

Native American Poets Circle of Voices

N. Scott Momoday

The Delight Song of Tsoai-Talee

I am a feather on the bright sky
I am the blue horse that runs in the plain
I am the fish that rolls, shining, in the water
I am the shadow that follows a child
I am the evening light, the lustre of meadows
I am an eagle playing with the wind
I am a cluster of bright beads
I am the farthest star
I am the cold of the dawn
I am the roaring of the rain
I am the glitter on the crust of the snow
I am the long track of the moon in a lake
I am a flame of four colors
I am a deer standing away in the dusk
I am a field of sumac and pomme blanche
I am an angle of geese in the winter sky
I am the hunger of a young wolf
I am the whole dream of these things

You see, I am alive, I am alive
I stand in good relation to the Gods
I stand in good relation to the earth
I stand in good relation to everything that is beautiful...
You see, I am alive, I am alive

A Simile

What did we say to each other
that now we are as the deer
who walk in single file
with heads high
with ears forward
with eyes watchful
with hooves always placed on firm ground
in whose limbs there is latent flight

CENTAUR

The boy caught sight of the animal as it grazed in a cover of grasses. It was a bright morning in the story of time. It might have been yesterday or thousands of years ago. The boy caught his breath. Never had he seen, or even dreamed, of such a creature. Latent, it seemed a work of art, a statue or a painting on a cave wall, perhaps. It was equal to the far reach of the boy's wonder. The boy shouted in pure delight, and the animal erupted in motion. It ran at great speed, and the strength that informed its whole body was under perfect control. Light rippled on its flanks, its blue-black hooves struck like rapid drumbeats on the earth, and its chiseled head lunged like the point of a spear into the crystal air. Tears came to the boy's eyes, and in his mind there came a conviction that he could barely express: We belong to each other, this creature and I.

Mary TallMountain

The Last Wolf

The last wolf hurried toward me
through the ruined city
and I heard his baying echoes
down the steep smashed warrens
of Montgomery Street and past
the ruby-crowned highrises
left standing
their lighted elevators useless

Passing the flicking red and green
of traffic signals
baying his way eastward
in the mystery of his wild loping gait
closer the sounds in the deadly night
through clutter and rubble of quiet blocks
I hear his voice ascending the hill
and at last his low whine as he came
floor by empty floor to the room
where I sat
in my narrow bed looking west, waiting
I heard him snuffle at the door and
I watched

He trotted across the floor
he laid his long gray muzzle
on the spare white spread
and his eyes burned yellow
his small dotted eyebrows quivered

Yes, I said.
I know what they have done.

Farmer's Market

I.

Our plaza is sanctuary
for sunning, eating, and smoking
waiting to go up to Social Security
words to each other tripping on our tongues
looking curiously at pigeons.

A homeless man plans a life
around sneakers, clothes
and a bedroll

He buys a bunch of stringbeans for a quarter
and lives on it till next Wednesday.

II.

People are circling into families
Onions and greens from the Farmers Market

The good workers of the soil display their wares
The housewives and elderly men
stand in line to get their ingredients weighed
Soup would be hotfood for their families.

City fathers would lift off our market
from the bricks of the plaza
for the sake of ego
that puts down plaques here

Where will the vegetable sellers find refuge?
Where can we buy vegetables still smelling of earth?

Linda Hogan

To Be Held

To be held
by the light
was what I wanted,
to be a tree drinking the rain,
no longer parched in this hot land.
To be roots in a tunnel growing
but also to be sheltering the inborn leaves
and the green slide of mineral
down the immense distances
into infinite comfort
and the land here, only clay,
still contains and consumes
the thirsty need
the way a tree always shelters the unborn life
waiting for the healing
after the storm
which has been our life.

Map

This is the world
so vast and lonely
without end, with mountains
named for men
who brought hunger
from other lands,
and fear
of the thick, dark forest of trees
that held each other up,
knowing fire dreamed of swallowing them
and spoke an older tongue,
and the tongue of the nation of wolves
was the wind around them.

Even ice was not silent.
It cried its broken self
back to warmth.
But they called it
ice, wolf, forest of sticks,
as if words would make it something
they could hold in gloved hands,
open, plot a way
and follow.

This is the map of the forsaken world.
This is the world without end
where forests have been cut away from their trees.
These are the lines wolf could not pass over.
This is what I know from science:
that a grain of dust dwells at the center
of every flake of snow,
that ice can have its way with land,
that wolves live inside a circle
of their own beginning.
This is what I know from blood:
the first language is not our own.

There are names each thing has for itself,
and beneath us the other order already moves.
It is burning.
It is dreaming.
It is waking up.

Joy Harjo

US Poet Laureate 2019 to 2022

An American Sunrise

We were running out of breath, as we ran out to meet ourselves. We were surfacing the edge of our ancestors' fights, and ready to strike. It was difficult to lose days in the Indian bar if you were straight. Easy if you played pool and drank to remember to forget. We made plans to be professional — and did. And some of us could sing so we drummed a fire-lit pathway up to those starry stars. Sin was invented by the Christians, as was the Devil, we sang. We were the heathens, but needed to be saved from them — thin chance. We knew we were all related in this story, a little gin will clarify the dark and make us all feel like dancing. We had something to do with the origins of blues and jazz I argued with a Pueblo as I filled the jukebox with dimes in June, forty years later and we still want justice. We are still America. We know the rumors of our demise. We spit them out. They die soon.

This land is a poem

This land is a poem of ochre and burnt sand I could never write, unless paper were the sacrament of sky, and ink the broken line of wild horses staggering the horizon several miles away. Even then, does anything written ever matter to the earth, wind, and sky?

Suicide Watch

1.

I was on a train stopped sporadically at checkpoints.
What tribe are you, what nation, what race, what sex, what unworthy soul?

2.

I could not sleep, because I could not wake up.
No mirror could give me back what I wanted.

3.

I was given a drug to help me sleep.
Then another drug to wake up.
Then a drug was given to me to make me happy.
They all made me sadder.

4.

Death will gamble with anyone.
There are many fools down here who believe they will win.

5.

You know, said my teacher, you can continue to wallow, or
You can stand up here with me in the sunlight and watch the battle.

6.

I sat across from a girl whose illness wanted to jump over to me.
No! I said, but not aloud.
I would have been taken for crazy.

7.

We will always become those we have ever judged or condemned.

8.

This is not mine. It belongs to the soldiers who raped the young women on the Trail of Tears. It belongs to Andrew Jackson. It belongs to the missionaries. It belongs to the thieves of our language. It belongs to the Bureau of Indian Affairs. It no longer belongs to me.

9.

I became fascinated by the dance of dragonflies over the river.
I found myself first there.