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Author

Ellefson, J. C.

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dynamics of one style of Navajo weaving. More than this, it should have brought into balance a broader, cross-cultural dynamic that helps the reader accurately learn about the material culture under discussion. Unfortunately, it does not.

Kathleen Whitaker

School of American Research

Ndakinna (Our Land): New and Selected Poems. By Joseph Bruchac. Albuquerque, NM: West End Press, 2003. 88 pages. \$11.95 paper.

It was a busman's holiday like any other. I was a creative writing workshop leader at a summer conference center in Maine. The arrangement was simple: from 9:00 a.m. to noon we circled up for an intense, passionate exchange of writing and ideas, and from noon to 9:00 a.m. my family and I were at large by the ocean, a 21/7 free ride by the sea. At 9:01 on the first day a bearded man arrived, sat down at my left hand, and asked me what he should read. I began to list off the books I liked, but before I got very far, he stopped me.

"No, you don't understand. I'm dying of prostate cancer. I don't want to just pass the time reading. I want to ride forever into a book. I want to live a hundred lives."

For a moment the ocean waves froze at crest and trough. Birds hung in midair. I realized later that there was now a new world order of the book list, a new literary Maslowian hierarchy of need.

I told the man that I'd get back to him, and I did by the end of the week, but it wasn't easy: the imagination takes over, and soon I could hear the hushed conversation of doctors outside the dark bedroom door, the grieving of family, and I saw a stack of books by the nightstand that no longer belonged—novels with failed endings written by famous people, uneven Pulitzer Prize-winning poetry.

The week in Maine went well. We had excellent weather, and the workshop delivered a stellar reading to the community, but I have to admit, I'll never be the same. Now, when asked to recommend a book, I shutter, so I'm shuttering now when I say that everyone needs to read *Ndakinna (Our Land)* by Joseph Bruchac.

Ndakinna is a collection of new and selected poems written over twelve years. The poems reflect on the natural world of New England and elsewhere and how we two-leggeds get along in it. Some are travel poems; some are reportage of encounter, emotional history if you will. All of the collection, however, reflects Bruchac's limitless capacity to allow his experience to become ours. It's the great storyteller's transfer of power. Why live one life if we can shape-shift into multiple existences? In essence, throughout this collection Bruchac becomes a Native American godfather of sorts: he gives us an offer we can't refuse. In a certain sense he's giving us twelve more years of life, and all we have to do is read.

It's easy to like these poems. I particularly like how we're invited into another world from the onset in "An Abenaki Song of the Stars" (3). Here Bruchac tells us

There was never a time
when we were not dancing . . .
We stars are the rain
held in clouds of heaven.

The rhythm of this world is provocatively drumlike, and the beautiful assonance of the *e* in *never* and *held* and *heaven* begins to weave the sound of a chant, a song. It's a simple poem, true, but it's also an incantation and an invitation to enter another place in another time, when words were like magic—where "we have always been dancing / dancing above your dreams."

This poetic music and song can be found in the first poem of the collection and in the last poem, "Turning from the Klan" (87). Here in the penultimate stanza Bruchac writes, "My young son refused to wear these robes, / even as a joke, without knowing the story / which I never told him." Again the drums, and again the chant with the haunting repetition of the long *o* of *robes*, *joke*, *knowing*, and *told*. Again we're under the storyteller's incantation. This is the way it is in the first and last poem of the collection; this is the way it is throughout *Ndakinna*.

Along with the music I'm also grateful for the inclusive tone of this collection. In the literature business we call it psychic distance. When I read these poems I feel like I'm family. Here's how it works: regardless of how much Native American blood the reader has, we're invited to join the race with the persona poem "Mannigebeskwaw" (9). Bruchac creates this inclusion immediately:

When your people see me
walking in the forest
they know my name
by the distance I keep
between myself
and any mother who would scold me.

The reader's people are The People, and there are no others: no one is outside looking in here. Bruchac did say "your people." With two words, we're in the metaphorical river; we're invited into the culture. Bruchac gives us another enculturational invitation with "Walking at Night in Shade Brook Swamp" (7), a poem that alludes to the cautionary tale of the Abenaki "Swamp Dweller" or the Penobscot's "Jug Woman." In this poem the speaker wonders,

Whose face am I wearing
in this cycle
although I know
whose spirit I carry?

These lines are pure rocket fuel. This question is necessary on every college or job application, every marriage or hunting license. In one question our racial or ethnic divisions melt away. With one question gender issues and sexual preference become meaningless. How can we hate what we possibly were? Who knows who we were and what we did in the last cycle, and to make matters worse, it is difficult to hate when our faces keep changing. Yes, a few lines like these can clear a muddy stream of bigotry: they can even help us all understand what it means to be a human being.

There is even more to admire about this collection. I like how Bruchac takes us into *Ndakinna*, but I'm also grateful for where he takes us. Traditionally, *Ndakinna* is the northeastern region of the United States and Canada, a place of forest, mountains, and streams, but toward the end of the collection we get a geographical expansion. In "Snapping Turtle on the Expressway" (56) we learn that our land can be covered in concrete; in "Seeing the Whales" (57) we learn it can be covered in water. We're in Alaska with "Raven's Song" (76). Or our land might also be on the European continent, as in "Crossing into West Germany" (82) and "The Baux" (84). At the end of the road I have to thank Bruchac for the question I infer from the poems: where isn't *Ndakinna*? Forgive me, but the inclusion is overwhelming. When I read these poems, I imagine lights going on all over globe.

It's a truism that nothing is perfect, and *Ndakinna* is no exception. My fundamental problem with the book is that it ends. I'm with Jack Kerouac here: I think poems should be one continuous improvisational solo by a tenor man, but no one has been able to achieve that—outside of the stars in the opening poem of the collection. But there is something else. I'm also not crazy about the cover. I know this is simply a matter of taste, which is difficult to truly qualify, but I find it Native American kitsch, like those rubber knives and purple headdresses. The cover just doesn't come up to the poems, so the only thing to do at this point is to revise the old adage; indeed, in this case you can't judge a cover by its book. This said, I want to be clear about something else: I sure would like to paddle that canoe.

A Native woman in my hometown of Plainfield, Vermont, once told me about her vision. She saw all the two-leggeds in a circle—and I'm talking about everyone in this world. She and the Creator were walking to each man and woman, and to each the Creator delivered everything that person needed to know for a happy life. My friend was able to hear everything, and then the vision faded, leaving her wanting more, I suppose, but transformed. Books like *Ndakinna* (*Our Land*) are equally visionary: if we take the time to really read these poems, they'll make us better. No, you're not going to get the whole pie, but books like *Ndakinna* are must-reads. When everyone's cell phone goes off at once, we can remember that there are still stars forever dancing over our heads; we can remember that words are magic. Read this book. Recommend it to all goodhearted bearded men, men who might even wear a different face in the next cycle, a woman's perhaps. Let's put it on top of the pyramid of the New World Order Book List. Where we're all going, it's exactly what we'll need.