
A MELANCHOLY FACT: BEING AN INDIAN IN AMERICAN LIFE
(From Past to Present)

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When Columbus first arrived there may have been about 1 1/4 million American Indians in the United States and Canada. The majority lived in what is now the United States. From 1492 to almost the end of the nineteenth century. DAWG- Disease (especially smallpox), Alcohol, Warfare, Guns- depleted their members. In 1890 there were about 400.000. From time to time, efforts were made by governments and missionaries to civilize the American Indians, that is, become literate in English or French, be devout Christians, and otherwise emulate the settlers. Eventually, then the Indians would be assimilated into European society. This approach was opposed by other officials and settlers who wanted to get rid of the Indians in any way possible.

As Roy Harvey Pearce who studied the Indian and the American mind in his work called "Savagism and Civilization" wrote:

Americans who were setting out to make a new society could find a place in it for the Indian only if he would become what they were- settled steady, civilized. Yet somehow he would not be anything but

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what he was- roaming, unreliable, savage. So they concluded that they were destined to try to civilize him and, in trying, to destroy him, because he could not and would not be civilized. He was to be pitied for this, and also to be censured. Pity and censure were the price were Americans would have to pay for destroying the Indian. Pity and censure would be, in the long run, the price of the progress of civilization over savagism. (1)

The Indians were not eager for social change of either variety. By the latter part of the nineteenth century, the displacement was completed. The original people had been forced out of their homelands and resettled on lands that were not desired by the European settlers. They were settled on reserves and reservations located in the boondocks where they had little contact with the general population. The major change that they were forced to undergo was to become farmers if they had been hunters and gatherers previously. Many lost the right to travel as they may have desired. They were confined to the reservation territory. Such enforced immobilization, in turn, may have led to decrease in intertribal warfare. Further, insofar as several tribes may have been assigned to one reservation or reserve, some social change may have come about from the intertribal contacts. Otherwise, social change was probably minimized. However, along with reservations, the Bureau of Indians Affairs created boarding schools to educate Indians and help them become assimilated into American life and culture. Unfortunately, the schools were so far away from the reservations that children could be separated from their families for as much as twelve years, with the results that they were literally deculturated losing fluency in their own language and developing a profound sense of being an outsider to two cultures.

There was little demographic change except for the decrease in numbers and the relocation of many tribes from the sixteenth century to about the time of the Civil War in the United States. The birthrate, age, and sex distribution were largely the same; they were still rural dwellers; they were still not citizens of the United States -although they were native Americans and owners of these lands- they were on the "scrapheaps" of U.S. life. Only the death rate had fallen significantly, probably in the latter part of the nineteenth century, since intertribal warfare had been stopped, plagues had been brought under some control, and the governments stopped killing them. By 1890's the number of the Indians were less than 20.000 in all of California.

In the twentieth century, some, but not much, population change occurred until about the time of World War II. Leaving the reservation and moving to cities was getting underway during the four decades preceding the war, the amount of schooling gradually increased, the birth and death rates began to decline, population growth increased, the American Indians became national citizens and served in World War I and II. and marriage to non-Indians increased. By the middle of the twentieth century; the censuses counted a little over one-half million. Three decades later, at the beginning of the 1980s, the two censuses counted about 2 million. During this 30-year period, 1950 to 1980, there was apparently more convergence of the Indian population characteristics with those of the dominant society than in preceding decades. There were vast increases in the numbers living in cities, many more of the younger people received more schooling, almost reaching the level of the general population. intermarriage with non-Indians may have increased considerably; and the birth and death rates fell almost to national levels. Some of those living in the United States and who had been dispossessed from their lands east of the Mississippi River in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were returning to the east.

Probably, the most important factor in this demographic renaissance was World War II and its accompanying changes in both military and civilian life. These changes helped to increase levels of tolerance and acceptance of minority ethnic groups. And the civilian workforce had difficulty in obtaining enough workers, especially during the periods of actual fighting. Refusal to hire because of race or colour or ethnicity made no sense. So this biases that previously had kept out ethnic minorities and women from jobs were partially lifted. These changes led to greater tolerance and acceptance in other aspects including intermarriage. Though the conditions of Indians have changed. They have never found peace in anywhere else as being an outsider to two cultures. The questions "Who am I- American or Indian?" to "Which side am I most on now" and the effort of looking for the answer of these questions present a logical and ethical problem. So it is clear that the conditions of being Indian have changed over time while the images of Indianness have not.

American Indian Literature: According to some of the literary critics; to study American Indian literature is to study the power of language to shape one's perception of human experience. The word has power because it is the vehicle of the imagination and the means of clarifying relationships between individuals and their landscapes, communities, visions. As Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna) wrote:

The tribes seek through song, ceremony, legend, sacred stories (mythes), and tales to embody, articulate, and share reality, to bring the isolated self into harmony and balance with this reality, to verbalize the sense of the majesty and the reverent mystery of all things, and to actualise, in language, those truths of being and experience that give to humanity its greatest significance and dignity. The artistry of the tribes is married to essence of language itself, for in language we seek to share our being with that of the community, and thus to share in the communal awareness of the tribes. (2).

As she wrote language is the means by which one knows the universe and shares that knowledge with the community. And one of the finest contemporary Native American poets, Simon Ortiz, addresses the relationship between language and culture by examining how the Acoma language and oral tradition he learned as a child nurtured him and shaped him into a poet and a writer:

I don't remember a world without language. From the time of my earliest childhood, there was language, always language, and imagination, speculation, utters of sound. Words, beginning of words. What would I be without language? My existence has been determined by language, not only the spoken but the unspoken, the language of speech and the language of motion. I can't remember a world without memory. Memory, immediate and far away in the past, something in the past, something in the sinevew, blood, ageless cell. Although I don't recall the exact moment I spoke or tried to speak, I know the feeling of something tugging at the care of the mind, something unutterable uttered into existence. It is language that brings us into being in order to know life. (3)

In the early tribal communities, this regard for language is expressed within the oral tradition through storytelling the means by which those stories and legends, myths and folklore, poetry and song that constitute the memory banks of tradition of a given culture are handed down from

one generation to the next. Women as well as men can be storytellers; within some of the Plain cultures, for example, the grandmother is the supreme storyteller, passing on her knowledge of tradition to the young. As N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa) has said:

Storytelling is imaginative and creative in nature ...
The possibilities of storytelling are precisely those of
understanding the human experience. (4)

So, the language and oral traditions of Native American people have carried the thoughts and beliefs of their ancestors forward to their descendants in contemporary America. Passed from generation through story telling, oral traditions represent living libraries containing thousands of years of knowledge and history about the world of the Indians.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a written tradition was beginning to emerge out of the oral tradition that would reach fruition in the 1960s and 1970s in the works of contemporary American Indians. Dispossessed of their land and rights, threatened with the dissolution of their culture, and demoralized by confinement to reservations, American Indian men and women began writing down their life stories and recording tribal lore in an effort to preserve the traditions of the past. They adhered to concept that it might take a long time, but the story must be told and there musn't be any lies. So, the American Indian writers have been part of the storytelling tradition- both oral and written- from its inception, passing on stories to their children and their children's children and using the word to advance those concepts crucial to cultural survival.

In order to establish a literary tradition based on the material of their culture some of the American Indians women writers wrote "life story". Organized to cover the major events in a women's life- from early childhood through puberty ceremonies and education to marriage and child rearing- these autobiographies provide important records of the woman's position in various tribal communities, reversing many of the stereotypes about Indian women.

In the most of the ethnographic autobiographies and early personal narratives, the authors concentrated on recording aspects of their heritage. Still acutely sensitive to the violent and rapid changes they underwent and convinced of the passing of the old way, they tried to preserve as much of their history as possible. While the urge to perpetuate cultural traditions continues to be a predominant theme in the Native American literature of the last two decades, the emphasis has shifted from a description of the characteris-

tics of heritage to an analysis of the relationship between individuals and their heritage. Being aware of the impending loss of culture through assimilation American Indian authors with contemporary concerns try to examine. The dilemma of the Individual caught between two worlds and seek to resolve that conflict through storytelling and a revitalization of the traditions and rituals of their inherited past.

In the following pages, by referring to works of some of the American Indian authors, the melancholy fact; being an Indian in American life is going to be examined.

LAME DEER, SEEKER OF VISIONS

by John Lame Deer and Richard Erdoes

Having lived among both whites and Indians, Lame Deer is able to evaluate both cultures and, in his memoirs, he describes the mysticism of being an Indian in the wild untamed nature and the hopeless struggles and resistance of his kind against the obstinate and determined white man. He begins his history with anger for the ones who have disregarded his identity and rights. While his grandfather Good Fox is telling the Custer battle he cannot help remembering that terrible day and gives his message about the white man:

There may be some good men among the whites, but to trust them is a quick way to get oneself killed. Every time I hear a lady or child screaming I think of that terrible day of killing. The preachers and missionaries tell you to turn the other cheek and to love your neighbour like yourself. But I don't know how the white people treat each other, and I don't think they love us more than they love themselves. Some don't love themselves. Some don't love us at all. (5)

When Lame Deer describes his ancestor's life and his as a child the harmony and peace in his voice can be heard:

In their own homes Indian children are surrounded with relatives as with a warm blanket. Parents, grandprants. uncles, aunts, older brothers

and cousins are always gussing over them. playing with them or listening to what they have to say.
(6)

Though most of his childhood days weren't exciting, they had a good, simple life with the members of his family. Like many other Indian works, in his autobiography, *Lame Deer* deals with the Indian life, philosophy and culture and he describes the red man's life to be very peaceful one. But with the coming of the white people "how everything is destroyed" and *Lame Deer's* strong feeling and desires, which springs from the indifference of the white are explained:

I didn't need a house then or a pasture. Somewhere these would be a cave, a crack in the rocks, where I could hole up during a rain I wanted the plants and the stones to tell me their secrets. I talked to them. I roamed. I was like a part of the earth. Everything had been taken from me except myself ... I wanted to feel, smell, hear and see, but not see with my eyes and my mind only, I wanted to see with *cante ista* -the eye of the heart. This eye had its own way of looking at things. I was going through a change. I didn't resist it. (7)

Not only did the white not give the Indians some basic rights of a human being but they tended to dehumanize the Indian. They took away their land and forced them to live in the reservations under the control of the white man. According to *Lame Deer*, this was their understanding of creating more civilized people.

The white after having the Indians imprisoned in a reservation, they again ordered the Indian families but this time to send their children to school. This is the event which lead *Lame Deer's* life to gradually lose its peace and harmony:

When I was fourteen years old I was told that I had to go to boarding school. It is hard for a non-Indian to understand how some of our kids feel about boarding school. ... To the Indian kid the white boarding school comes as a terrific shock. He is taken from his warm womb to a strange, cold place. It is like being pushed out of a crazy kitchen into howling blizzard. The schools are better

now than they were in my time. They look good from the outside- modern and expensive. The teachers understand the kids a little better, use more psychology and less stick. But in these fine new building Indian children still commit suicide, because they are lonely among all that noise and activity. I know of a ten-year old who hanged herself. These schools are just boxes filled with homesick children. The schools leave a scar. We enter them confused and bewildered and we leave them the same way. When we enter the school we at least know that we are Indians. we came out half red and half white, not knowing what we are. (8)

In these schools the children weren't allowed to speak their own language or even sing Indian songs which played an important part in their lives. Basically, these people were asked to forget their own values, culture, belief, and language, and begin to adapt the white man's ways. The dehumanizing continued with the expectation of the Indian to change his real and original name given to by his people. It was something very humiliating.

In his writing *Lame Dear*, stressing the situation his own people are in blames the white by saying "the food you eat, you treat your bodies, take out all the nature part. the taste, the smell, the roughness, then put the artificial colour, the artificial flavour in" (9). And he goes on writing to explain some of the changes which are really important in their daily life "As a medicine man we try to doctor our sick, but we suffer from many new white man's diseases, which come from the white man's food and white man's living, and we have no herbs for that" (10). And complains about the fact that the white have separated the Indians from the nature which lead them to survive a very healthy life.

And he argues how the white have destroyed nature with the thought at being civilized in mind. He complains by saying that

...the terrible arrange of the white man, making himself something more than God, more than nature, saying "I will let this animal live, because it makes money"; saying "This animal must go, it brings no income, the space it occupies can be used in a better way. The only good coyote is a god coyote.." They are treating coyotes almost as badly

as they used to treat Indians. You are spreading death, buying and selling death (11)

So, the government continued their strategies "vanishing" the Indian by doing Custer's work because they thought the Indian as a "brutal savage" and "uncivilized" being. They were expected to behave like white but no matter what they ever did, they would never have the same rights as a white man. This eventually lead the red man to have an identificiation crisis. Lame peer explains a time when he went to church, because he was forced to marry a Christian woman and her family wanted him to go:

These people were Catholics and I went to their church with them. It didn't work well. People paid more attention to me than to the preacher. Some white people didn't want to sit next to me. It was the board□ng school all over again. (12)

As Lame Dear expresses his state of loss, "I was cut lose, drifting like a leaf the wind tore from a tree", many Indians were in a trap with no where to go and no one to be. They were usually seeking some way but weren't allowed to settle in and experience any.

BLACK ELK SPEAKS

by John G. Neihardt

Not only the American Indian authors but also the whites -John G. Neihardt is one of them- have been interested in this functional literature. By referring to the members of Black Elk, an Oglala Sioux warrior and medicine man, Neihardt makes the reader see some of the facts and gives his interpretation about this historical fact.

In Black Elk Speaks, Neihardt tries to present the natives point of view by writing the themes of land, history, memory, family and race. With a brief touch of sceneries from the lives of the Indians and their struggle for resisting the invasion of the white people. He defends the native, and magnifies the wrongdoings of the newcomer who is said to have hunted the natives like wild beasts. In "Black Elk Speaks", an Oglala Sioux warrior, tells the coming of the white man and the changes in their simple life in that way:

Up on the Madison Fork the Wasichus had found much of the yellow metal that they worship and that makes them crazy, and they wanted to have a road up through our country to the place where the yellow metal was: but my people did not want the road. It would scare the bison and make them go away, and also it would let the other Wasichus come in like a river. They told us that they wanted only to use a little land, as much as a wagon would take between the wheels; but our people knew better. And when you look about you know, you can see what it was they wanted.(13)

What Lame Deer writes in his memoirs about their way of living is also emphasized by Black Elk in following sentences:

Once we were happy in our own country, and we were seldom hungry. For then the two-leggeds and the four-leggeds lived together like relatives and there was plenty for them and for us. But the Wasichus come and they have made little islands for us and other little islands for the four-leggeds and always these islands are becoming smaller, for around them surges the gnawing flood of the Wasichus and it is dirty with lies and greed.(14)

With the coming of the soldiers they all had to leave their own country not to be killed. Though it was theirs and they did not want to have trouble, this strange race, white man, forced them to fight. After the battle, the horrifying view of it and how he feels about the white man are explained:

It was all dust and smoke and cries after a while I got tired looking around. I could smell nothing but blood, and I got sick of it. Those soldiers had come to kill our mothers and fathers and us, and it was our country ... I thought that my people were relatives to the thunder beings of my vision, and that the soldiers were very foolish to do this (15)

So it is painful to consider how they moved without hesitation into Indian lands and took what they pleased and it is obvious that the frontiers-

man, whether he was farmer trapper or hunter was the exact reason of this cruel destruction. That is why the anger the native feels for the newcomer is something inevitable and their exact feelings and thoughts can be best described and understood in Neihardt's own lives in "The Song of the Indian Wars".

I had my village and my pony herds
On Powder where the land was all my own.
I only wanted to be left alone.
I did not want to fight. The Gray Fox sent
this soldiers. We were poorer when they went:
Our babies died, for many lodges burned
And it was cold. We hoped again and turned
Our faces westward . It was just the same
Out yonder on the Rosebud. The soldiers came.
The dust. they made was high and long
I fought them and I whipped them. Was it wrong
To drive them back? That country was my own.
I only wanted to be let alone (16)

MOCCASINS DON'T HAVE HIGH HEELS

by Le Anne Howe

The story is an autobiographical depiction of the Howe`s encounter with the problems of being an Indian. The title is self-explanatory and shows her transformation from the rude business life to Indian life. She, as a bond saleswoman, goes on working despite the fact that she hates it. She is too much in the business which as highly mechanical. inhuman and capitalistic and she is a part of the machine though it is against to her Indian side. But the conditions of life were hard for a woman of minority. So, the money got her.

When she is laid out, the change in her job is a symbolical representation of her cultural change too. The situation she is in and her feelings are explained with the sentences below:

I was getting rid of my high heels and putting on my moccasins. I had to get away. Everything was getting to me, man. You may ask why I stayed with it? Why I did it? The money. The money get me. (17)

We see that her cultural change is emphasized symbolically with her putting of the high heels and instead putting on the mocassings. So large as she works in a white business she can be white but when she leaves, she faces her Indian side again.

In her writing, Le Anne Howe tries to examine the position of an Indian in the society. The Indians are mythological, romantic, touristical and authentic elements in the hands of the dominant commercial-minded culture. As we have already seen in Diane Burns "Sure you Can Ask Me A Personal Question" the Indians generally face those stock, tokenizing questions about themselves:

Don't you Indians, like ah-h, see yourselves, ah-h, as just transcending this time, spare continuum thing? Yeah. like ah-h. you all practiced this kind of Indian-Zen thing? Right?

"Indian huh? Didn't you used to be white?"

"Indians, Hey you're human too. You don't really feel any different than the rest of us. You put your pants on one leg at a time. Missey, so just stop that nonsense. It's just like, all in your head. "

"Indians, I thought you were all dead.? (18)

What such an attitude does to them, the Indians, is that they are taken out of the concept of human beings and reduced to figures which popped out of white boys' comic magazines. But this Indian image in the mind of a dominant culture reduce them to a level of stock character, a stereotype.

In her writing, as an Indian, she also complains about being the subject and even guinea pig of the white materialistic science. The white man of science, the archeologists "study" the Indians. The white scientists make hypotheses and to prove them they cut the skeletons of dead Indians. They want to condemn Indians for beings who committed incest due to their small gene pools. So, the melancholy fact: being an Indian in such kind of a society is quoted in the sentences of the writer below:

Throughout America, from north to south, the dominant culture acknowledges Indians as objects of study, but denies them as subject of history. Indians have folklore, not culture, they practice superstitions, not religion they speak dialects, not languages, they make crafts not arts ..." (19).

Shortly, the Indians are excluded from any human, modern, artistic and intellectual consideration. Their religion does not deserve to be included among religious studies. Their language is not a language of its own and etc. Therefore as she exemplifies in the sentences below, while whites deserve respect even if they are dead the Indian is a mere object of cold scientific study:

In 1971 in Iowa a road crew unearthed a cemetery. Twenty-six of the bodies were white. They also found one Indian woman and her baby. The whites were placed in new coffins and reburied. The Indian and her baby were boxed up and sent to Iowa City for study. (20)

So, according to the writer it is not enough for the aliens to capture their souls but also they want to own their physical bodies.

All this suggest that the white tactic is to empty the Indian and make him an authentic statue. But the only thing that makes them happy is that they are first environmentalists. As we have seen in Lane Deer's "**Lame Deer, Seeker of The Vision**" they are not the rulers of the nature but a part of it. However, the whole environment is now exploited by the white culture and she demands it to be cared for it is not given back to the Indian. The whites took the land and owned it but although they owned it they did not show respect towards it. And now, what they have done to nature poisons them too:

Hey that shit didn't fly and the grass ain't green. the sky ain't blue, and the rivers are full of trash. We didn't want to leave this place -this time. space continuum thing to you- but you wanted it you got it. Now fix it.? Someone said once that lost causes were the only ones worth fighting for, worth dying for. They got to us, all right. But the poisons man, they're getting to you, too. (21)

WITHOUT TITLE**by Diane Glancy**

Diane Glancy who is a daughter of Cherokee father was raised by an English-German mother. For that reason she often writes about being in the middle ground between two cultures, not fully a part of either. In her poem "Without Title" she writes about the difficulties that her father come across as an Indian in a dominant culture.

In the opening lines of the poem, the poet emphasizes that it is really difficult for a native to live in that way:

It's hard you know without the buffalo.
 the shaman. the arrow
 but my father went out each day to hunt
 as though he had them. (22)

As we have seen in most of the works of the American Indian writers, the Indian characters are parts of the nature, and they are drawn as dependable hunters who know the region and nature like the poet's father. But now being far away from his own land, his traditions and his beliefs makes him unhappy and the life unbearable.

Writing this poem, she glorifies her father as an Indian and emphasizes the native American cultural values and respects the wisdom and experience of her elders. But throughout the poem the disturbing feeling of being an outsider to two cultures is felt:

Without a vision he had migrated to the city
 and went to work in the packing house.
 When he brought home his horns and hides
 my mother said
 get rid of them:.(23)

In the poem, the father who has lost his attachment to the native spirituality, beliefs and traditions is moving back and forth between two cultures. The cultural alienation and identity crisis of an Indian who tries to

struggle living in the dominant culture are described well with the image of a father figure.

Her mother, who is the voice of white people of dominant culture, never let him, her husband, survive his tribal identity. However, he gives place to his animal tracks on his truck in order to reflect his Indian spirit which he tries to keep alive in his heart.

I remember the animal tracks of his car
out the drive in snow and mud,
the aerial on his old car waving
like a bow string
I remember the silence of his lost power
the red buffalo painted on his chest.
Oh. I couldn't see it
but it was there, and in the night I heard
his buffalo grunts like a snore. (24)

At the end of the poem, like most of the other Indians filled with despair, her father becomes silent. He was asked to forget his own values, culture, belief and language in order to adapt the white man's ways. The poet, as a daughter notices that her father by accepting the dominance of American culture, tries to live his life the way life presents itself. So, that is the common fate of all the natives to live "grace under pressure."

SURE YOU CAN ASK ME A PERSONAL QUESTION

by Diane Burns

Diana Hurns who is Anushinabe and Chemehuevi, as a poet and a painter, in this poem, reflects the Native American's voice. The poem is a mixture of answers only uttered by a native to a white. The stereotypical questions of the prejudiced white is omitted in the poem because Burns wants to direct the reader's attention to the natives and reflect the defensive and assertive feeling of the Natives distinct identity.

Without having a white in it -because white's questions are neglected in the poem- gives an opinion about the stereotypical ideas whites have about natives. In the beginning of the conversation the white wonders about the native's origin and goes on asking nonsense questions in order to get it.:

"How do you do'?"

No, I am not Chinese.

No, not Spanish.

No, I am American Indi- uh, Native American.

No, not from India.

No, not Apache.

No, not Navajo.

No, not Sioux. No. we are not extinct.

Yes, Indian

..... (25)

Here, the poet does not specially give her tribe's name because she becomes the spokesperson for the whole native Americans and only accepts that she is Indian by stressing that they are not extinct and are still surviving.

So, that's where you got those cheekbones,

Your great grandmother, huh?

An Indian Princess, huh?

Hair down to there'?

Let me guess . Cherokee? (26)

As we understand from the lines above, the white might really be of an Indian ancestry or she might be adopting an imaginary ancestor which is called dimestore ethnicity. What is ironical in these lines is that the natives who usually despised by the whites from one side can be their ancestors. In these lines the Native American begins questioning the white and her or his origin:

"Oh, so you've had an Indian friend?"

That close?

Oh, so you've had an Indian lover?

That's tight?

Oh, so you've had an Indian servant?

That much?" (27)

Throughout these lines we see that the white pretends as if he or she is boasting of having a close Indian friend, a tight Indian lover and too much Indian servants. So that natives' situation in dominant culture is stressed by the poet with a concept of "servant" and an adjective "too". Although the white wants to show himself at the equal bases, it is obvious that whites are superior to Indians.

Yeah, it was awful what you guys did to us.

It's real decent of you to apologize (28)

Here is the white guilt reminded. White's oppression upon the Natives is still an open wound. These lines bring into mind the massacres, the relocation camps and being exiles in their own lands.

No, I don't know where you can get peyote .

No, I don't know where you can get Navajo rugs
real cheap

No, I didn't make this. I bought it at Bloomingdales.

Thank you. I like your hair too.

I don't know if anyone knows whether or not Cher
is really Indian.

No, I didn't make it rain tonight. (29)

Throughout these lines, we learn that the Native American is in the process of Americanization. He has adapted the American way of living but she tries to keep his identity as well.

Yeah. Uh--huh. Spirituality.

Uh--huh. Yeah. Spirituality. Uh-huh. Mother

Earth. Yeah. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Spirituality.

No, I didn't major in archery.

Yeah, a lot. of us drink too much.

Some of us can't drink enough.

This ain't no stoic look.

This is my face. (30)

In the last lines of the poem, the poet as an Indian again faces these stock and tokenizing questions about themselves and these questions makes them reduced to a level of stock character, a stereotype. For example, alcoholism is emphasized as a common habit among the natives. But the exact reason why they become alcoholics is never questioned. With the line "a lot of us drink too much" the poet's aim is to emphasize the hopelessness of a native who lost their sense of identity and pride. However, in the end we see that the writer reclaims her past and says that she is proud of her identity as an Indian without caring the idea, of the white people.

BE CAREFUL

by' Nila NortSun

Nila NorthSun who is Shoshone on her mother's side and Chippewa on her father's is a contemporary of American Indian poet:,. As a poet she has a sense of humour, sharp eye for detail and original way of looking at things. In her poem "Be Careful" she brings the reader closer to her culture by implying typical Indian elements which are foreign to the whites. And also she is criticizing those people who create an image of an "alien" and never want to accept the Indians' natural existence in a society.

The poet introduces the Indian from white men's point of view and emphasizes that there is nothing to be scared of encountering a different culture. And she is accusing the whites because of their prejudice:

In ponema

there still are witches

people with power

people with strong medicine

they can make you sick or
lame or kill you
..... (31)

With the image of a "witch" -a medicine man who practices certain rituals and plays an important role in the lives of the Indian people- the poem is addressing the white people who do not know what the Indian culture really is, and handles some of the facts by anticipating that an Indian as an human being in his native state of rudeness and wildness is untaught, uncivilized or without cultivation of his mind or manners will harm the whites.

From the beginning of the poem the reader senses the irony and sense of humour in her lines;

.....
you can't take pictures of
their medicine lodge
your camera will break
you cannot cross
in front of them
you will lose your step
..... (32.)

As we have seen in Howe's "Moccasins Don't Have High Heels", NortSun, in her poem. also tries to examine the position of an Indian in the society. The Indians are mythological, touristical and authentic elements in the minds of the dominant culture. The poet wants to warn the white person who wants to take this authentic Indian's picture by saying that his camera might break because of witchcraft and gives advice by stressing that stay away from any place inhabited by Indians.

Her warning have the function to ridicule the white people who are afraid to come to close contact with Native Americans thinking that the other culture could harm them. But the contrast is that they are the ones who cause the Indians to be hurt and damage them usually on purpose. She also writes about ethnic elements by using the image of mirror:

"

hang a little mirror
 on your clothing then
 if they should try to
 cast bad medicine on you
 it will reflect back. (33)

The mirror in fact is hung on the clothes of Indians who traditionally believe that the mirror will reflect back evil from them and this has a protective function. So, in the last lines of her poem she gives the messages that the Indians are not the ones as the whites thought but they are the human-beings who tries to survive without giving any harm to any cultures. Because they are not the ruler of a nature but part of it.

NOTES

- (1) Roy, Horvey Peace, Savaism and Civilization. p.53.
- (2) Dexter Fisher, The Third Woman, p.5.
- (3) Patrica Riley and Ines Fernandez, Growing Up Native Americans, p.29.
- (4) Dexter Fisher. The Third Woman, p.6.
- (5) Alan R. Velie, American Indian Literature, p.174.
- (6) Ibid; p.184.
- (7) Ibid; p.187.
- (8) Ibid; p.184.
- (9) Ibid; p.190.
- (10) Ibid; p.185.
- (11) Ibid; p.191.
- (12) Ibid; p.188.
- (13) Alan R. Velie, American Indian Literature, p.157.
- (14) Ibid; p.168.
- (15) Ibid; p.168
- (16) Albert Keiser, The Indian in American Literature, p.273.
- (17) Alan R. Velie, American Indian Literature, p.363.
- (18) Ibid; p.364.
- (19) Ibid; p.365.
- (20) Ibid; p.355.
- (21) Ibid; p.366.
- (22) D. Sayini Madison, The Woman that I am, p.67.
- (23) Ibid; p.67.
- (24) Ibid; p.67.
- (25) D.Sayini Madison, The Woman that I am, p.65.
- (26) Ibid; p.65.
- (27) Ibid; p.65.

- (28) İbid; p.66.
(29) Ibid; p.66.
(30) Ibid: p.66.
(31) D. Sayini Madison, The Woman that I am, p.294.
(32) Ibid; p.294.
(33) Ibid; p.294

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