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question this relationship to Christianity (p. 128). A shopping mall on the reservation would not charge a "state tax," rather than not charge a "federal tax," as they say (p. 153).

Gorman also insists that Navajo religion is older than Christianity (p. 127), although the Native American brand must have originated in the 1700s with contact with the Pueblo Indians, and he argues the anti-archeological view, which has become fashionable in some circles today, that the Navajos have always lived in the Southwest and are the descendants of the Anasazi (p. 126). They are not Athabascan, therefore, which does not explain how the Navajos spoke a language which has roots in the far north, around Lake Athabasca. The ceremony performed for his mixed-blood daughter when she left for boarding school, described as Blessingway, could more accurately be a version of the girl's puberty ceremony, *Kinaalda*. Incidentally, in this description, the awkward phrase "paraphernalia bag" (p. 174) should be rendered "jish."

Is it no longer possible to write Navajo autobiography in the style of Walter Dyk's *A Navajo Autobiography* (Old Mexican) and of his *Son of Old Man Hat*, or of Gladys Reichard's *Dezba, Woman of the Desert*? What is it about the "voice" of these earlier works that seems so different and so genuine to the reader of today? Old Mexican, *Son of Old Man Hat*, and *Dezba* did not have assimilation to the Anglo culture to contend with. Perhaps that is the difference. Carl's repeated declarations of loyalty to his Native roots seem tainted. He leaves the reservation often to work in the white man's world. Arguably, his artwork, praised fulsomely by the Greenbergs, fails to show a genius in either the Navajo or the Anglo canon. Like so many Navajos today, it is difficult for Carl to find an authentic Navajo voice. But his dilemma is not detected by the Greenbergs, who deprecate his Anglo connections and emphasize his Navajo roots. Perhaps *Power of a Navajo* demonstrates the pitfalls and the frustrations of writing Navajo biography today.

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**Songs for Discharming.** By Denise Sweet. New York: The Greenfield Review Press, 1997. 54 pages. \$12.95 paper.

Denise Sweet has a world-sized soul and a microscope eye. This combination in a poet is a gift of transformation for readers. And

it is these strengths which lead to a successful "discharming," in all the word's unfolding senses throughout Sweet's book.

The poet invites us in with her title poem, not just hospitably but heart-nakedly, telling us how a poet does what she does, from the inspiration, to overcoming her own "tiny wars" (p. 1), and finally to humbly declaring that the same power can be the reader's: "that sorcery that swallowed me will swallow you too/at your desired stanza and in a manner of your own making" (p. 2). She accomplishes this last, too, or empowers her readers to do so with the range and depth of her identifications.

No aspect of nature and no creature is too small, too bad, or even too dead that Sweet cannot identify empathetically with it. From the migration of a Michigan trout, to which Sweet relates both personally and ancestrally—"a migration built/into the blood" (p. 4), to a prisoner in maximum security, to a stillborn infant, Sweet leads us on this meticulous journey toward "a deeper birthing" (p. 8). In "Still Born," our neck hairs rise with the double meaning implicit in the tiny T-shirt that waits on a rocking chair; "Spoiled Rotten" it reads (p. 7). She imagines what the child might have felt emerging from its mother: "cold steel against your spine...?" (p. 7), and also asks if the infant felt its mother's "legs quiver around you, their hands struggle/to resurrect you?" (p. 8). Her courage in recreating such a moment does not preclude the sensitivity to presume nothing for the stillborn, as she frames her observations as delicate questions.

Doubtless Sweet has an abundance of negative capability. She is not above singing the homely simple pleasures that begin with her son's declaration that "There are dogs in your future ... but-tramming/their way towards you" (p. 12). She might poke fun at herself because the dogs can sing of her as readily as she can of them, "howl[ing] in [her] honor": "she was that shinnobe poem maker,/and she had some dogs, way aa hey hey hey" (p. 13), but the poem is light-years from a howl for all that; it is an elegant song.

As a poet in the schools she not only gives to her students, as is evident in "Found Poem or Sometimes I Hate My Job," but she is big enough to learn from them as well. This poem turns on her attempt to remind would-be poetry writers, her students, of the first sound they hear—the human heartbeat. But when the poet asks the question, a reply comes from the corner of the classroom: "A gunshot"; the "eighth grade giggle" that follows and the "ho," which is repeated at the poem's end, make it clear that this teacher has a thing or two to attend to herself.

She hasn't forgotten how own adolescence either. In "The Origin of Envy" she recalls noting "the nice girls" who "wear/their diaphragms/most of the time," "the cheerleaders of/stupid happiness" (p. 9), and the moment of finally finding her own strengths in the dissection of a "large black bass," and then being crushed in the hour of her pride when "the little ferret biology teacher" calls her a show-off (p. 10). She confesses that she has never stopped wishing to regain and conquer that moment of lost confidence—the destructive effects of an insensitive teacher—and thus to

take that knife ...  
and ... sink it deep below the layer of  
muscles  
beyond the ...  
yellow liver  
to the iridescent pearls  
with an expert hand so swift  
and steady no one would have  
the nerve to question. (pp. 10-11)

Ironically, of course, it is clear that she has done just that in the poem itself, and in the entire collection.

"By the Sound of It," in particular, traces the poet's desire to dissect the very heart of sound. She begins molecularly, proceeds biologically to the middle ear's bones, then continues the exploration the best way a poet can, through the imagination, imagining—and convincing us—"what sound looks like" (p. 14). This leads her to the essence of her discovery, the distinction between mere physiological hearing and truly listening, what she calls the "soundings," as she learned from her son during a powwow. He had pressed his hands against a wall "to lift up over sounding to feel the color/of our songs, brilliant and deepening" (p. 15). And as usual she excels beyond the initial task, perceiving "soundings unlike words I know," and once again invites the reader to join her, to "show me with your hands/what I am trying to say" (pp. 15-16).

In "Homing Song: Two Stanzas," she has honed her listening so fine she can now hear "the sound of a descending star" and the "sand coyotes pull[ing] in/midnight air," enabling her to "sing back" (p. 17) and finally understand that "a song/means all of us" (p. 18). This poem's placement, slightly before the middle of the book, validly concludes the range of identifications

Sweet has already achieved in the first half, and prefaces the intense ever-widening identifications that follow.

Sweet's talent for walking, no, dancing, miles in other people's shoes includes backward as well as forward movement. In a single poem she choreographs moves outward and toward the future as she speaks in the voice of children, and then swings smoothly back in time toward the kindness of an old aunt who raised the child. In "For Children Who Earn Time," Antone must remember his aunt "to stay alive," imagining "the smell of maple syrup" and seeing her pause "over black coffee" (p. 31). He may be in a correctional center, but there's another kind of time, a historical one, which he is also fortunate to earn in having had a caretaker who sincerely cared. There is, perhaps, some hope for his future because of this.

Of course there is never hope for any kind of a future without a certain rootedness in the past. Sweet's perception of the past goes back far enough to connect with her ancient and tradition-establishing ancestors. In "Mission at White Earth" Sweet opens at a grave site thick with pennyroyal, where "Phillip gently pulls away/the blue medicine of our relatives" (p. 28) and Uncle Himhim describes the Christianization of all the villages. On this apparent day trip, the speakers move on to the Cass County Museum, where Phillip asks about a "glass case that holds property/of our families," but the volunteer "only works on Thursdays/and does not know about ownership" (pp. 28-29). In this poem where the speaker and Phillip are able to connect with more distant relatives through the presence of more immediate ones (the mother and Uncle Himhim), we experience with a chill the danger of not knowing—and being kept from knowledge—through the apathetic voice of the volunteer.

Worse than apathy, perhaps, are children who cannot see or connect with the reality of their own parents. Sweet's speaker is not easy on herself for her rebellion against her mother's life experience in "My Mother and I Had a Discussion One Day." As we saw in the last poem, it is immediate family who serve as conduits through which our roots can be accessed. In the penultimate stanza, the speaker attempts to explain "women's music" to her mother. "Are you telling me," her mother asks, "up until now ... no women have been singing?" This stanza ends with the mother humming "a tune of her own" (p. 40).

In the poem's last stanza the speaker tells her mother she is leaving because she doesn't want to end up "a nosewiper, a kitchen keeper," like her mother (p. 41). It is only after her moth-

er calls her a smart mouth that the speaker notices her mother's "scarred knuckles and quivering chin" and realizes "I had spit in the face/of a thousand women and I wept/with my mother" (p. 41). Sweet uses this moment of near-separation to connect not only with the mother, but the mother as everywoman, and thus shows us how destruction can be avoided and greater unity achieved.

She continues expanding her connection in "Club Med at UxMal, Yucatan" (p. 46), where a tourist speaker offers a wet cloth to a sixteen-year-old mother so she can wash her baby, and in "Winter Farm Auction" (p. 43), where the Amish gather around the loss of a farm. Here, however, the connection circles back because it is impossible to see the raised wooden crate of garden tools and horseshoes, for which a dollar is being asked, and not think of the price of Manhattan when it was stolen from those to whom it belonged.

More hopeful than a box of old tools held in the sky is the "lifting [of] our children high above our heads/to change the color of our sky" (p. 37). In this poem, "Evelyn Searching," a poem inhabited by Indians and Mexicans, Sweet generously expands boundaries once again to observe that "strangers/become fathers become strangers" (p. 37) and in so doing acknowledges the reality of a multicultural. The children in the sky are likely multicultural children as well. In "Veteran's Dance, 1995," after Oklahoma City, it is painfully clear that we're all in this together, for good or bad. "This is the worst war/we've ever seen:/surrounded and unarmed" (p. 48). Thus we need to remain wakeful, like the poet herself in "Insomniac" (p. 49). As she implies in "Here in America," poets giving voice can create "songs to awaken Americans/from their long and murky slumber" (p. 27).

Because she has so deftly and so fully connected not just with her present world, but virtually as far back as her "original face," Sweet earns the profound and optimistic conclusion of "The 500-year-old Poem," her last poem: "Time is seamless ... /Mr. Columbus, Today marks no/greater discovery than our ability/to survive" (p. 54).

Through truth and connection, her poems teach, we can remove the dangerous spells of untruth and treachery that lie in the "shadows/unraveling everywhere" ("Veteran's Dance," p. 48). We can become "disarmed." But we cannot avoid the echoes of "disarm" in the word. We are truly caught off guard by the power and beauty in these poems. If we can, as a result, disarm of our own defenses just a little bit, perhaps we can hope for a

future disarming of a more militaristic sort. After all, our private defenses are good metaphors for the escalation of destruction that can spiral outward from what the poet calls "my tiny wars" (p. 7) in her opening poem.

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**The Stars We Know: Crow Indian Astronomy and Lifeways.** By Timothy B. McCleary. Waveland Press, 1997. 127 pages. \$9.95 paper.

Originally done to teach the vitality of the Native studies/science interface at Little Big Horn College, this study of Crow cosmo vision relies on excerpts from longer interviews by elders rendered into edited English. Twenty were interviewed, with sixteen providing detailed sky lore. The book is divided into ten chapters, each focusing on a particular feature of the heavens. An initial chart of the stars and constellations with their images drawn in, like those of Greco-Roman (classical) astronomy, is especially helpful.

Using their familiar self-referent, "Our Side" astutely describes Crow continuities from triple ancestral bands known as River or Mountain (Many Lodges), from which separated the "Home Away from the Center" along the western edge, better known as "Kicked the Bellies" in honor of their first encounter with the horse. Squeezed from 38 to 2.2 million acres, the Crow Reservation now has six districts, each with a major town. Each band settled separate districts, with River Crow in the north, Mountain to the west, and the third in the southeast opposite their former range. Crow Fair, their most famous event, occurs in late August at the time of the ancient fall bison hunt. Historically, of course, this date has shifted to its present one, but this association makes clear its ultimate timing. The most curious, if not perplexing, aspects of the overall text, however, are offhand references to clanship. Crow matrilineality is never made explicit. Instead, the "mother's relatives are expected to provide for the emotional and physical needs of the individual, whereas the father's side is expected to provide the religious training *and* social recognition of the individual" (p. 7). In English, the father's relatives are called "clan fathers" or "clan mothers" to distinguish them from straightforward kin. Crow literary stylis-