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## Blackwater Draw; 8,900 B.C.

### I.

In the grasslands of the Llano Estacado  
he crouched, hearing more acute  
than a mother dire wolf suckling  
her sons. Lemon quartz tinsel slumbered  
beneath the smooth tops of the short  
pines and dotting of spruce lining  
the open plains, almost ready to cast  
warmth onto the cricket crawling  
across his toe, noiseless body reflecting  
a hawk nose and a thin, tight-lipped face.

His eyes rose toward the sky, strange  
points of still lightning glinting  
like a baby girl's newly cut eyeteeth.  
Cold light, but he did not shiver  
from the chilled dampness that clung  
to his long stringy hair hanging  
behind his ears. Muscles tensed  
and flexed beneath a mist of sweat,  
thick eyelashes unblinking.

He hefted his throwing stick, tracing  
the dried sinew and blood stuck  
to the wooden handle, felt the weight  
of it and the comfort of the spear  
hooked to the end, several feet in length,  
the rough, crude looking flint point flaked  
into shape with precision. Robust and deadly.  
A whistle shot into the air. His dark eyes  
lowered and his bark brown feet dug  
into the ground, ready to spring.

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Romy Shinn is a sophomore at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg. These poems would not have been possible without the vast knowledge of Dr. Anthony T. Boldurian, associate professor of anthropology, who made sure the prehistorical data was correct for the author.

II.

A rumbling snort shook the water of the shallow pond, reeds bending with snapping protest against the weight of the mammoth as it collapsed. A wail escaped the adult bull, already injured from a recent fight, fatal to man, as spears flung from atlatls rang through the opening horizon to stick into hide and lung, an eye and skull, dying the blue clay red.

Wading into the water the band ripped into the carcass, skinning and cutting flesh and bringing it to shore. Blades and sharp knives shaving ribs and husking legs. Some men stood watch on the bank, spears raised in a gesture of warning to other hungry animals, cat and bear. A young boy ran to tell the women.

The useful parts taken, the Columbian mammoth was left in its place, virtually nothing left but a mass of bones that lay partially submerged in the black water. New shelters made, strips of drying meat hung from branches, he stood and watched, fingering a piece of chert, his daughter asleep against his leg.

—Romy Shinn

## **A Scorpion Danced in Mud**

Black Horn followed the Bison  
With his band, stocky  
Fingers judging air.

Foreign sounds prevailed  
In the night, darkness thicker  
Than water-logged hair.

Measuring distance,  
He took his place, stance wide, firm,  
Grass tickling toes.

The herd was quiet  
Asleep, waiting for sunlight  
To heat their broad backs.

His nose twitched; he sneezed,  
Sending shock waves through  
The distance, breaking the hunt.

Men scattered, afraid,  
As a large mass charged, horns low,  
Black tears glistening

From its horns, weapons  
Made of nature, stinking  
With maternal intent.

Black Horn ran, Folsom  
Spear left behind, forgotten,  
As impact crushed bone.

Screaming, hurtling  
Across the plains,  
Over the small intended cliff,

The fall rendering  
Him unconscious, mute, as his  
Brothers called his name.

He woke to brightness,  
Pain touched every nerve.  
He yelled for his comrades.

Unfound, he laid, thirst,  
Hungered, his paralyzed limbs  
Keeping him from life.

Boxed out of site,  
He nursed his broken legs, numbly  
Waiting for gray death.

—*Romy Shinn*

### **A Southwestern Paleoindian Cuts a Blade Behind Yucca**

As mandarin dawn creeps across the mesa he sits  
and waits, dry dark hands folded around a chunk  
of obsidian, Wren and Magpie buzzing in his ear.  
The man of the Clovis sits, 11,000 years in  
the past, sits with a recently cut antler  
on his knee, bloodied tine of an antelope  
now grasped in his right hand, moving  
toward the cone of obsidian, pale  
hydration rind flaked off ...  
creamed black glass waiting,  
waiting to be made into  
a blade, subsistence  
a must ... history  
recorded.

—*Romy Shinn*

### **Mystic Powers (II)**

I don't know any Indians  
who wear crystals  
around their necks or anywhere  
else for that matter.  
Most medicine bags I've seen  
come in the nickel and dime  
denominations, having little to do  
with the mystical world  
Rod Serling told us existed  
between the light and the shadow  
the black and the white  
and more with the magic we pull through  
clenched teeth and sharp wind which  
is never enough to save us  
from even one hot white seed  
leaping from the joint burning straight  
through our ribbon shirts scarring  
the dark flesh beneath.

—Eric Gansworth

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Eric Gansworth (Onondaga), assistant professor of English at Niagara County Community College, serves on the board of directors for Hallwalls Contemporary Art Center. His first novel, *Indian Summers*, will be published by Michigan State University Press in 1998.

**Iroquois Backboard Rebound Song(I)**

We finally move as  
my nephew's voice usually  
clogged with dirty  
jokes and the dullness  
of nicotine alone  
fills the large gymnasium grown  
smaller in our adulthood, hitting  
the backboard straight on  
sliding clean through  
the net, stripping itself  
as it falls of stock cars  
and video games  
and all night kegs  
and even a brief flirtation  
with the Armed Services  
along the way  
and he doesn't even see  
forgetting all  
of us sitting, refusing  
to take up the song he has  
started, smiling only  
when his wife,  
her shadow having reached out  
covering our feet,  
leather jacket  
and British Knights gleaming  
more brilliantly  
than the scuffed expanse,  
begins the traditional Women's  
Shuffle alone over the free  
throw line erasing the bars  
of red, white, and blue  
smoothly inviting us  
with the ease of her  
natural stride  
her feet shifting  
back and forth  
across the urethane  
rewriting history.

—Eric Gansworth

### **Iroquois Backboard Rebound Song(II)**

This boy in Reeboks  
and hip hop Levi's  
Cleveland Indians hat turned  
backwards slouches alone  
around the gymnasium  
periphery pubescently  
forgetting his family  
a tomcat scouting areas  
for singular spray  
defying the nature  
of the Tuscarora Social  
until the Warrior song  
drums begin, waking his legs, arms  
and he snatches a boy  
cousin not a year old  
from the sitting mother  
and he crosses the floor  
married for the moment  
to the drums and the song  
entering the territory  
of the men's world  
where they move  
with their sons  
and the singers stop  
only when the dance  
is passed on.

—*Eric Gansworth*



### Traditional Blanket

She wraps herself in  
the comforting itch  
of a reservation  
blanket she has worn  
so long it holds her  
shape even  
in those rare moments  
she steps  
tentatively from  
its nagging fibers.

It is . . .  
the blue one  
she tacked to the arch  
every winter dividing  
our house along  
the invisible line where  
my grandfather died  
leaving us relying on  
the state in a home only half  
insulated, a synthetic membrane  
wheezing in the January winds.

It is ...  
the red one  
she saves in the hall  
closet to seal my brothers  
in their own rank  
hangover juices  
on the couch or floor  
so she will not see blood  
stains, trails of where  
they have fallen  
every Saturday night.

It is . . .  
the white one  
of the fabled U.S. Army small-  
pox shrouds we've all  
heard were delivered to

our ancestors  
the sort they don't need  
to bother with anymore—  
we take care  
of our own  
these days.

It is none of these.  
It is all of these.

—*Eric Gansworth*

### **On the Lack of Needing My Indian Celebrity Sunglasses**

So what's it like, anyways  
being an Indian after the Last  
Mohican has rolled  
silent and stoic  
across the big screen  
and we're done dancing  
with wolves and Oscars?

It ain't so  
bad, really.  
Many people looking  
for a little beadwork and turquoise  
buckskin and braids fail  
to recognize us  
even in our Property  
of the Cleveland Indians shirts,  
goofy grins spread across  
the cherry red face  
marring our chests  
in K-Mart or Ponderosa  
allowing us  
the freedom to buy  
cottony white underwear and dig  
into medium rare steaks  
just like regular folks,  
maybe even catching some Braves  
games, grinning ourselves  
as we chop the air  
with Ted Turner and Jane Fonda  
from the cheap seats.

Graham Greene never had it  
so good.

—Eric Gansworth

## Helping the Sun Come Up the Old Way

### I

Early stirrings in the greenwoods:  
vireo-pewee-grosbeak vocals rise above  
a woodpecker's erratic percussion;  
Glimmer of snailtrails on stone;  
Dewpearls on a spider's web (a trapezoid  
suspended on riverwillow fingers);  
Butterflies show their lavender  
innerwings among wild sweetpeas;  
The creek swirls, swishes past  
boulder, mossbed, fern and deadwood;  
    Through aspenleaf haloes  
    the heavens are pinking,  
    brightening, blinking ...

### II

There is music here, a green,  
dawning song on the wind's breath,  
stirring pines and aspens ...  
a cradlesong of birds and water  
and lakefrogs chanting, of moon,  
mountain, stones and stars.  
I listen to her heartbeat,  
Earthmother's pulse and rhythm.  
I keep my cookfire going and  
warm my hands, my backside.  
Two hawks sky-dance above me.  
In ancient ritual we join.  
    I am a part of the Circle,  
    the Great Hoop of Life.

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Jo Lynne Harline (Awenita: Little Doe), Cherokee of the Deer Clan, is a free-lance genealogy researcher and a member of the Utah Storyteller's Guild as a *Kanohe'sgi* (Cherokee storyteller). Her poetry has appeared in *Ellipsis*, *manna*, *Waterways*, and *The Gentle Survivalist*.

III

I sing the Cherokee Morning Song

seven times:

Win de ya ho, Win de ya ho

Win de ya, Win de ya

Oho oho, Hey aho Hey aho

Ya ya ya

It is a prayer song to begin the new day.

Morningstar pales, fades from sight.

Humming, I raise my arms and hands, lifting slowly, higher and higher upwards til at last Nugi, the Sun, greets the world, clears the horizon and is whole. "Yiip! Osda sunalei (Good morning), Nugi!", I exclaim. I dip in the creek, facing the East and West, then turn back to camp.

The Great Hoop of Life goes on.

(The legend of Morningstar: Long ago a powerful sorcerer got himself into some trouble. He fought with and killed a warrior and escaped as other warriors sought blood-revenge. Just as they caught up with the sorcerer, he held tightly to his shining instruments of magic and leaped up into the sky, becoming the Morningstar. The Cherokee continue to offer prayers for protection and for peace among the people.)

— Jo Lynne Harline

## **A Final Word to the Trickster Rafinesque**

The truth is out, Monsieur. Your brain  
has been exposed and picked clean.  
It was no different than a broken treaty,  
this "abor of love" you offered the world.  
You thought the natives were that gullible!  
(You nearly convinced yourself it was authentic,  
dazzled by your own brilliance as you were).  
You were no hero, no savior.  
Pardon the ungrateful Delaware.  
How could you see their shaking heads when  
you kept your back turned away from them?  
The elders did not accept your gift as the  
"long-lost Painted Record" of their ancestors.  
Instead it was the carcass of a great  
white elephant rotting beneath the sun.

If only you had remained content with your  
menial tasks and unglamorous fieldwork,  
categorizing plant species and wading in mud.  
Chance, greed, and eccentric vision made you toss  
your scruples in the hearth and sell your soul.  
In a library's cranny you forged your masterpiece,  
borrowed, robbed and butchered texts,  
re-writing Lenape lore, re-creating the very  
genesis of a people, playing God, teasing fate.  
You wasted your genius on brazen plagiarism  
and with an outstretched palm sought to win  
the favors of esteemed colleagues  
or a royal pension from the King of France,  
your published manuscript waving under  
scholarly, prestigious noses.  
Your moment of glory was dim and brief,  
death soon released you from  
your heart's private hell.  
But it is not over, Rafinesque.

The young Lenape generation has been  
shaken awake. Can you sense their confusion  
or feel their painful disappointment?  
They have been searching for their past, their

language, their beginnings, reaching deep  
to untangle and divide their roots, to replant  
in the rich earth of old burial grounds.  
The wind carries their protest songs  
and angry voices to further disturb  
your long, uneasy sleep.

*Author's note: In 1836 the European-born naturalist Constantine Samuel Rafinesque published his book The American Nations. It contained the Walum Olum, or "Painted Record" of the Lenni-Lenape (Delaware) people, which he claimed to have discovered and deciphered. He died in 1840. Many scholars accepted his document as authentic, and it found a respected place among Native American histories, but controversy still haunted it. In 1993, linguist David M. Oestreicher proved through meticulous research that the Walum Olum was a hoax.*

— Jo Lynne Harline

## **The Last of Her Kind**

for my Cherokee grandma  
Lena Monroe (Mammy)

Have gray eyes ever sparkled like those,  
or a steep, white curve of hair delighted so?  
The silver hand of moonlight throws  
a shadow over us, remembering her.

Little Lena on a small Texas spread,  
coying up to cowboys, saddling up  
her pony, hiding in the bed  
of her daddy's wagon, stealing a ride to town.

Like a snow bank on the Mojave,  
a glistening anomaly, a little  
redhead, she, wading the Kiamichi,  
charmed the darker, solemn Choctaw children.

Ricky called her Mammy and it stuck fast  
to the mother of five, Mammy to fifteen.  
She was a queen of the stage in a cast  
of hundreds—if you count the dead.

She was a narrative telling, a plot  
spilling over, somehow knowing her voice  
was terminal, would abandon, would not  
stay her spirit's resolution.

Andrew's Square is not the same without Monroe.  
Nor Mother, nor Ricky and the rest who know  
sadly sometimes, when something precious dies,  
it's the last of its kind.

— *Toni McNeilly*

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Toni McNeilly received her master's degree in religious education from Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas. She teaches sixth-grade English at a Houston middle school.