  
look there," said Charlie,  
"nothing bothers those two."

So one by one, except the two  
we didn't wish to separate,  
we carried the toads just up the hill  
and set them in shade, sat on our heels,  
and they squatted there regarding us  
a little while, communicating maybe  
with fat throat puffs, then  
hopped away one by one,  
except for the two.

And Charlie just looked at me,  
his eyes asking that message  
which is so much a part of him:  
hey, aren't we fortunate?

And so we had a good one to tell at lunch time,  
especially about the two that, "they was wrassling, I  
guess." And Gladys fixed us with a dubious eye, because  
she doesn't go too much for that kind of talking. She must  
have thought about it all through lunch. As we were getting  
ready to go back to work, she said, "Twelve toads, huh? I  
guess somebody's going to be lucky gambling." And of  
course Charlie must have thought about that all afternoon,

because he was more quiet than usual: which means he hardly said anything at all, instead of the two or three short answers he reserves for my constant questions.

Sixteen postholes and twelve toads is what I mostly remember from that time. And Charlie gambling, and not seeming able to lose.

**Peter Blue Cloud / Aroniawenrate**

### **SKY OF DEPARTING**

Bone whistle:  
At the river, hoofbeats  
Of horses on the ice;  
White crystals nameless in song.

A feather drifts in the snow.  
I think of spring, granite  
Veins beneath Montana plains,  
Amplifying the belly of the sun.

Orange-striped bug of the aspen,  
Trampling the bookstore counter,  
Where else will you outwit the storm?

Beyond windows, all paths  
Merge where the mind  
Is a stone among stars.

Surfacing through clouds, the jet;  
Its winter trail following  
The ancestors, following buffalo.

Twirling on its flame  
Of earth and sky, the moon  
Dangles from a ring.

Home, in our mountains, I sweat  
For what the spirit counts.

**Duane Niatum**

**MASK OF THE WOMAN**

*after a mask carved by Marvin Oliver*

Your eyes black as winter  
gleam like obsidian.  
I have come from the trees

from the darkness between them.  
The roundness of my face  
was carved by your eyes black as winter.

You made my mask from alder  
I am the rich woman, my cheekbones stained  
with red cedar, I have come from the trees.

I live by the brake fern  
near the burn area where deer feed  
their eyes full with winter,

they nibble at the underbrush  
thick and thistled, we hunt them  
when they come from the trees.

You have inlaid my abalone smile  
in the hollows of cedar-stained alder  
captured eyes black as winter.  
We have come from the trees.

**Jo Cochran**

**MASK OF THE MAN**

*after a mask carved by Marvin Oliver*

The moan opens wide your mouth  
this is the mask of the hunter,  
who grips his knife over the seal's belly,  
above the fur cleanly slicked  
back with water. Her eyes roll  
the moan opens wide her mouth.

This is the season for the hunter  
as you slit down her length  
as you grip the knife and scrape  
meat from her ribs, then carefully roll  
back the pelt. The bull seal watches  
from the water, the howl opens wide his mouth.

He charges over the ice at you  
the blue high on your cheekbones deepens with anger.  
You grip the knife, thrust outward,  
as the bull lunges and lashes his teeth.  
He pierces your neck and shoulder.  
The howl opens wide your mouth  
as you grip the knife on the ice near his mate.

**Jo Cochran**



**FRIENDS**

I'll feed them nine-day old corn soup  
while teaching crooked Indian chants.

A storm is listening to my drum,  
it throws blue lightning  
reminding me to sing off tune.

It kills the voice in all of them  
rolling in my bloody notes.

"Murderess,

    Murderess,

        we'll haunt your songs  
        in the morning's drum  
        while infesting your words  
        with cancer."

Leaving bones to bead  
an Indian's life

they tried to call their own,

I'll beat the morning's drum at night

        and play a crooked song.

Martha Conallis

**HIGHWAY I-40 EAST**

She woke up in Oklahoma  
(somewhere)

Intoxicating breath whined at the  
big blue sign reading I-40 EAST

She had spent the night  
with her white-lined friend

The singing of Cerrillos Road  
had driven her east with her bottle  
to cry on mother's blankets

Hushing the time of day  
she had lost the dance with her  
melancholy Apache husband

Still high on her whiskey breath  
she cursed the sun for singeing  
her tired eyes

Dry throat,  
empty stomach,  
and one elegant tear  
quenches her thirst.

**Martha Conallis**

**STORIES MY GRANDMOTHER TOLD**

She braided my hair  
told me stories of a  
time almost forgotten  
spoke of how the seven  
little sisters became the  
Big Dipper  
One day she told me how  
my grandfather passed on  
After a long illness he was  
ready to die and said  
"Any day is a good day to die"  
She said he held many secrets  
of medicine and power  
Before he died he ripped the  
corners of his thin-lipped  
mouth open  
Just to release the powers  
and spells he had put on  
others  
My grandmother said an owl  
was killed that day  
I believe that owl

**Etheleen Poolaw**

**DEEP RIVER WIDE WITH HANDS**

Turtle to the north  
swim across for me  
so that I may learn your  
ways  
I know you will venture  
out because your tribe will  
carry on through me  
Venture into the river  
and become  
one  
Deep river wide with hands  
I thought that I would  
step in alone but the ice  
around the edge cut me  
Branch to the south  
show me how to float  
The branch knowing that he  
could did so downstream  
Alligator you are thin  
but you swim well  
Won't you take me across  
Knowing that you can  
Knowing too that you are thin  
take me and he did  
But the inside of him  
smells dead  
Brother Coyote  
Why have you eaten me  
Brother please  
just take me across

**Etheleen Poolaw**

**texas night snake**

my bones behind me  
i bleed brass tacks  
smiling in  
my sinew climbs  
death sliding  
over ice  
where i walk  
old women scream  
beneath the pavement  
my shadow burns  
its print  
drip  
drip  
drip

**Robyn Renea Perry****to my grandfather**

when he was young  
they beat the self out of him  
when he was an old man  
we had to bring him to the table  
  
he was a man  
who said he would take leftovers  
  
when i was young  
i didn't save his silver dollars  
but as i grow old  
i will never spend his words

**Robyn Renea Perry**

LAST RUNNING MAN

Nothing could save him.  
Not the visions the old ones sought  
nor the promise his pocketed education  
foretold.

He knew there were songs  
hidden in grey marshes.  
Rising,  
offering light  
for cranes to carry pieces of our lives  
towards the sun of new days.

Yet it was never enough.  
For he knew too well of fossil flesh,  
some elder's skin, tucked and preserved  
in guarded archives  
scattered along the very trails they walked  
lain in concrete temples of industrial sludge.

Somehow he thought of their unrest in glass display.  
Counting the greased fingertips left by eager patrons  
longing for impressions of their own past.

He felt alone in a country of thieves.

Throughout the dark distance  
his eyes searched the hills of his father  
in an effort to understand  
how easily these things had been taken.

But back home  
a cemetery where the last of his kinfolk slept  
surrounded by a circle of asphalt  
was now a parking lot for consumers  
now a T.G.&Y.

“This is the elegy they write for my people,” he thought.  
“This is how we are consumed.”

In the thin air he dreamed himself.  
The last running man.  
To find one stream with sweet flowing water.  
One road where men greeted one another in a good way.  
**Jon W. West**

## **B.S. AND FAST FACTS**

five gallons of regular and a quart of pennzoil  
led to a conversation with an attendant at a DX  
service station about Gene LeRoy Hart  
and Indians in general.

I asked,

“Isn’t it incredible that the whole city  
of Tulsa was once part of an entire Creek  
village?”

with a loaded gas nozzle in his right hand  
he looked up and told me:

“That’s bullshit. This station’s been here  
for years.”

**Jon W. West**

**from THE POET'S ANALYST**

weightless reality  
footfalls printless  
on naked snow . . .  
snakes raven guard  
the buried door  
through stark sumach  
arbor . . . marks  
the garden's edge  
. . . my sitting stone  
iced to the core

serpent ancient  
abiding coiled  
reclining on  
my island stone  
deeply sighing  
. . . clearly dying

snowsnake black  
patterned-diamond back  
flame inlay . . . crimson yellows  
eyes waning topaz  
beckon whispers  
me to mind  
the vision that is mine  
inlaid flame design  
by my hand to carve  
in out of wood

**Rokwaho**



## NEW DAY CHANT

blue, blue  
                   fresh as new dew  
 the night sky  
                   soon is blue  
 the black sea  
                   soon is blue  
 all around  
                   soon blue too  
 blue, blue  
                   like morning dew  
                   like morning dew  
                   like morning dew

William Oandasan

## THE JANITOR

*for John Nims*

Late after work a man sweeps an office.  
 He can't go home until the floor is finished:  
 swept, mopped, waxed. The brush with the long metal  
           handle  
 is pushed around the filing cabinet and under the desks and  
           chairs.  
 He mumbles now searching still for dust  
 while pushing it toward the door.  
 A draft in the hall raises some dust  
 and pushes it back at him.  
 He keeps the beat of the soft sound of his sweeping,  
 but now furiously, back and forth, as he  
 bumps the desk and bangs a wall leaving a dent.  
 He mutters: "Dust, dust, dust." He raises the broom,  
 shaking it at the surrounding silence.

William Oandasan

NOTES FROM BRITISH COLUMBIA

1.

We're heading north  
through the Idaho panhandle  
for British Columbia  
Steve driving—watching the  
land zip by—seeking a tie with  
this world occupied  
by foreigners  
and I am just watching through  
small towns—for Indians of course—  
I see them here and there  
apparent  
standing around deciding directions  
We nod.

At the border, the guard  
carries an amiable conversation  
with Steve and asks him if  
I am a hitchhiker,  
how long has he known me  
No questions directed at me  
no broken English replies  
Steve not hearing the years of  
previous such dialogue  
convinces the guard that I  
am Steve's friend  
I sit quietly pissed cause  
I know Steve has established a rapport  
and I will not be sent back to  
the res in chains after all.

Fooled 'em, hah? We're across,  
Canada now infiltrated with Shawnee Indians  
I tell Steve, one day  
there will be an Indian border guard  
who will

lean across and ask if this  
is my truck and why is Steve driving  
it—and I'll tell him  
"Ahhh, he's  
a good boy who works for me."

## 2.

He doesn't hear the words  
inside me  
Kokanee Glacier, the huge peaks,  
disguise the voice  
Inside the cave of hot springs  
we sit barely touching in  
the steaming waters  
barely hearing each other  
over the din of crying children near  
the entrance  
I wonder waiting for the ferry  
to haul us across Kootenay Lake  
if I know any of the words  
inside him  
Waiting in the bar we put  
American coins in a Canadian jukebox  
I sure like to hear Mr. Bojangles  
but not at the 49.

## 3.

Crawford Bay Annual Logger's Fair  
and we're here, muscles weak  
from the hot springs—  
I search the crowds for  
an Indian face  
One—but she's an older lady  
fixed up to pass for white,  
I don't interrupt her dream  
except for a glance

Women axe throwers hurling  
double bladed destruction at  
a wooden bull's eye  
loggers climbing poles and  
chopping for a stop watch  
They yell, whistle, and burn pink skin  
from mountain openings of a north sky,  
of a north sky that surrounds them  
with wilderness when they are  
not watchful  
Chariot races and horse events—  
There they are  
I see Tony, standing alone, on the  
fringes, Kootenai Indian  
We sit in the shade, share tobacco  
Steve beside me not knowing  
this great event taking place in  
my belly  
I learn how Indians are treated here,  
even their white friends pity  
them and know nothing about them  
except what they think they see  
I felt it myself from the whitefolks  
not able to openly deal with my  
southern arrogance  
We say "See you later"  
to Tony and leave the  
same way we came  
over the fence.

4.

We found an island  
where we skipped rocks  
across the lake  
making magic, making beauty,  
rock skipping, making them dance  
Steve won over me but

I have an old wound in  
my shoulder, ayyyyyyyyy.

Space, quiet, the bird sounds,  
the easy lapping of the  
lake  
and in silence  
we sift the sands for  
tiny crystals once used in making  
beads so they say  
I keep wanting to say something  
about the seasons, about friendship,  
about learning the other ways  
but inside there is always that  
hold when talking to a whiteman  
even when he is my friend .

Stoicism

On the pier near Zeke's place  
we rest in the evening sun  
changing rocks  
changing color  
light sparkling in our eyes  
one with the lake  
and Kokanee Glacier  
Thoughts of manhood  
and the words poured forth  
across the pier  
grabbing the pain inside  
like the alarm of tornado  
on the Oklahoma plains  
Goddamn you  
Can't you hear the  
meanings of earth and  
bear—p'qua  
Don't you know we  
walk this land  
waiting

living  
dancing  
watching  
laughing  
hunting  
singing  
dying  
until we are free?  
This touch I give you,  
don't be afraid.

**5.**

Ahneen—

and we're heading back  
this morning  
cold and sunny like early  
autumn instead of spring  
Great snowcapped peaks  
powering above the Kootenay  
are forever still, holding  
shadows of clouds as we  
pass by  
There is no end no bottom  
to the depths of silence  
between us  
We each talk of  
different worlds but the  
sun is warm through the truck's windows  
P'qua was near the  
dumps, we saw each other  
knowing our dependence on the  
fringes of civilization  
One mile to U. S. border  
and I ride  
remembering how to be Stoic.

**Barney Bush**

**ROSE ANN TSO**

when Rose Ann Tso  
got hit by a car  
on Highway 550  
by My Place Bar

no one knew  
til morning light  
froze her blood  
on the hard  
winter road.

the rancher that hit her  
drug her 150 feet  
then someone else  
ran over her  
again.

“thought it was  
a dog.  
or something.”  
they said.

“well. that’s that.”  
the highway patrolman  
said looking at  
Rose Ann Tso

**Luci Tapahonso**

**For my brother, who was shot defending  
a friend, on a December night in 1966**

he died alone  
in sixty-six  
in a wooden shack  
off a rough road  
near the river.

it was no way to go  
his blood spreading warm  
slow in a circle  
into the long  
wooden cracks in the floor.

damn the drink  
and misplaced aim

that we have lived  
to this time  
filling his space  
with his faceless children's voices  
and hard, dull ache  
of  
dead hopeless grief.

**Luci Tapahonso**





**DAUGHTERS SLEEPING**

Yesterday the younger one slept in my arms.  
Today she curls beneath the orange umbrella  
watching me. I watch the sky  
for signs of bad weather  
so my eyes don't swallow her,  
don't take away the gold  
that breathes her quiet skin,  
the sun through orange cloth  
lighting her like honey.

And the older one  
sleeps like a stranger  
to the country of fear  
but we move enough in step together  
I walk those roads with her.

Beauties, I want to curve into your skin  
while you sleep,  
to suspend myself in you  
and tell you it is a warm world.  
Would I lie?  
I'll say that you are strong  
like a people who lived so long  
on fish, the glass scales  
and white lace of bones piled up  
and blew about their home  
a warm snow.

**Linda Hogan**

## from THE TREES

*1978 Mississippi*

Some memory, underground pulse  
has drawn me  
to these oaks and locusts  
carved now with the initials of lovers,  
small crosses and dates.

Those letters are windows of pitch,  
a language of years  
I see inside.

In this land  
dead bark  
is undermined by worms  
as my own flesh  
breaks down,  
small designs working their way beneath it,  
those arrangements of cells  
which brought me walking.

A thousand figures  
unfold their heritage of silence,  
strange alphabet  
sending out this message  
into a new life  
into words.

And listen.  
The crows are still  
talking about it.  
Red rocks underground  
are breaking open.

Linda Hogan

### **LOVE CHARM**

Eagle with feathers blazing,  
Come to me.  
White root of lightning,  
Come to me.  
Echoing thunder of mountains,  
Come to me.  
    Trembling wind,  
    Come to me.  
Brown eyes of my lover,  
Come to me.

**Duane BigEagle**

### **FIVE RIDERS IN CARDINAL RED**

Five riders came from the North. There were two women,  
    one  
holding a small child. Cardinal red was their color and  
there were leaves everywhere.  
They all seemed to be warriors, and when they came to the  
town well, the women drank first.  
It was only later that the silence was noted.  
There were no birds.  
And it had gotten very cold.  
  
It is like this without you,  
forever riding from town to town,  
through leaves, waiting to drink.

**William Bradd**

**FEAST DAY**

The last time  
I saw the moon rise  
was that night in Taos.  
It was the last time  
I was happy.  
It seems life was too good  
then, the dance slow and close,  
my arm linked with yours,  
occasionally a fringed shawl  
brushing against my bare leg  
and finally, the men singing  
The Moon Rising Over the Mountain  
song. I had expected  
my life to always  
be that way,  
the eternal rising,  
the song I thought  
I would always understand.

**Sandie Nelson**

from **THE SLEEP MAKER**  
(Nocichka Haya)

In Taskigi I was born,  
wrenched from the womb,  
    an evil spawn, nocturnal.  
Named "Coon-walking-in-the-night."  
Denied pap for stronger meat,  
    roasted heart of Mockingbird,  
raw meat of Deer,  
stewed Tortoise in the shell,  
    bland, saltless.  
Natural sugar from the belly  
    of the Bumble Bee.  
Sired by Ho-dul-gul-gi  
    of the Wind Clan.  
Mothered by her kindred  
    of the 'Coon Clan.

My endowment from this union:  
    power to make sleep of one  
or many as I choose.  
By edict of the powers  
    from the evil ones  
I lived in the endless bottoms  
    of the River Deep Fork.

Ayi-ha! I'm frightened of  
    my visage:  
    the livid scar across my face  
    from the claws of Bear.  
    Long hair, black and coarse,  
    a peculiar tic of spitting uncontrolled,  
    walking fast—like Fox trot,  
    head down.

Barefooted, pantaloons ripped and frayed,  
smelling of Wolf and Coyote.

The moon rises—fluorescent, exposing  
long black shadows,  
latticed, weird.

Mole Cricket starts his constant  
low whirring whistle.

Great Horned Owl, the Indian's  
harbinger of evil and good  
sounds a muffled summons,  
endearing to our cult.

“A fire! a fire!” the Little People shouted.

“We'll dance the Gar Dance and  
send you on your way!”

In my medicine bundle I felt the  
gar tooth, needle sharp.

Iss-sap-ka it is called.

They sang the Gar Song:

“We-hey-hayo-neh . . . .”

Beyond the pale in dark shadows,  
Wolves' eyes blink yellow.  
Halo-sahgada, the Cottonmouth,  
king of water snakes, arouses.

Screech Owl dives, snapping,  
making sounds like a child  
being throttled.

High moon now . . . .

Littlecoon of the Creeks  
Okisce!

Louis Oliver

THE HILLS OF TSA LA GI

*for Gene LeRoy Hart*

They framed him once  
and put him in their jail,  
and he escaped  
and stayed hid out three years  
with family and friends  
never really leaving home.  
And then they framed him once again—  
the second for a heinous crime.  
And then began (they say)  
the most intensive manhunt  
in the history of the state.  
They searched the woods.  
Two bloodhounds died.  
And Hart endured it ten more months  
before they got him.

A Cherokee can disappear from white men's eyes  
in the wooded hills of Oklahoma.  
Ned Christie hid out seven years.  
Billy Pigeon holds the record at eleven  
(and then they never really got him).

These hills are Cherokee,  
and Cherokees slip into their brambles and their brush  
like a fish glides through a stream.  
The *yonegs* enter as invading forces  
and hack and stomp and burn their way.

They say that long ago  
a boy so liked the woods,  
he took his family to live out there,  
and they became the bears.  
That boy was Cherokee.



I thank these hills for what they've done.  
 I thank them for their welcome.  
 I hurt for them  
 when white men cut their trees  
 or burn them up  
 or fence them off.  
 I pray that they'll endure.  
 I pray that Hart escapes again  
 and finds himself once more  
 in the safety of the hills of *Tsa la gi*.

Robert J. Conley

### 1730

oh, what had he ever known  
 in the dark forested valleys  
 of the western flowing streams  
 of royal transactions in London  
 And so they came to the strange shores  
 to this place called England  
 The Great Chiefs of the Cherokee Nation  
 Attakullakulla, the Little Carpenter, and Oconostota  
 so that even forty years later  
 when they came up again for the last time  
 The Great Warrior Path  
 as old men leading their young  
 to rid their nation forever of the British  
 he had a dream that night  
 in which the Red Coats pinned him down  
 and shot images of a far eastern city  
 its dirty streets and its sorrows  
 into the balls of his eyes

Sharon Doubiago

**NEAR CRATER LAKE**

Between hill and river the trail  
forks, edges deep in stone only  
shadows know, and only the stones  
can say which way my fathers took.  
Steps and lives have worn away  
the mountain agates' chalky maps  
so I can say they went this way  
or that and knew the sounds upon  
the land, knew too the rush of wings.  
The hill fork leads to a sky beyond  
the hill, the river fork down water  
fast with rainbows and quick jacks.

Ways my fathers walked are things I  
learn from hard stones. I lift my arms  
and hold the bear, the bull, the lost  
maidens, and the hunter mad for game;  
I make a prayer for the drawn bow  
to send beyond the sun and down  
the last dark corridor of sky:  
old fathers, when you come again,  
old fathers, tell me once again  
why the path forks and the river  
runs fast with fish to homes beneath  
another sky, homes beneath the sea.

**Jim Barnes**

**THE DAY I WAS CONCEIVED**

was, they told me, the middle  
of a yellow and turquoise time.

My Badger-father bent  
his silver head to earth,

pulled at his fingers  
till they hardened, turned  
to tufa. Then split the stone  
and carved within

the marks of lizards, human hands,  
Spider Woman, Kachin-mana,  
and the most ordinary of stones.  
He poured next the moon,

molten silver, into creases  
made ready. Like claws  
his fingers held the stone  
made to plow and scrape up through the world.

Badger-Man, Good Hands, with blinded soul,  
with an underworld-glow,  
was it a long time it took  
to cool the tufa, split it,

the solid-spilling moondust  
now marked by billions of scars.  
Mid-morning the heat began  
and grew as a pottery kiln but before that

a feather-mite of tufa lifted,  
was set down and stuck in the west  
by acorn tongues, cedar lodges,  
touched by shells still wet

from the sea, carried away  
in the mouths of dust devils.  
He would need a bone medicine tube  
incised with magic or obsidian

to see what he buried that day  
and forgot in the yellow and turquoise time.

And so my origin is one  
of rocks and badgers; I sing

but do not carve. My origin is one  
of moondust and medicine;

I dance but do not pray.

My origin is one of maize and mesquite;

I grow but do not live.

**Wendy Rose**

## **NAMING POWER**

They think I am stronger than I am.

I would tell this like a story but  
where a story should begin  
I am left standing in silence.

There has to be someone to name you.

There must be hands to raise you sun-high,  
old voices to sing you in, warm hands  
to touch you about, ancient words  
to bind you to your many selves,  
gentle spirits with yucca whips waiting  
as you learn to walk.

There has to be someone to name you.

The words have thundered in my body for thirty years.

Like amnesia, this way of being a fragment.  
Unfired pottery with poster paint splashed on  
to hide the crumbling cracking commonness  
left in the storeroom for a tourist sale.  
They'll make their buck or two from me but  
I will never be among them.

There has to be someone to name you.

I will choose the tongue for my songs;  
I am a young woman still; joining hands with the  
moon.

I am a creature of blood and it's the singing  
of the blood that matters, the singing of songs  
for keeping thunder, of songs for hollowing out  
mountains, of songs for awareness—always—of  
someone else, of songs that starve not for food  
but for being remembered.

There has to be someone to name you.

Aging with the rock of this ancient land I give myself  
to the earth; my red feet merge with the mesas  
and root in this desert, balance like the rainbow  
shaped in its dance, searching the sky for clouds.

Across asphalt canyons  
waits a thirty-year old woman to be named.

**Wendy Rose**

**Indian People: don't get it  
mixed up—this is all for you.**

I would never drift  
to the hanging-stage  
if I didn't know it would  
swing us to survival.

I would never slice my voice  
into electricity if I didn't think  
the spirits were straining  
to hear it.

I would never remain  
to do what I do if I didn't  
believe mostly in you.

**Wendy Rose**

**THE POLKA DOT KID TELLS  
ALL ABOUT SQUEEZE**

“You know where Larimer Street is  
in Denver. On Sundays mornings,  
we’d go to this drugstore  
and get Squeeze.

“The lady there would say,  
‘How many Squeeze will do for you  
this morning,’ and we’d tell her,  
and she’d give you Squeeze.

“The reason it’s called Squeeze  
is you take a tee shirt  
or sock, a clean one  
if you got one, but you really  
didn’t give a shit,  
and squeeze the Squeeze through  
to get the alcohol  
out of the paraffin.

“I used to have a tee shirt  
I always used.  
When you squeezed the Squeeze  
it’d leave a pink spot.  
I was called the Polka Dot Kid.

“When we rode the freights,  
we’d sit around a fire  
in a circle of the tins.  
We’d keep warm like that.

“That Green Lizard is good too,  
but not as good as Squeeze.”  
He wipes his mouth  
with the back of his scarred hand.  
“I was born as a pure baby  
near Clayton, New Mexico.”

Simon J. Ortiz

**THE OLD ONES****1.**

the old ones make patterns  
just outside my perception  
external blueprints move to appear  
from beyond visibility.  
i cannot unfocus enough  
to refocus on the message  
i need to hear.

my life crammed with:

bits of lives  
scraps of ideals  
pieces of change

that belong to fragmented visions:  
not my own.

it is the killing of things that bothers.  
the separation of: this from that  
the analytical shattering of:  
countless living things.

the old ones crowd  
the edges of my consciousness  
think me thoughts of fragmentation  
stare me through  
and all around me.  
ask me to articulate myself  
through them—the once was  
order and conversation  
that they knew and shared  
with all living things.

2.

these certain people  
argue life.

distribute anger onto unknown forces  
isolate and separate to:

find a cause  
that wrought effects  
that cut them down.

the whole

escapes the point of focus  
the balance held inherent  
in all that is.

and i fall back

fall

outside the thoughts  
the old ones bring  
become again those:

bits of lives  
scraps of ideals  
pieces of change—

fall back into analytical shattering of:  
living things.

3.

those feathers come  
to guide my path  
encourage my heart to understand  
the old ones come  
to speak in many ways:

Be strong  
(they say.  
Be good to yourself



(they say.  
 Be careful for yourself  
 and the life you share.

and they say—  
 you must learn to observe everything  
 so you will know and understand *your* power—  
 the power of: your own way.

you should learn these things:  
 carefully.

if you are not careful:  
 you will hurt yourself.

the old ones come  
 appear at the edges of my vision  
 remind me to care for myself  
 and the *words* i discover  
 for, they say *words*:  
 are like singing.

*words*  
 are like singing

(they say.

Carol Lee Sanchez

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