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Unfortunately, they are also very frustrating. The photographs don't go well with the text. They are not portraits of the people mentioned in the text. As a matter of fact, there are no names listed for the people whose pictures are presented. This ambiguity makes the photographs less of true portraits and more of a representation of some symbolic value. The approach smacks of Noble Old Savages, important not for who they are, but for the way they express the exotic. The whole odious implication is something Northland Press should have known to guard against. Besides, I think I knew some of those old people and I want to know if my memory is correct.

There are many books that chronicle personal experiences with the Navajo. Most of them build on an implicit assumption that because the people are exotic or unique, any interaction with them is worthy of publication. The subject validates the writing. Here I think the writing is of a quality that warrants attention, and the subject benefits from the writing. This may be because Bennett seems to have told these stories over and over again through the years. They take on a narrative life of their own like the tales with which she pairs them. Her stories reveal a person with respect and intelligence who is trying to understand another culture. The people in these stories come alive with strength and perception, but what really makes these personal experiences engaging is the warmth and personality that comes through.

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Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry. Edited by Duane Niatum. New York City: Harper & Row, 1988. 396 pages. \$24.95 Cloth. \$15.95 Paper.

Harper's Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry has been received with confused, obligatory, polite and dismissive hosannahs by a dominant culture press whose collective ear seems to be exclusively tuned to the latest arch and stillborn "nouveau," the presumably ironic wits of svelte post-Cardin despondency, the exhausted cavaliers of urban befuddlement hoping to be taken for disciples of "The Cloud of Unknowing," the nail parings of the commonplace cunningly arranged in lines too brief

to carry any weight at all: the post-Minimalist, the post-Modern, the post-Sensible.

Fortunately the shopworn transparency of their post-Terminal orthodoxy cannot disguise the inadequacy of their critical equipment when faced with a monumental achievement by an ethnically distinct and "alien" (non-European) body of writers who have reclaimed considerable turf among us—not in land, but in their mastery of the alien English tongue.

The questions of ethnicity and what determines it, acculturation and the political response of the 'sixties,' tribal consciousness and an emerging pan-Indian culture, the "horsification" of the truck, Zuni jewelry featuring Mickey Mouse in iconostasis and the progressive depredation of ancestral lands and people unprecedented in its visionary compassionlessness, while interesting and important, have nothing to do with poetry in its root form and essence.

What is of primary importance to this reviewer is that Native American poetry is rooted in the oral tradition. And that this oral tradition itself flowers in and from myth, ritual, ceremony, vision, contemplation, tales, winter fires and legends and, most importantly, song. Among the sacred of these genres, there is posited the real presence of the god among the witnesses and the abolition of real time or its doubling into a present which is simultaneous with (and secondary to) the presence of primordial/ancestral/"divine" time. The vehicle of the summoning of this real presence is primarily the voice of the singer/chanter/reciter, though paint, costume and ecological materials are also appropriately and variantly utilized. The range of prosodic devices which formally structure any particular example derive from the oral nature of the form, its manner of tutelage and of performance. Within the most primary device of repetition and variation, there are local (tribal) vocabularies which are only beginning to be studied in the relatively new and richly promising discipline of ethnopoetics.

Cutting through the fascinating details of the complex usages of verbal structures once assumed to be simple, naive and unsophisticated, one may posit that the primary element in traditional Native poetics is what is termed in Western critical analysis the quality of "voice."

Voice, among the native poets of the *Harper's Anthology*, is not merely a particular sum of particular and measurable effects.

Voice here is qualified by what I term the notion of "stance." This "stance" of the voice is at one with the creative source(s) of the cosmos as well as a calling forth of those powers in a particular and harmonious ritual pattern and presence. Voice, in the Native American positioning, is closer to the "divine" than are the Christian psalms in that traditional native "texts" possess their essential being only on the singer's breath and in the ears of the witnessing community in the immediacy and efficacy of the ritual moment.

As the context of the ceremonial has moved into the present, the voice of the singer/chanter/reciter remains that of the ancestors, but the ears of the hearers are no longer universally attuned to the language of the ritual or to its underlying structure. The cultural surround of the ritual performance likewise is no longer exclusively Indian, but a complex layering of Indian, Anglo, Hispanic and other strands.

This disjuncting of the traditional song from its place within a unitary and shared common culture, this *anomalization* of the traditional song, has been accompanied by the genesis and growth of Native American poets, all of whom proceed historically from the Sacred Tongue/Holy Breath oral tradition. Their collective adaptation to the European linear/print media presentation is more than a choice predicated by common sense and necessity. It is a challenge which calls forth a response from a developed spiritual and historical consciousness, from the chakras of compassion and outrage and with an assurance and an articulateness of technique which encompasses both the "primitive"/oral usage and the range of historic/linear prosodics.

Thus the casting of one's voice in the language of the conqueror and the oppressor again, paradoxically, becomes a sacred matter. For now one's tongue must carry not only to every corner of the great diaspora, but also carry everywhere within the land and heart of the oppressor, tearing the veils of mendacity and healing woundedness wherever they are found.

The three poets whose work I shall briefly touch on here are important American poets: Roberta Hill Whiteman, Ray A. Young Bear and Gail Tremblay.

Ms. Whiteman's voice, clear and pure, austere and musical, especially in the inner voicings of the vowel sounds, creates itself, as well, in and through pools of dark oracularity. Her imagery is drawn from the natural and the niminal as well as from the

flotsam of the everyday, the commonplace. Through the skilled and offbeat rhythms of her irony, both of these sources become invisible marks on "the fierce edge of our twilight." (*From the Sun Itself*, 223-224) Here is the final cadence of *The White Land* (219)

"Regular rhythms bridge my uneven sleep.
What if the wind in the white land keeps you?
The dishwasher's luminous; a truck
grinds down the street."

Here, as in traditional song, the object and the word are charged with (sacred) portent. The irony here does not serve to denigrate the tribal model, but to elevate contemporary artifacts to a charged and signficatory purpose.

In *From the Sun Itself* which deals with the poet's encounter with a hawk, we have this pure but problematic stanza:

"The mottled light underneath his wings
scattered into beeches below.
Heady with flight, I stood silent, for
he knew what the human heart renounces." (224)

The abrupt reversal of role in the third and fourth line is utterly masterful in the economy of its truth, in its rootedness in the quivering immediacy of visionary perception and in the quickness of its tongue and mind, objects which are here equivalent and perfect functions of each other. The poet in her identification with the hawk in flight completes and realizes this "act of becoming" (of transformation, rather than of identification) through silence and movelessness. Thus the hawk completes his knowledge, too, of what the human heart renounces: *everything* but the pre-disposition of devotion and the disposition for vision.

As these poems speak with a kind of serene outrage against the continuing passing of the Indian from America and of America from the Indian, it is ironic that contemporary reviewers fail to see this vision of a fading rural/nature centered America as having cogency and pathos for our own grandfathers and grandmothers of the dominant culture, and, of course, for ourselves.

Ray A. Young Bear's voice is playful, colloquial, unadorned, but no less given to oracularity and mystery. Somewhere between the high seriousness of shamanistic usages and the deceitful mockery of the trickster, Young Bear pitches his tent from

which he also displays the pennants of a deeply restrained lyricism and an austerity of diction completely aware of its effect of circumscription even as it overflows the severity of that circumscription. Here I am thinking of the close of *Emily Dickinson, Bismarck and The Roadrunner's Inquiry* (270-275):

“Mesmerized, she can only regret
and conform to the consequences
of an inebriate's rage
while I recede from her
a listless river
who would be glad
to cleanse and touch
the scar the third mutant-flower
made as it now burns and flourishes
in her arms.
I would go ahead and do this
without hint or indication
you would accept me,

Dear Emily.”

There is also an extremely oblique and grotesque humor at play here. What is at the heart of this seduction of the dead, what subtle mockery at play amidst the elegiacs?

Young Bear's voice moves in a variety of shapes and directions. The virtuosity of his experiment reminds me of the Robert Frost of *The Witch of Coos*, a long poem almost exclusively preoccupied with *voice* and the implicit notion that the voice of the other must also become one's own. Young Bear's daring also extends to the making of long poems whose affective impulse moults and transforms our expectations of its singular intent into juxtapositions of allegory, trickster tales, satire, myth, shaggy dog story, emblem and elegy. There is daring bravura to Young Bear's work as he makes himself and takes his chances before us with the careless grace of the circus acrobat, performing without a net but with an innocence, insouciance and assurance that speak to us of the bodily nature and delight hidden at the heart of all being.

Gail Tremblay's voice returns in quiet assurance to the place of the ancestors where the turning knowledge of the seasons holds itself in certainty and reverence. The songs of tradition transmute the agony of a people to a ritual place beyond pain.

So does Ms. Tremblay's voice treat the terrible sufferings of isolation, alienation, death and extinction as timeless pebbles scattered in a landscape, as falling feathers poised within a wind. Unuttered, there is nevertheless a sense of purpose being wrought, a sense of spirit being forged in the depths of all of us in our human heartedness. Ms. Tremblay's work perhaps draws a portion of its eloquence from the great rhetors of her Iroquois ancestors, an eloquence which is utterly spare and stoic, holding nothing in excess.

The keen observation of *To Grandmother on Her Going* (195-196), the most personal of her poems to appear in the anthology, might seem in its dispassion and uncompromising severity to verge on cruelty, on sacrilege:

"Old woman, time and your own
bad habits ravaged you at the end."

This, however, is a hieratic portrait in which there is no room for sentiment or for fictive epiphanies. Self-knowledge and knowledge of the other is brought into utter identity through the stoic linaments of tribal survival. In some sense this portrait of grandmother is a school for survival and, perhaps, a preparation for her own passing.

Duane Niatum is to be doubly thanked for the leaves he has gathered here: for presenting native poets in a generous format by a major American publisher, and more importantly for presenting an anthology of American writing which, with Donald Allen's *New American Poetry, 1945-1960*, shall stand as the most seminal and influential collections of the latter twentieth century.

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