

UCLA

American Indian Culture and Research Journal

Title

Poetry

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/23f6v852>

Journal

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 37(4)

ISSN

0161-6463

Author

Masson, Michael

Publication Date

2013-09-01

DOI

10.17953

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>



Michael Wasson

MY BROTHER'S FIRST BULLET

Our father just shot himself
mom is cleaning up his leaking head

waiting for the ambulance to scream in
for the blood to dry in her fingernails.

My brother says nothing
as the sun blares harsh
and autumn air settles low on the reservation.

He finds the empty shell
mom hums a dim cleaning prayer
alongside the warped body.

Hungry and barefoot
he tastes air from the bullet clinking his teeth.

MICHAEL WASSON (*niimiipuu*) is from the Nez Perce Reservation in Idaho. He is currently an MFA candidate at Oregon State University, and his work is included or forthcoming in *Weave Magazine*, *Stonecoast Review*, *Talking River*, and *Yellow Medicine Review*, among others. Wasson has worked on Nez Perce language preservation as well as depopulation and labor issues facing elders abroad in Fukushima, Japan.

COYOTE'S LETTER ARRIVED TODAY

Try to imagine me:

Did you dream open the door?
I am the ghost of your storm entering the house.

I am the other song pocked of dusk.
I am the starving child hugging the shadows of people.
I am chiseled bones your people mourn during sunrise.

Are you willing to slice into my body?
When I'm drunk, can you lay me down on my side until I vomit?

Sing me your latest song. I'll try to make out the meaning.

Dance soft next to me. My flesh is still tender
from the violence of forgetting.

MOONVIEWING

Drunk on this light
I stand watching stars rattle.

The few pointing north appear to
fracture a baby's skull into shards

glowing unsteady across my hand.

Several more are the scattered skeleton of a boy
who burned during dawn.

A firefly wavers and rises over the garden
like a fleck of bone surfacing
to see the sky

until it fills with water and sinks.

NETWORK

Coyote is inked onto print, typed
then uploaded into computer light.

I forget his loneliness
singing of the old women
—the old men sculpted and sent nightward.

In his story, he builds a river by hand
and asks me in high-definition
who dances the ghost-road of ancestors today?

*Who will bury our bodies of sound?
And tomorrow where are we headed?*

I want to wash my hands in his river
search for it in images and audio.

In a video I find undiscovered lightning
imprinted in slowing water.

It vibrates like a howl dark in the horizon.

BECOMING

You became real to me
when you sang a universe over our father
who shot himself.

When my brother unraveled, clenched
his weeping fist, he mouthed

daddy's dead.

And that body before him stared into all of us.

CICADA

Hollowed mouth
 spun and woven into song

like the cicada pointed skyward
and drowned in its din of prayer

I climb heaving my ancestors.

By tonight
 I will wing each
 and push them up among stars.

‘AQÁAMKIN’IKAAY: WHEN MY BROTHER THOUGHT ABOUT HEAVEN

When my brother couldn't speak
until his mourning, he knew

God doesn't visit long on the reservation.

Last my brother heard
 our aunt tried shooting at him.
 Thought it was Bigfoot rummaging for dog food.

God's afraid of ticks—of people like us
grandpa said. My brother thought he's off

in Nez Perce heaven
dragging father's body not to a place
 but a godawful distance.

REVIVE

I dip your dry lightning
in water: branches of your light

root out. You breathe again
after centuries etched under earth.

Your body clamor,
you speak in natural song.

Why am I weeping? Because
I cannot understand.

BROTHER'S OWN SUICIDE

My brother hears an old whisper
from the battered window:

*Did you forget I promised you
this body—yours, mine, and your mom's?*

*Did you forget you are beautiful
even without me?*

Take that bullet out of your mouth.

Between us space rustles with breath.

INDIAN CHILD WELFARE ACT

I was born
during rippled gunshot.

My mother knew
she'd lose me.

Nameless, I starved myself
to hear faint voices

threaded into constellations
those lost without blankets, to hear

the breaths of newborns
hemmed and draped on a sunbeam.

Ashamed of my body, I failed
to carve myself beautiful at birth.