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*Contemporary Native American Women Poets*

*(bakalářská práce)*

*Autor: Žaneta Baločová, Česká filologie + Anglická filologie*

*Vedoucí práce: Mgr. Jiří Flajšar, PhD.*

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## 1 Introduction

The goal of my thesis is to explore and analyse contemporary Native American poetry written by Indian women poets who endorse to the indigenous culture of the First Nations. The Native American literature has been neglected for a long time and even nowadays many American literature courses disregard Native American literature as minor and therefore irrelevant. However, the indigenous people who have been occupying the Turtle Island longer than we can imagine, deserve a valid place not only in the makings of history of the Americas but they should also be acknowledged as partakers in the cultural development there of. In my thesis I will try to prove that Indian American artist significantly contribute to the contemporary American literary traditions.

At the same time, we have to consider, as I will later explain in the theoretical part of my thesis, that the “old-time traditional Indians,” have changed. More precisely, they were forced to change and adopt the Anglophone cultural, social and political structures. The acceptance of the traditions of the white colonizers irrecoverably invaded the Indian cultural heritage and corrupted it for the next generations of the Native Americans as well. The contemporary Native Americans, a minority within a greater American nation are a proof of all the wrong-doing that befell the First Nations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, the today’s Indian isn’t born into the world with the certainty that she or he will be able to fully embrace the cultural heritage. It always depends on the individual if he or she decides to „belong to a tribe“, go back and try to re-discover the Native American legacy that runs through the veins of every Indian. Such events that Indian has to face at some point of his or her life affects has many outcomes, both positive and negative. I will try to explore both in the collections of poems written by three Native American authors. Given the fact that the collections are the ver first ones that these authors published we will have an opportunity to experience with them the Indian consciousness that bursts out of their literary voices. We will meet my authors at their literary birth and find out what is the early standpoint from which they write.

As a result of my analysis, I would like to find an answer for the following: How do the authors re-discover and revoke the Native American literary traditions, if they do so. If it is even appropriate to talk about literary traditions that differ from the contemporary American poetry, since all the authors write in English as their native language. What do the women poets share in their collections as the new post-colonial Native American generation of women living in patriarchal society and what makes their poetry anomalous. The

collections that will be analysed are *Indian Cartography* by Deborah A. Miranda , *Trailing You* by Kimberly M. Blaeser and *The Island of Lost Luggage* by Janet Mc Adams.

### 1.1 About the authors

The reason for my choosing the following authors and their first collection of poems is that they were all awarded Diane Decorah First Book Award from the Native Writer's Circle of the Americas.<sup>1</sup> The fact that their first collections were chosen as the best ones in the year of their publication signifies that the contemporary Native American critics and scholars find them crucial for the contemporary Native American literary development.

Kimberly M. Blaeser's collection won the 1993 Diane Decorah First Book Award for *Trailing You*. Kimberly Blaeser, of Anishinaabe and German ancestry, is an enrolled member of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe and grew up on White Earth Reservation in Northwestern Minnesota. She is an Associate Professor of English at UWM, where she teaches twentieth-century American literature, specializing in Native American Literature and American Nature Writing.<sup>2</sup>

Janet McAdams' *The Island of Lost Luggage* won the Diane Decorah Award in 1999. She is an author of Scottish, Irish, and Creek ancestry, grew up in Alabama. She received her M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of Alabama and her Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Emory University, where her studies focused on American Indian poetry. She has taught literature and creative writing at the University of Alabama, the American School of El Salvador, the University of Oklahoma, and is presently the *Robert P. Hubbard Professor of Poetry* at Kenyon College.<sup>3</sup>

Deborah A. Miranda was awarded the Diane Decorah Award in 1997. In 2000, she was named *Writer of the Year for Poetry* for her book, *Indian Cartography*, by the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers. Miranda's father grew up as the last generation to live in a cohesive tribal Chumash unit (a compound in Santa Barbara). Miranda and her parents worked to re-establish tribal ties and reunite tribal members. Starting academia late in life, Miranda earned her Ph.D. in English at age 40 from the University of Washington in 2001. Miranda is currently Assistant Professor of English at Washington and Lee University, where she teaches Creative Writing (poetry), Native American Literatures, Women's Literature, Poetry as Literature, and composition.<sup>4</sup>

## 1.2 Critical Approach

My thesis concerns only female poets and I intend to use the term Native American poet for those three female authors I chose to discuss with regard to the previous statements I presented. For interpreting all three collections, I decided to take the approach of Minority Feminist Criticism and close reading. In my opinion and based on my knowledge of Guerin's *Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, minority feminist criticism is, along with close reading, the most suitable method for interpreting the chosen collections. As Guerin explains, "our treatment of their concerns is meant to suggest issues that confront other minorities, including Hispanic, Asian American, Native American, Jewish, Third World, handicapped, elderly, and other groups of women."<sup>5</sup> Though Guerin focuses on black feminist criticism, the critical framework is very much applicable to Native American writings as well. As I will later explain, the Western feminist model was never present in the pre-colonial era, and thus I would like to apply Alice Walker's suggestion to reject the term feminist altogether: "Speaking as a woman of color, Walker writes in her collection of criticism in *Search of Our Mothers' Gardens*, that she has replaced feminist with womanist, remarking that the former is to the latter as lavender is to purple."<sup>6</sup>

As Guerin explains, black and lesbian women more than white heterosexual women have been written out or ignored or threatened as alien. Thus the need to create a new set of traditions is more urgent. The same applies to Native women as well.

When using the minority feminist criticism approach one has to be aware of the following: "The personal life is even more political than for other women. Their work, both artistic and critical, tends to use irony as a primary literary device to focus on their self-definitions - their coming out of silence. They reject classic literary tradition as oppressive. Not only do they find most other critics racists and misogynists, but they abuse other feminist critics of developing their ideas only in reference to white, upper-middle-class women who oftentimes practice feminism only in order to become part of the patriarchal powers structure they criticize for excluding them."<sup>7</sup> That is, minority critics don't want to be counted as men but as women who are coming out of silence and realising their heritage and value in the contemporary society.

Furthermore, I would like to present W.E.B. DuBois' term "double consciousness" of the person of color in a white society, "socialized ambivalence", defined by Bernard Bell as a back-and-forth movement between integration and separation.<sup>8</sup>

Despite the fact that I, by no means, intend to make associations between African American and Native American writings, the term double consciousness and its more precise version for a woman of colour living in white male-centered society “triple consciousness”, I consider highly relevant. Guerin further explains that black feminists are interested in exploring the texts for motifs of interlocking racist, sexist, and classist oppression; the portrayal of black women as complex selves; spiritual journeys of black women from victimization to the realization of personal autonomy or creativity; the centrality of bonding; personal relationships in the family and community; reclaiming such figures as the tragic mulatto or the black mother image; validation of the epistemological power of the emotions .

Regarding the critical approach of my interpretation, it is important to mention Guerin’s comment on the perception of language within the minority feminist critics. “How language operates is a constant concern of minority critics; they prefer holistic rather than linear notions of meaning.”<sup>9</sup> Minority feminists believe the issues that concern colored women writers and characters should be expanded and given a greater place in literary criticism in general.

Additionally, I consider close reading as another relevant approach to my analysis, since precise comprehension of the poems is essential. As a non-Native, I have to pay special attention to details and different connotations as to be able to understand what comes to the authors naturally: Native American heritage and sense of tribal belonging. The combination of both minority feminist criticism and close reading will provide a solid theoretical background for my purpose.



## Notes

1 Native Writers Circle of the Americas. 13 March. 2010

<<http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/awards/poetry.html>>.

2 Blaeser, Kimberly. 13 March. 2010.

<<http://www4.uwm.edu/libraries/special/exhibits/milpoets/blaeser1.cfm>>.

3 McAdams, Jane. 13 March. 2010

<<http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/McAdams/>>.

4 Miranda, Deborah. 13 March. 2010

<<http://www.nativewiki.com/miranda/>>.

5 Wilfred Guerin, *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992) 207.

**6 Guerin 208.**

7 Guerin 207.

8 Guerin 210.

9 Guerin 209.

## 2 Theoretical part

### 2.1 From traditional oral poetry to Western literary traditions

“Columbus didn’t enter a silent world.”<sup>1</sup> At that time, North America was occupied by ten million people of different political, economical and religious structures. Summarizing all these nations under one term Native American is “the broadest and thinnest generalization.”<sup>2</sup> However, due to the destructive impact of colonization, millions of lives were lost in the uneven battle with the western European invasion and today it is estimated that there are approximately one to two million living descendants in North America.

The main difference between Indian voices and their preservation for future generations was in the mode of presentation.<sup>3</sup> Oral literature is less a tradition of texts than a tradition of performances. Translation and textualization imposed certain limits on the quality of the oral texts and had to be, naturally, adapted to the contemporary reader. The ignorance of the colonizers caused considerable damages to the preservation of oral literatures. “In Europe the Age of the Book coincided with the Age of Discovery. For this reason and others, most of the European newcomers were slow to recognize the existence of these Native American literatures.”<sup>4</sup>

This original Native American literature is rooted in the tribal experience, which is closely connected to the land and nature the Indians were always in immediate contact with and their survival relied on its mercy and favour. Kenneth Lincoln in his *Native American Renaissance* tries to find an answer to why there have been four hundred years of American silence toward native literatures. He presents the hypothesis of Dell Hymes who argues that non-Indians have been “telling the texts not to speak.”<sup>5</sup> Moreover, such a development was caused by the tragedies of tribal dislocation and mistranslation, misconceptions about literature, cultural indifference.

The first person to concern herself with the the “first-born literature of our native land”<sup>6</sup>, was Mary Austin. Two generations ago, she complained that “it is still easier to know more of Beowulf than of the Red Score of the Delaware, more of Homer than of the Creation Myth of the Zuni, more of Icelandic sagas than of the hero myths of Iroquois and Navajo.”<sup>7</sup> Yet the first more visible attempt to present the Indian American literature was an “aboriginal number” in Monroe’s 1920 publication of *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse*. “Mary Austin, Alfred Kreyborg, Nelson Crawford, and William H. Simpson offered personal versions of “native”

american verse to acquaint reverts with their own Indian country, adoptive ancestors, natural life, and regional language.”<sup>8</sup>

Kenneth Lincoln and his terms, such as the “reemergence” of Native American literature as a written renewal of oral traditions translated into Western literary forms, is mentioned also in the *Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Even though there had been attempts to bring Native American literatures to life and to the consciousness of colonizers, the success was fractional and the Indian literary traditions had to wait few more generations to resurface with new strength.

As Sacvan Bercovitch informs in the *Cambridge History of American Literature*, “The 1960s saw the creation of a new pan-Indian consciousness exemplified by the Chicago Conference of 1961; which brought together hundreds of Indians from different tribes to discuss issues of common interest.”<sup>9</sup> Native Americans were edging towards the area of civil rights very slowly but finally in 1968 Congress passed the Indian Civil Rights Act, which guaranteed to Native Americans rights that white Americans had always taken for granted, such as freedom of speech, press, and religion.

The following year was crucially important for the Indian literary world. N. Scott Momaday from the Kiowa tribe published his novel *House Made of Dawn* and in 1969 it was awarded the Pulitzer prize. As *Heath Anthology* informs through the words of James Welch, Momaday’s acknowledgement was a significant turning point: “suddenly people started to notice Indian literature, and the way kind of opened for Indians.”<sup>10</sup>

Simon Ortiz is another important persona and poet whose opinion on the 20<sup>th</sup> century development of this minority’s literature matters immensely. He identifies Momaday along with Vine Deloria, Jr. from the Sioux tribe, and James Welch from the Blackfeet-Gros Ventre as the writers who commenced a tradition of written Native American literature that did not exist before.

As Kenneth Lincoln writes, most Indian writers today, over one hundred published, were born since World War II. A generation before that, Ezra Pound and his contemporaries “prepared non-Indian literati for the new nativism with its organic forms and subjects: The edictic image, the musical cadence, the intrinsic song of spoken language, the visionary passion that charges words with meaning, the nonformalist rediscovery of art in things.”<sup>11</sup> Since the traditional oral literatures beared the qualities mentioned, the emergence of Native American literature that occurred in 1960 was easier done. It was shaped by what was recognized and relearned from contemporary literature, as non-Indian modernists had been discovering from native art forms. Paula Gunn Allen, from Laguna Pueblo, says that she

could trace her “Indian premises in Pound’s clarity of language, in Williams’s search for an American idiom, in Gertrude Stein’s firm lines, in Olson’s “glyphs”, and in Allen Ginsberg’s chanted poetry.”<sup>12</sup> And the converse is true: Pound’s musical arguments for literature, “set forth in *The A B C of Reading*, make cross-cultural sense to Indians versed in tribal ceremony”<sup>13</sup>, Paula Gunn Allen adds.

## 2.2 Getting to used to writing in the Enemy’s language

In addition to the changes that Native Americans were forced to undergo, we must not forget the change audible in spoken language and visible in the written form and that is the fact that the newly resurrected literature of native forms was and still is mostly written and published in English. The adjustment of the Indians to the Anglophone culture and consequently literary traditions had to inevitably begin with the Indians learning a new language that would enable the whites to communicate with them. Naturally, it was not the white man who was expected to learn the language of the locals, it was the locals that had to adjust and accept English as the means of communicating with the “seizers” of their land.

The two female authors of *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language*, Joy Harjo and Gloria Bird, discuss the issue of transition to English as the primary language in the introduction to their anthology. The creative writing in English language is yet criticized, as Harjo argues that “it is through writing in the colonizers’ languages that our lands have been stolen, children taken away. We have often been betrayed by those who first learned to write and to speak the language of the occupier of our lands. Yet to speak in our communities in whatever form is still respected. This is a dichotomy we will always deal with as long as our cultures are predominately expressed in oral literatures”<sup>14</sup> This statement has to be the one primarily acknowledged when discussing the collections of poems in my thesis.

The most logical reason for such development is the bare fact that young Native Americans were incorporated into the American educational system, which guarantees a “site of privilege” from which to speak. Therefore the title of the anthology is quite poignant because the new Native American voices did not just adapt to the Western literary traditions, rather reinvented their own. As Harjo continues, “we are coming out of one or two centuries of war, a war that hasn’t ended. Many of us at the end of the century are using the “enemy language” with which to tell our truths, to sing, to remember ourselves during these troubled times.”<sup>15</sup> The author also states that despite the inevitable conversion of languages, the Natives still haven’t lost their own way of perceiving the world. Notwithstanding, it is still

upon a consideration if the modern “westernized” Indians perceive English as the new native language. The authors of *Reinventing the Enemy’s Language* most surely do not. Both Harjo and Bird stipulate that they “do not believe that English is a new native language in spite of its predominant use as a vehicle for native literary production. What we have is a native literature produced in English that is written for an English-speaking audience and that incorporates a native perception of the world in the limited ways.”<sup>16</sup>

I would also like to present Lincoln’s definition of the more recent literary development: “Contemporary Indian literature is not so much new, then as regenerate: transitional continuities emerging from the old.”<sup>17</sup>

### **2.3 Specifics of the poetic traditions**

There are many elements in the poetry of Native American authors that can be designated as familiar to all of the authors. The most apparent are poetic devices such as metaphors. The metaphors that most appeal to American Indian poets are usually those that combine elements of tribal tradition with contemporary experience. Some of them are the following: understanding of the moon, of relationship, of womanhood, and of journeying with city stress, rodeo grounds, high-ways, airports, Indian bars, and powwows.<sup>18</sup>

The reason for us being able to make such a statement is that the contemporary American Indian has to consider a dual perception of the world: one that is relevant to American Indian life, and one that treats this life with ignorance. Each is largely irrelevant to the other except where they meet - in the experience and consciousness of the Indian. Because the divergent realities must meet and form comprehensible patterns within Indian life, an Indian poet must develop metaphors that not only will reflex the dual perceptions of Indian/non-Indian but also will reconcile them. The ideal metaphor will harmonize the contradictions and balance them so that internal equilibrium can be achieved, so that each perspective is meaningful and that in their joining, psychic unity rather than fragmentation occurs.<sup>19</sup>

As Paula Gun Allen believes, modern life, like modern poetry, provides various means of making the dichotomy clear and of reconciling the contradictions within it. Airports, traveling, powwows, burger stands, recreation vehicles, and advertising layouts all provide ways to enter the contradictions and resolve them. The increasingly common images from the more arcane aspects of western traditions – postindustrial science, electronic technology and the little-changing chores of housework and wifery – provide images that are common

denominators in the experiences of Indian and non-Indian alike, making perception and interpretation possible.

“Another salient characteristic of American Indian women writers is a solid and ineradicable orientation toward a spirit-informed view of the universe, which provides an internal structure to both our consciousness and our art.”<sup>20</sup> It is, however, subjective, for it is apparent that all matters concerning the non-material realms of being must be experienced within the subjective mind of each individual. Allen adds that this distinction is important for distinguishing the poetry of American Indian women from that of non-Indians and creates the difference that makes Indian works less accessible to non-Indian readers, editors, and audiences.

This objective and internal perception of spiritual forces and entities leads American Indian women to write poetry and fiction that is internally more coherent and unified than that of other American writers because it is always based on a group-shared understanding of private and public events.

## **2.4 Themes of contemporary Native American poetry**

I have already touched upon the subject of alienation from the Indian cultural heritage that frequently occurs in the lives and consequently writings of Native authors. In the introduction of *Harper's Anthology of 20<sup>th</sup> century Native American poetry*, Swann suggests a few more poetic themes. Both cultural traditions and Native American society itself are under stress. Suicide, alcoholism, unemployment abound. Poets naturally react to such issues in the society. Old Indian myths are frequent themes also.

“In the culture and literature of Indian America, the meaning of myth may be discovered, not as speculation about primitive longdead ancestral societies but in terms of what is real, actual, and viable in living cultures in America.”<sup>21</sup> Myth is one of the ways to overcome the feelings of alienation. However, for my thesis I will not approach the selected poetry from the view of mythological criticism since it is not relevant to my analysis as much as the approach of minority feminism and close reading.

Another theme is the one of faith. Choosing between monotheistic Christian religion and polytheistic Indian beliefs is in most cases a clear choice since most of the Indian population today has been christianized. Notwithstanding, we can still discern that Native American authors return to the beliefs of their ancestors in their works.

“For the majority of some million and a quarter variously defined Indians in America, being Indian involves not just the traditions or catastrophes serve dup on a buffalo chip of history, but a conscious set of choices. The central issue is what to fuse of the new and the old, improvisations and continuations from the past.”<sup>22</sup>

## **2.5 Who really is an Indian?**

It would be wrong to suppose that contemporary Native American authors turn to the past of their ancestors and attempt to approximate the old forms in their writings eminently. Most of today’s authors were raised in the Anglophone culture and also adopted the Western literary traditions. Yet it is in the themes of their works we can find differences. The differences are not just those that are based on the cultural discrepancies. The distinctions that creatively divide contemporary Indian American authors are more complex than that.

First thing to be acknowledged is the fact that it is not only Indian blood that runs through the veins of the contemporary Indians. Many Native Americans today are mixed-blood, that is, they are Indian by one of their parents only. That causes a partial or full alienation from their ancestry that the “breeds“ have to face.

“The breed (whether by parentage or aculturation to non-Indian society) is an Indian who is not an Indian. Breeds are a bit of both worlds, and the consciousness of this makes them seem alien to traditional Indians while making them feel alien among whites. Breeds commonly feel alien to themselves above all.”<sup>23</sup> The main problem the Natives have to face is very degrading: they have to declare their being full-blood Indians or a partial-bloods. The norms for being an Indian are very vague and each tribe sets their own specifications on who is still an Indian or not. Every important monography discusses this issue. Kenneth Lincoln provides us with some gross numbers: “The working definition of “Indian” though criteria vary from region to region, is minimally a quarter blood and tribal membership. Roughly seven hundred thousand Native Americans survive as full-bloods or “bloods”, to use the reservation idio, mixed bloods whose parents derive from different tribes, and half-bloods or “breeds” with one non-Indian parent. Another half million or more blooded Indian people live as whites.”<sup>24</sup>

What is there to look for in the mixed-blood heritage may come as hardly bearable issue. They can be looking for something Indians call “Indianness – what sociologists call identity and Bicentennial patriots called heritage. Identity is for breeds a matter of choice.”<sup>25</sup>

Brian Swann highly criticizes practices that demand measures on blood-lines as the latest insult. To be enrolled in a tribe, says the Bureau of Indian Affairs, one must possess

one-quarter Indian blood. I agree with Swann when he further states that “Native Americans are Native Americans if they say they are.”<sup>26</sup> No governmental official can see inside the heart of any Native American man or woman to surely state, simply by reviewing their family tree, that they are or are not Indian. Being incorporated into the tribal system shouldn’t be a matter of preserving certain purity of blood-line within the community, but a matter of Indian heritage that is worth saving for future generations. I believe that such blood measuring practices will have to be eradicated eventually, since today’s Native Americans will not have their offspring only with fellow Native Americans, so the blood-lines will be mixing further and Indians shouldn’t vanish due to paperwork and laws set by institutions or the tribal leaders themselves.

## **2.6 How much Native American?**

Eventhough I presented many arguments for considering every Native American a member of a larger structure, when interpreting the works of any Indian author, the label “collection of poems by a Native American poet” can do more harm than good. The question that Brian Swann asks is what distinguishes Native American poetry. “More than most poetry being written today, Native American poetry is the poetry of historic witness. It grows out of a past that is very much a present.”<sup>27</sup>

However, it would be too vague and incorrect to label all authors of Indian heritage as Native American poets or novelists. As Swann continues, Native American poetry is a rather vague term and has to be used wisely, since every author is specific in his own style of writing and more importantly labeling author as a member of minority curtails the importance of his or her works.

Consequently, Swann argues that too often a classification can reduce attention to what is special; it can be used to pigeonhole and thereby deny full regard. Nonetheless the usefulness of the term Native American poetry is appropriate, when “knowing that such a grouping is only a start, a convenience, an aid to understanding that leads to reinforcement and intensification of attention.”<sup>28</sup>

In my opinion, terms such as Native American are necessary to preserve at least the little bits of what was left from the pre-colonial era. Labeling poetry or fiction that is written by Indian Americans has a political subtext. To raise the awareness of the Indian minority in today’s America it is essential to define what these people are even in their writing. How much political each author and more specifically female author is, is very individual. Still,



“the political dimension is an inherent part of their writing because it is an inherent part of their lives.”<sup>29</sup>

## **2.7 Pan-Indian idea**

Since the issue of what it means to be an Indian was mentioned, let’s not forget that there were hundreds of nations all across the Americas with different traditions and belief systems. Yet, when we define someone as Indian today, we don’t imagine a person with culturally specific background but an image of dark-skinned, long-haired man or woman who lives on the reservation.

“Indians and non-Indians alike tend to gloss contemporary reservation life and vision of the way things used to be. America still fails to see the Native American as an individual with a tribal, human identity, directed by a history that informs the present.”<sup>30</sup> The pan-Indian idea is even supported by some critics and Indian authors themselves. Kenneth Lincoln is one of them with his concept of the new Indian:

“So being Indian today, what my Lakota brother, Mark Monroe, calls a “now day Indi’n”, can mean living uneasily among white people, in poorer sections of WASP-founded towns, south of the tracks, or in city ghettos; holding a job, going to school, even to college; staying sober enough to function like anyone else in white society, where alcohol is the social anodyne; and mixing white ways with Indian ways.”<sup>31</sup>

Lincoln’s now day Indi’n is not, however, an individual that realizes the specifics of his heritage just by knowing who his ancestors were. It is the rest of the community that provides the Indian with the sense of belonging. Lincoln believes that these present-day people believe in themselves as Indians and act on that belief, within their own definitions. They realize themselves within a sense of Indian community. Their Indianness is not individually seized, but tribally granted and personally carried out, as the old ones carried time down to where it is on their backs. In the older traditions it was not believed that time is passing around the people but that they were time.<sup>32</sup>

## **2.8 Community**

Community life has always been crucial for the understanding of Native American social structures. As Stephanie Sellers writes, all indigenous nations were communal people with a very special bond to nature and all living things. “Relationship with the natural world and communal ethics are primary cultural definitions that set indigenous nations apart from

the nations of western culture and of industrialized nations today.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, even if the idea of pan-Indianism may delimit Natives as individuals, there are certain characteristics or principals on which are Indian lives built even today and the sense of communal belonging is one of the most important.

Although Sellers partially contradicts the pan-Indianic notion she agrees that “noting that there are important, fundamental similarities among indigenouse nations is readily observable and are, therefore, legitimate points to note.”<sup>34</sup> Among many, she mentions the Western culture’s hierarchy of existence model versus the communal ethics model of First Nations peoples.

Moreover, one of the shared views on Mother Earth is stated by Sellers who points out that all beings on our planet, including Mother Earth herself, are considered to be: members of community, in relationship with each other, intelligent, conscious, having spirit and able to communicate to human beings if they wish to.<sup>35</sup>

## **2.9 Individual vs. Communal**

All of the collections of poems I am to be discussing were written in free confessional verse. What is quite western-culture about them is the personalised “I”, the speaking as an individual, for oneself. The “I” of an individual was primarily and almost solely for men. Themes from traditional works like the hero, the savior, the adventurer, the conqueror, and the warrior are about petting one man against other men, nature, or his won internal conflicts. What they all have in common is the centralization of men and, most importantly for this discussion, the individual human. Sellers presents her idea that the centralization of the individual is in nearly every literary classic in the western tradition; however, it does not appeal in the traditonal stories of Native peoples. What is central to Native peoples is the “We” of the nation and the biosphere, not the “I” of one human self.<sup>36</sup> I don’t agree with Sellers here, because to be raised in Western culture, as all of my authors were, it is necessary to accept the concept of “one”, to be individual and be profiled so. As much as the themes in their poetry might suggest their participation in the communal, they still write confessional poetry that uncovers their own feelings and opinions, not those of many.

## **2.10 Pre-colonial Native American woman**

Given all the facts stated by Guerin in *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature*, I find it necessary to emphasize the differences in historical development and position of women in the pre-Colombian era of the First Nations.

As a result of the changes that brought colonization with its patriarchal social structure is that Indian American women today still have to face oppression and the hardships that come with being a woman from an ethnic minority. “For Native American women, the struggle for survival has specific challenges since the colonizing culture (western culture) brought misogyny with it and all the religion, social and judicial restraints a women-persecuting society endangers.”<sup>37</sup>

I would like to start by stipulating that most of literary and cultural information that was and still may be provided in classes about Native American literature and Native American social and political structures are very much untrue. Anthologies about American literature tend to generalize or provide only very general background and almost never provide space for Native American women authors. The truth about women’s roles in the pre-colonial America is overshadowed by captive narratives and authors like Fenimore Cooper whose Indians aren’t Indians as they were but as he wanted them to be. Therefore, in American literature classes, attention isn’t drawn to what white authors perceived incorrectly. One of the very common mistakes is that students aren’t warned that patriarchy was not the original social and hierarchal system. Most of pre-Columbian nations were built on matriarchy. “Native women’s roles changed dramatically during colonization because, among other reasons, the colonizers believed in and practiced a patriarchal governing and social structure.”<sup>38</sup>

Sellers defines such social structures as gynocratic. It would be inaccurate to say that the First Nations were ruled solely by women. The governing, ceremonial, and social structures of most gynocratic native nations are based in gendered balance: women’s duties and men’s duties. The purpose of this is to maintain harmonious balance within the nation. This balance is often reflected in the creation stories of the nation.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, such balance wasn’t maintained only in the nation but it was also reflected in the creation stories. As opposed to the Christianity where God and his son Jesus are both male and the gender balance is absent, Native nations believed in preserving the natural balance of all living things. That would also include the multiple creators and creatrixes who were females, males, transgenders, and often animals. In many cosmologies women are centrally figured, and some names of these divine beings are Sky Woman, Thought Woman, Corn Woman, Spider Woman, and First Woman.<sup>40</sup>

Accordingly, the initial steps that the first colonizers and missionaries had to take were towards transforming the whole social and political systems in which women had too much power, appreciation and had more value than white women at that time. Seller further

explains that through forced assimilation often enacted through missionary schools, over the past several hundred years, some native people began to reject their own culture that centralized women because they were told it was wrong, even “savage” and “ungodly” to believe in it anymore. Doing so is called internalized racism: “the belief that what racists think about the people they are discriminating against, even hating, that the members of that hated group then adopt the beliefs about themselves and think they are actually true.”<sup>41</sup>

### **2.11 Native American women today**

Today, Native American women are forced to overcome two barriers at once. First, they have to gain confidence as women and then as women of color.

Lets consider the first issue Native American woman has to face with regard to our topic here which is poetry What is different about poetry by women, of course is no its nature but the fact that until recently it has been undervalued an to some extent neglected. Such notions about women’s poetical incapacibilities root in the fact that “poet was a masculine word. The Muse was female, the poet was male. There was a deep-seated conviction that women couldn’t do it.”<sup>42</sup>

However, a lot of women were writing but socially isolated. Another factor was the lack of education amongst women whose household duties were more important than educaiton. That is expecially apparent among the Native Americans who were for a long time denied equal education, without a regard to the gender.

Nowadays, Fleur Adcock believes that the problem has shifted elsewhere. The danger is that women’s poetry will be shunted into a ghetto, occupying the “Women’s” section of the bookshop rather than poetry section.<sup>43</sup>

Adcock also writes, that such situation can be blamed on the separatist attitude of certain women writers who reject patriarchal standards along with the “language of the oppressors. It is the real poet who wants to address both sexes or to an audience that is not gender-defined.”<sup>44</sup>

Such issue faces Native American literature also, as I already mentioned earlier. That results in Native American women poets struggling to overcome two barriers at once.

## Notes

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### 3 Practical part

In the practical part of my thesis I will analyse the three chosen collections of poems using the critical approaches discussed in the introduction of my thesis.

#### 3.1 *Trailing You* by Kimberly M. Blaeser

I would like to begin my analysis of Blaeser's *Trailing You* with her statement about the poetry she writes:

“Claiming or believing in an individual voice, we delude ourselves. No voice arises from one person. My work is filled with the voices of other people. It crosses boundaries of time and space, of ways of knowing, of what it means to be human. Like many Indian people, I write partly to remember, because remembering, we recover; remembering, we survive. I think the best poems might be nothing more than a list of names of people, animals, places, plants, sounds, season, because poetry is connections and these are the connections – the poetry we all carry in our soul, the poetry that writers try to bring to the surface.”<sup>1</sup> This revealing confession somewhat declares the theoretical assumptions that I presented earlier.

Blaeser's *Trailing You* contains poems in free verse that explore many aspects of Native American culture and modern woman's place in it. Very pointedly, in five chapters, Blaeser lays down the basis of her perception of the pan-Indianic concept and how she perceives her ancestry, as well as her contemporary self.

She chose the poem “Speaking Those Names” as the opening one for her collection. Here, she confronts the notorious question of who we are. And hers is answered through another person's definitions or ideas. Hearing someone else, reminds us who we are,

“I become again myself  
my holdin-your-hand self  
my hair braided, round cheeked self  
my barefoot, fringed cut-off self  
my lace thighs, Easter hat self, my watermelon loving, woodstick hating self,  
my child self, my teen-age self, my now self  
my whole self”<sup>2</sup>

The possessive pronoun “my” suggests she is confident with being independent, yet it is someone else who means so much to her that every aspect of her life is reflected in this other person’s voice and the words uttered in it. She is made whole by another person’s presence in her life. The names she was given by her mother or father give her the sense of safety, “speaking them out loud in rescue.”<sup>3</sup> She won’t lose the sense of herself and she will “know again myself in relationship.”<sup>4</sup>

Yet the second stanza is more personal, writing those names down, she realizes how many times she is herself, how many roles she has to play in this world and each of these roles has a different name, each having a particular significance, all of them together resulting in her “claiming myself / in speaking those names.”<sup>5</sup> Rayna Green also discusses names as a religious matter: “Receiving names, realizing you own names you never knew, taking new names, giving names – all are part of the deepest religious process for Native people. In conferring names or in simply calling them – sometimes for the first time in a non-public ceremonial, these writers create ceremony, invoking the powers of the often forgotten female spirits, giving women power to speak and create.”<sup>6</sup>

In “Living History”, Blaeser ponders if we carry the history of our ancestors in us, in the way we act, in the way we resemble them and therefore some may view us from the perspective of their past. For them, we are a different spirit in the same body, so when Big Indian man pinches her arm, he doesn’t see the poet, but her mother whom she resembles. “Hell, wasn’t looking at me. / Wonder if I’m what they call living history?”<sup>7</sup> She is left with a feeling that her own self is lost in the self of an ancestor.

“Ice Tricksters and Shadow Stories” is a poem based on a popular mythical figure in the Native American tales and stories. The Trickster is a well-known and beloved figure in many myths over much of the world. In North America he is characteristically portrayed as a being from the early mythological times when the animals appeared as human beings - human in mentality and thinking, animals in form — and the trickster himself was often zoomorphic and behaved as an impostor and cheater.

The heroine of the poem struggles to shed a light on the voices of ice she hears. After sleepless night she goes back to her roots and looks and searches for an explanation in the old Indian stories of creation: “Remembering the story, how ice woman frone the wiindigoo at just that point in the moccasin game.”<sup>7</sup> The duality of every character, every part of the game, realising the balance of all things, she began to hear.

But then again, the rational reasoning surfaces and she tries to explain the tricksters based on the scientific knowledge of Celsius and centigrade, subjects “to simple laws of time



and temperature.”<sup>8</sup> But she, as the poet reminds us, forgets for a moment the “ice shadows cast by myth.”<sup>9</sup>

In this poem, precisely in its final stanza, we can find a poetical device typical for Native American oral literatures – anaphora of initial word in each line in which she seeks to find her true identity that the ice tricksters forced her to question. The whole truth is revealed to her in a dream or something close to it, yet more deadly. Waking up from such a dream is an epiphany that is followed by her

“Wondering had she been rescued or been condemned,  
Wondering if she was human, or ie, or shadow,  
Wondering if her voice sounded or was silent,  
Wondering if her story was the present or the past,  
Wondering if she was myth or reality,  
Wondering finally, if perhaps they weren’t the same”<sup>10</sup>

The centrality of the juxtaposition of both is that mysterious “timeless equilibrium / where one begins at last to understand voices”<sup>11</sup> and consequently to herself.

Another sort of epiphany, a different comprehension of things, isn’t something inherent only to the First Nations but also to post-colonial Americans who, living on the Turtle Island, changed their lives and desired to preserve what is essential to First Nations also, the nature.

In “History Again”, Blaeser recalls and admires John Muir, an advocate for preservation of American wilderness in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. His accident in his workplace - an industrial plant - was an epiphany, a point at which he changed the direction of his life.<sup>12</sup> The poet, finding herself in a valley that was preserved thanks to Muir, tries to find parallels with Muir and the loss of his eye.

What she desires then is to become Muir himself, a man, who in his time, could embrace the call of nature and change his fate: “If only I could grow a beard, pack my knapsack, / put on my hiking boots, live on good bread and tea, / If only I could walk backwards into history If only I could find the light to change my life.”<sup>13</sup> Interestingly, she doesn’t want to be a woman that she is, but rather a bearded man, which makes me believe that this poem is also an allusion to Emerson’s self made man, and H.D. Thoreau’s experiences of life in the wilderness. The simple fact that she looks back into history and it is there, in the past, she would like to change her life suggests she would want to change her life through helping those in the past. The patriarchal system into which was the poet born leaves its mark with her wish to make this all happen as a man, not a woman.

I find the poem titled “On the Way to the Chicago Pow-Wow” as one of the most important ones in Blaeser’s collection since it directly and very specifically shows how much has the Native American culture been suffering and how she finds her own way to cope with that fact. Pow-wow, a gathering of Native American people, is a cultural event whose significance, or the lack thereof was caused by the transformation of cultural values in the white-dominated country. A modern pow-wow is a specific type of event where both Native American and non-Native American people meet to dance, sing, socialize, and honor American Indian culture. Poem consists of three stanzas and each of them begins the same: “on the way to the Chicago pow-wow.”<sup>14</sup> The attribute Chicago tells us that the powwow is held in post-colonial America, it is no longer a pow-wow named after a nation or area on which the nation lived for centuries, but modern American city. It is not the old-day Indian tradition, but one that had to be readjusted to contemporary vision of Native American culture. Blaeser relates to Roberta’s opinion of the pow-wow who calls it an abyss, “a puzzle that Indian people across the country / are working on.”<sup>15</sup> They don’t know what it means, or rather what it should mean for them. The puzzle is full of alienation, not knowing what significance should pow-wow have for its attendants. Such situation she blames on “madmen who want us all lost / in the rotating maze.”<sup>16</sup> White people, or mixed-bloods will have them lost in multitude of Indian traditions stuffed into one puzzling pow-wow for all of them regardless of the tribal specifics. Also, the madman’s classic cliché is the one that originated in capture narratives, Cooper’s and many others’ noble savages, or to put it in other words, the best of the both worlds.

Home is what pow-wow should be and it isn’t because it was tainted by the hand of the white man who started organizing even the most important events for the indigenous people: “Thinking of home, I know we are driving the wrong way.”<sup>17</sup> The pow-wow feels homely to her only when she travels to the one in her mind, the real Indian open air pow-wow, not the one that is in “the heart of Carl Sandburg’s hog-butcher to the world.”<sup>18</sup>

Blaeser’s poems don’t explore her Native American descent only through myths and old traditions. She also unveils herself as a daughter, mother and wife. Yet, all these family roles are associated with her heritage and affect her in many ways. In “Rituals, Yours - and Mine”, Blaeser confides to her mother about the devotion and love she has for her. The poem is addressed directly to “your long yellow-gray braid / hanging heavy down your back.”<sup>19</sup> The author admits certain subordination to her mother’s principals that “stretch / that long distance / from home to here / from then to now.”<sup>20</sup> But the words uttered by her mother are the words she lives by and they bear more crucial significance than being just an advice how to live. Her

mother's words console and explain things in fashion that any of the "new words I've ever read learned / or shelved so neatly / can't."<sup>21</sup> Even the most common days that start with the most common things are cherished by the author for she wants to feel and observe everything so familiar and common and return to her childhood when she used to sneak on her mother and then hear "that familiar exclamation / you snapping the dishtowel / landing it just of me / shame on me for surprising you."<sup>22</sup> The table that she is now sitting at, observing her mother's every sacred move and line in her face, represent the safe place that she can always return to anywhere and anytime: "smoothing away tie with the fluid line / of your memory / I am in place at your table"<sup>23</sup> and by opening the kitchen door she doesn't only bring the daylight into her house but she is also "bringing it into mine."<sup>24</sup>

As a mother of little Frankie, Blaeser realises his reign not only in her heart but also in his own world. At the age of three, not knowing how big the world is outside of "My Santa Fe house / my mountains, arroyos / rainbows, cereal box toys / my pow-wow music,"<sup>25</sup> he sits in his baby chair, his throne. Insisting on so many little things that move any mother's heart he conquers her world and they both "crouch together under the troll bridge / in the safe sweet world of our invention."<sup>26</sup> She abandons her grown-up world and "I forget to be embarrassed as I twirl you in dance."<sup>27</sup> When her son turns four, she realises that his little innocent games "become an omen of a story no one wants to tell."<sup>28</sup> No one wants to tell him that his life will be affected by his ancestry and made more difficult. As he grows older, it is no longer the child that wants to claim the world whole, it is his mother and her imagination, her invention, her hopes and expectations that she has for him that dominate. Yet she has to respect that his life has to be independent and not ran by her, or as she puts it "your world, still."<sup>29</sup> Childhood is metaphorically described and compared to a kingdom with different rules and their passing or obeying is the little ruler's liberty only. And she as a mother is only allowed to reside in the kingdom without attempting to influence it with her own rules.

As a wife who believes in different things, some of them ridiculed by modern society, she has to successively approximate her beliefs to the world of her husband's and let him find his own path that will eventually imbibe to hers. In "Waking to Dreams", she defends the power of dreams that show her either the future or the journey that her life will take. During the "just married mornings over the perking of my coffee / and the crunching of my cereal, / I recite my dreams to you."<sup>30</sup> She doesn't get upset when her husband listens to her only sometimes. She presents her perfect tactics of getting her husband accustomed to her world and upbringing that was superstitious and didn't disparage one's visions or dreams. She takes her husband to hear other Native Americans who tell "role of dreams / in her life and her

family.”<sup>31</sup> That leaves her with a feeling that her own beliefs were explained interestingly, through different member of the community, not in her own words.

To take her spouse to another home to show him that what she does isn't unstable, but a common practice in certain cultures, means that he partially becomes a part of it all. The husband will still “find it amusing / but not so odd anymore.”<sup>32</sup> Through dreams, the subconscious, she is also connected to her family and when he tells her about his dreams, he gradually transpires part of her beliefs.

As the final stage of his transformation, he nods when he finds out that another Indian cut a tree because he dreamed it would fall on his trailer and then they both know “even as we all laugh / that now you believe in some things, too.”<sup>33</sup>

Blaeser, as Adams, dedicated considerable amount of poems to meditations about nature and animals since they are all on the same level of importance as humans.<sup>34</sup> I would like to point out one poem that is, in its message, quite similar to Adams' “Ice Tricksters and Shadow Stories”. In “Sleeping With McKenzie”, a river, Blaeser desires a certain timeless equilibrium and wants the ever moving mass of water to “teach me / how / to drop / earthly burdens / to move with you / so gently / into / that floating web where dreams reside.”<sup>35</sup> However, the water in the liquid form doesn't start talking first, it is the poet who asks the permission to forget and sink with the river into animal oblivion and then begs the river to speak: “Will you? / sing me there / with / breathy purring.”<sup>36</sup> Very appropriately, Blaeser adjust the form of the poem to the “taut flesh / leanness”<sup>37</sup> of the river. Some lines that consist of only one word as they flow faster like a water inside the banks of a river and in other places when the river channel is broader, the words pile up in one line.

Blaeser's concept of nature is transformative, especially in poems which admire the conversions of animals or insect. Such conversion can either take place in our mind or in our hands, by our doing.

“This Cocoon” is an example of the later, a minute particularization of the course of capturing a butterfly to create a cocoon with our hands. At that moment, we can feel the “quick life, / pulsing / in my hand.”<sup>38</sup> At another, the butterfly is gone out of the “cocoon / spun of flesh.”<sup>39</sup> The feeling of winged vibrations connect the child's excitement to the butterfly. Both in sync, the child wants to share the other being's secrets, “break out / for a moment / with wings.”<sup>40</sup> At another time, it is the butterfly that “wants to feel the human flutter.”<sup>41</sup> On her shoulder they transform into pinions on her shoulder. Winged again, she is captured and struck with awe. Just as much as she wants to be held down and “held fast / by

butterfly feet”<sup>42</sup> she wants to take flight from the cocoon that is her life, free herself from the imaginary prison, her invisible hands that keep her in cocoon as well.

“Alaskan Mountain Stories, Transfiguration” is interesting from many points of view. The first, most apparent one, is that the poem of two parts is written in prose. In each part the story describes moments in the life of a grizzly bear that is feared for its ferocity. On the surface, the poem may simply mean that animals like grizzly could kill a human in cold blood. However, when danger occurs she is stricken with constant fear of the animal, not realising that the bear may not even bother to attack her since her smell is tainted with tremor. “A better meal in mind than one scrawny mixed-blooded woman whose taste would have been spoiler anyway by the smell of fear.”<sup>43</sup> Due to this fear she “even faded from my own mind one in the presence of the bear.”<sup>44</sup> When she says Migwetch, meaning thank you in the Ojibwe language, for not being eaten, but destroyed in much more useful way – it helps her to realize that there is more to a grizzly than just sharp teeth and craving for blood.

In the second part we are introduced to a different situation. The grizzly bear is no longer around people but in his natural habitat: “that great blonde bear lumbering across the August tundra.”<sup>45</sup> Alliteration intensifies the grizzly’s music Blaeser sees and she wants to sing for you the song she saw. The song here isn’t the one that we know, “this song has no sound, but only motion sending the words through the air.”<sup>46</sup> It is a visual song of nature as the bear runs through the wild gaining respect from the birds that “lighted round to watch him eat, to learn his song.”<sup>47</sup> Pointing with his mouth the tribal way suggests that he is tightly connected to the world above and beyond our visioning. The world we can connect to only when in immediate alliance with nature. And as he runs through the tundra, the Transfiguration of the surroundings takes place only to fade out as the bear gets lost in the bushes. “And the words and sound returned to the tundra.”<sup>48</sup> She degrades her being of a woman to the point of self-ignorance. She isn’t more relevant to the bear than other fearing creatures. She is in sync with nature, understanding its laws and visual sounds which is the traditional Native American setting for every human being.

The recollection of how it felt to be the fallout and growing up as a minority in the USA, Blaeser tells in poem “Downwinders”. She directly attacks what America proudly presents as one of its principals. Downwinders’ main theme is the sacrifice of some for the welfare of many. She persuaded that we all live downwind and downstream and some of us are more equal than others, meaning that Native Americans were appointed to be those fallouts who won’t be treated equally but rather as a collateral damage. In the second stanza

she provides us with a personal recollection of how it felt to be an Indian girl at school, being sent to “the little trailer in the parking lot - / the dentist office for all the Indian kids.”<sup>49</sup> She compares her-then to a guinea pig, but her-now goes to a normal dentist just like other people. Such experiences make her empathetic to other tribes and people who experienced similar fallout of the downwind. The rest of the poem takes us to different location where the Natives were being experimented on or exploited. But the experiments do not affect just Native Americans anymore. She points out the genetic modification of foods that is a wide-spread experiment everywhere. Also, employees in modern world are exploited which she proves on an example of Elgin watch makers. As much as we would like to believe that most of us really live downwind and downstream there are those among us who weren’t given this chance.

The most powerful poems in her collection are, in my opinion, about her defining herself as such fallout and at the same time a poet and a woman of Native American ancestry. Especially four poems that I would like to further discuss stand out as the basis of her attitude towards the Native Americanness today. “Native Americans“ vs. “The Poets”, “American Indian Voices: I Wonder is This is an Indian Poem” and “Road Show” all question the white America’s common view on Native Americans as members of the society. Another theme is being Indian American within an Indian American community. I believe that this is her standpoint from which she approaches all of the topics that discuss Native American women as a minority within a minority within a nation of white Americans – the already mentioned tripple consciousness.

In “Native Americans” vs. “The Poets” she attacks the very common notion of perceiving a Native American scholar as a must-have at every equal-rights academic institution:

“Indian professors at universities throughout the country

Exhibit A,

No B, no C, just solitary romanticized A

Not much of a threat that way”<sup>50</sup>

Blaeser ironically points out that the image of the white man’s noble savage still survives even in our contemporary society but in a different form. It is the solitary Indian with noble principles in the traditional clothing, yet educated. So the Fenimore Cooper’s Indian who spends most of his time outdoors is only moved indoors and expected to show up outside, the Indian way, only when it is expected or appropriate. Also certain literature is expected. According to Blaeser, “real trouble is / America / still doesn’t know what to do with



whatever ancestry contribute what they can to the analysis and understanding of traditional materials. Let those who are not Indian leave the continuing reworking of traditional materials to Indian people.”<sup>56</sup>

In her first collection, Blaeser invites us to her world of a modern Native American woman and tells us “who takes her to the place where poems live.”<sup>57</sup> A poem is for her a realization of what we are: the sounds and the images. Just like we do, poems have souls, springing with life that we live. Trailing not just her family’s past in “Trailing You” but also going deep to the core of the Indian heritage she redefines what Indian Americanness means for a woman and what it should mean to the non-Natives. At times her memories won’t come clear, but looking at an old picture isn’t real enough. We can relive our memories in dreams that we cherish. Her poetry, is the means by which survival is made easier. In the final metaphor in “Trailing You” she compares the heaving of her loved one trough the frozen lake to the shore and her poetry is a journey through such ice as well: “I wonder if these poems are the path I make and I wonder / how far it is / to shore.”<sup>58</sup>



Notes:

1 Kimberly Blaeser, *Trailing You* (New York: The Greenfield Review Press, 1994) ix.

2 - 4 Blaeser 3.

5 Blaeser 4.

6 Green 8.

7 Blaeser 5.

8 Blaeser 7.

9 Blaeser 8.

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14 – 18 Blaeser 12-13.

19 – 24 Blaeser 14 – 16.

25 – 29 Blaeser 43 – 44.

30 – 33 Blaeser 64 – 65.

34 Sellers 51.

35 – 37 Blaeser 26 – 27.

38 – 42 Blaeser 33 – 34.

43 – 48 Blaeser 30 – 31.

49 Blaeser 54.

50 – 52 Blaeser 53.

53 - 55 Blaeser 56 - 57.

56 Dell Hymes, "Anthologies and Narrators, " *Recovering the Word: Essays on Native American Literature*, ed. Swann, Brian, Arnold Krupat et al (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987) 43.

57 – 58 Blaeser 39.

### **3.2 *The Island of Lost Luggage* by Janet McAdams**

I would like to begin my analysis of *The Island of Lost Luggage* with the first charter of the collection titled “Boulevard of Heroes”. The “boulevard” itself doesn’t necessarily have to be any real boulevard that can be found in a city or a place of Native American heritage. It is an imaginary boulevard on which, when we walk, can be introduced to the heroes who are presented in either anonymous or concrete way; in positive or negative light throughout this part of the collection.

It is the author who gives us the pass to proceed from hero to hero, scene to scene, event to event. It is important to stipulate that most of the characters and events poetically described are real and relate to historic and sometimes also tragic events in the history of South American countries and also reveal the author’s self-exploration as she walks along the boulevard.

The first poem of my analysis, is “The Basilica of Our Lady of Good Health”. As the author explains in her notes, the poem is set in Pátzcuaro, Mexico and concerns the unfortunate death of Gertrudis Bocanegra who was martyred in the Mexican Revolution.

The basilica has two meanings for McAdams: one is the real church in the city of Pátzcuaro, the Basilica of Nuestra Señora de la Salud, which is dedicated to the Virgin Mary. It is also the mother of Jesus that is made out of corn-stalk paste and honey and located in the church dating back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>1</sup> As the poet suggests, she wants to kiss that image just like all the pilgrims that come to her to pray for health. However, she doesn’t desire to pray to Virgin Mary. There is another shrine in Pátzcuaro for her. It is dedicated to a martyr who was arrested and tortured and executed in 1817 in the Mexican War of Independence, María Gertrudis Bocanegra de Mendoza de Lazo de la Vega.<sup>2</sup> The tree to which she was tied to and eventually shot at still has the bullet holes that bear new meaning to the poet as she inserts the “milagros” into one of the holes. This second meaning of the basilica provides us with a different perspective on the author’s belief system. Evethough the Lady of Good Health hears our prayers, but “no, not mine”<sup>3</sup>, McAdams withdraws herself from the mercy of Virgin Mary. The pilgrims’ prayers are “dull silver”<sup>4</sup>, but unlike the pilgrims, she only wants some answers from Mary. Answers that will become silver and unveil their utmost truth about being a woman like Gertrudis Bocanegra.

The penultimate stanza comprises the most important metaphor in this poem and consists of three questions that are essential for understanding the poem as a whole. Her body

is compared to a continent whose heart carries scales that move all across the continent. She suggests she wants the scales to measure the bad and the good and tell her what is right. What could possibly break on this continent of her body if the scales measured it? That is, how much can a woman in this world take to have the scale exclaim the inevitable “enough”? Finally, in the last question “Is the broken skin of the ash any woman’s story?”<sup>5</sup>, she ponders Bocanegra’s martyrdom and wonders if it really could be the destiny that could befall each and every one of us women.

The tree full of bullet holes becomes the shrine and it is from this place she wants to be listened to. The “miracle for every part of her body”<sup>6</sup> should be the point at which the scales swimming through her like a fish make the right measurement and she is able to withstand all the hardship that women, who fight for something, experience.

The church itself, eventhough supposedly religious: woman selling rosaries, monks, festivities, loses its significance for her and she seeks to gain strength from the one whose image wasn’t “shaped from Tzintzingue paste”<sup>7</sup>, but was shaped by Bocanegra’s courage, and once, her own presence.

Next poem, in certain way follows the topic that was adverted in the previous one: it describes war and the role of the savior in all the surrounding mayhem. The poem is titled “El Salvador del Mundo” which is the shorter and original name for the country that was named Provincia De Nuestro Señor Jesucristo “El Salvador Del Mundo” (“Province of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Savior of the World”) in early sixteenth century by the Spanish conquistadors.<sup>8</sup> The poem is set in a particular time of the month along with the visual direction where we should be looking: “It’s full moon here. Saturn and Jupiter / line up across the tropical sky and we wait, we wait.”<sup>9</sup> What are they waiting for is revealed in the following line: Our eyes focus and “the sky becomes a color after all.”<sup>10</sup> Next stanza suggests that the color in the sky was caused by human force in “our little country of unhappiness exploding over and over.”<sup>11</sup> But at the very beginning of the same stanza McAdams reveals more trivial desire than for the war to end. She longs for a friend and uncovers her lack of interest in her students in class. Moreover, she confesses that even in the times of political hardship we still have personal problems, wishes, lives and we all equilibrate differently. McAdams means that she is still a woman with a life that is only parallel to the one outside. The author solves her withdrawal by trailing “a bottle of Tick Tack down Paseo Escalón.”<sup>12</sup> Even the bottle itself plays an important role “in the bright dark of our altitude.”<sup>13</sup> The liquor takes her away from everything immediately close to her and allows the dive in the safe world of oblivion.

When McAdams asks in the final stanza “What is the savior of the world doing / among these wire fences, in all this broken glass?”<sup>14</sup> She doesn’t mean that the savior is there. She is looking for him, anywhere in the country that was revolution-beaten. Again, we can see objects in streets, compared to the “streets” in the sky, full of unfamiliar ammunition which further challenges her faith in the savior: “If the street were a sky, glass would glitter / like stars, a thousand broken pieces along the curb.”<sup>15</sup>

It is the mirror reflection of the sky in the street and the God’s hand of stone, the roads and sidewalks, that inspire her to move the savior’s residence into the heart of the earth that is “flexing its chambers of love and sorrow.”<sup>16</sup>

The material of the God’s hand is important too. Stone, as a cold lifeless, stationary part that can’t interfere with the living. That is also how the author is feels towards el Salvador del Mundo. In the city named after him, the savior is nowhere to be found. The universe on the earth is quite different from the one that a woman looks up to and idolizes.

As we can learn from the author’s notes, “Boulevard of Heroes”, “The Door of the Devil”, and “News from the Imaginary Front” refer to events that took place in El Salvador during the late 1980s when José Napoleon Duarte.<sup>17</sup>

The first poem of this triad “truncates into a single weekend a number of events that took place in 1987 and 1988 in response to the Esquipulas II Peace Talks, *including the paros*, by which th leftist FMLN closed down the capital, and the assassination of the head of the Salvadoran human rights agency by right.”<sup>18</sup> First thing we have to focus on is the structure of this poem: each of the three stanzas are loosely divided into two parts: one that describes the general only to be smoothly invaded by the poet’s “I”, her personal and subjective experience of those events. Also, there is the “you” that shows her around and is her “knowing guide“ of what is happening around. And he knows whose side is the right one to take: “a lie, you said and you should know.”<sup>19</sup> So, guided by her friend she sees the local natural wealth contrasted with the foreign presence of the photographers who “called out questions to their translators.”<sup>22</sup> Her otherness is emphasized by the “gringo argument.”<sup>23</sup> Gringo, having a negative connotation, meaning white person, carries her closer to the photographers than to the local community. She also explicitly defines one of the apparent characteristics of non-Native people who are “full of ourselves.”<sup>24</sup>

In the next stanza, it is someone else who is in control over her beliefs and actions, besides the powerful “you“. Here, she isn’t advised what to believe but what to do, which is “to stay in, boil water and keep a flashlight handy.”<sup>25</sup> It further confirms my initial assumption that she feels alienated from the events surrounding her and the fact that she

belongs to the strangers in this country is revealed when she “went back for my camera.”<sup>26</sup> Again, the oblivion to what is happening pervades: “I didn’t care if the war went on forever.”<sup>27</sup> In her surrender, I suppose an attempt to withdraw herself from anything as cruel and painful as her Indian past, when seeing parallels with the South American countries.

North Americans are in this poem pictured as those whose oblivion and ignorance has different source and its aim is to disparage the deaths which are “nothing, after all, in a country where people / die like crazy.”<sup>28</sup> Such an ignorance she despises in her friend who is apparently a stranger as well. When intoxicated, he points at local women and sees them only as sexual objects he had intercourse with. Despite everything, she still doesn’t know better life than this, considering that her nation has been struggling for centuries, she expresses the forced acceptance of her fate that is also the same for all the Native Americans living today – the constant struggle for survival.

El Puerto del Diablo (“the door of the Devil”) is a natural sight with a beautiful view of the surrounding countryside of capital city of San Salvador. As McAdams explains in her notes, during the early 1980s, it was notorious as a dumping ground for bodies of the disappeared. The guerillas of the left-wing FMLN were often referred to as the “boys”. Founder of the right-wing ARENA Party, Roberto D’ Aubeisson has, according to Amnesty International, “been accused of active participation in the activities of death squads responsible for the death of thousands of Salvadoreans, including the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero.”<sup>29</sup> The conditions under which such events occur are relevant to my interpretation of the poem. Also, the division of the poem into general and personal will help us to make sense of it. First we learn that on the peak above the capital the “boys” are attacking the city beneath them. The ferociousness of their actions is contrasted by the “cliffs / of pink sandstone and bougainvillea.”<sup>30</sup> The same contrast can be found in the city: the innocence of the nature is affected by the human constructions and obstructions: “dusky rose climbs over the wrought-iron bars that keep out everything.”<sup>31</sup> The common feeling for an American Indian woman applies especially in such situations: “Fearful of everything,”<sup>32</sup> they push their plates away, but not just those with the “smear of orange,”<sup>33</sup> but also figuratively, the plates on which the reality around them is served on: “the man who presses his face to our kitchen window,”<sup>34</sup> is perceived just like the plate, as a familiar item.

The mid stanza explains that none of the civilians see the guerilla warfare as something unusual. They are afraid but the noise of the machine guns becomes part of all the sounds of morning with “racket of vendors, the maid’s swish, swish / as she scrubs out clothes against the stone slab of the pila, mortar fire from the mountain”<sup>35</sup> The sounds are intensified

with alliteration for the gentle sounds with the smooth swish swish as she scrubs on the stone slab, compared to harsh strong sounds of mortar and fire. The fear of death of the sane innocent people, aware of the constant threat that come with every war is beautifully contrasted with the “crazy man with his delicate walk”<sup>36</sup> benighted of the reality.

What the the civilians experience every day and is a very obvious parallel to the life on the Indian reservation is explained in the final stanza.

“The earth shifts beneath the life we wanted:  
we work, we work, and turn each night  
in to our safe houses. Two by two,  
nuns with our downward glances,  
we climb and climb, descend  
the white streets of the city.”<sup>37</sup>

The movement of the earth under their feet, regardless of the speed of their pace, running or walking delicately, snatches them into the reality they have to live in. Using the metaphor of nuns for all the citizens is quite poignant since nun has to obediently listen to her only God as Indians have to obey the current master who forced himself into their lives long time ago.

The final poem of the triade, “News from Imaginary Front” is a ticket for the reader that will take him or her on the journey through the war the way he doesn’t want to know it. McAdams’ personal depiction is alarming in its intensity of description of the cruelties of war which come to foreigners and readers from second or third hand, only mediated and therefore don’t mean anything to them compared to the meaning of the war for those who are immediately affected by it.

She wants the reader to realise that the war is closer to them more than they think. She is also bitterly ironic when she lures the reader to come closer when she will “tell the story the way you want to hear it. / Think this: / It could have been me / Think this: It could have been any one of us. It wasn’t.”<sup>38</sup> The fault that she finds with the reader is that during the time she lived in “a tiny, violent country, / a Vietnam for my aimless generation,”<sup>39</sup> the story is only another amusement. Again, that is how we all, non-Natives perceive the terrible fate of the First Nations: we want to hear about the war, be amused and that’s it. We don’t want it to become personal. After time, it all “grows dull in the North American sun,”<sup>40</sup> the wrong interest which is “disappearing now, all of it.”<sup>41</sup> The author, a breed and American woman, is overbearing with the struggle she was close to, even with the things that shouldn’t be told: for instance, her talking to Duarte’s and D’Aubuisson’s people. She is the one, again!, “licking

the salt from the long wound of history. / This blood is sweet and my mouth's full of it. I'm milking this body for everything it's worth."<sup>42</sup> Being full of the pain she is "holding out a pale / North American breast so you can suck too. / I love it when you suck like this, / the sweet milk of death, the salt blood / of someone else's war."<sup>43</sup>

The triade is inlaid with two poems that I consider best written out of the whole collection. The first one, the "Hands of the Taino" is an imminent, yet highly original approach to the Columbus' America. It tells a story of the transformation of Christopher Columbus and of his journey, expectations, and "hands" he bound with violence and slavery. Poem has two parts corresponding with two stanzas. First one called "ADMIRAL" begins with the aftermath of the journey and its consequences for the First Nations:

"Laid out on vellum, the past  
is a long wound. It unfolds  
five centuries later,  
beneath the heavy pens of scholars."<sup>44</sup>

Already in the beginning we are reminded that what happened to the Taino, the pre-Columbian inhabitants of the Bahamas and Antiles, is something that hurts persistently. Here, as she did before, McAdams mirrors the sky into the earth, the only difference this time being that the mirror is the sea. Following lines are important and can be summarized by saying: Don't believe everything you hear. Columbus' destination is covered with myths of paradise that have to disperse. The sea isn't what Columbus thought and heard it would be, not even the mermaids. "They are not, he writes, so beautiful / as I have heard."<sup>45</sup>

Despite being the servant of the ruler of his native country and obedient servant of his Christian God, "he dreams of his own route to the Heavens. God and the Crown. Both want too much."<sup>46</sup> The pressure under which he was must have made him anxious. Orders from the monarch, orders from the priests, creates a lot of responsibility and eventhough he is far away from them all, his hands are still bound with their demands. But, as a "GOVERNOR" of Hispaniola in the second part of the poem, he is already fullfilling his salvation by stealing local natural resources. What McAdams states as a simple fact that Columbus wasn't aware of is that "these people so unlike him they could not / not be saved."<sup>47</sup>

Although they are battered and enslaved, "the severed hands of the Taino wave in clear salt water, / in pink-tinted water. / They wave as the gold mines dry up, / as the Governor leaves Hispaniola in chains."<sup>48</sup> Columbus isn't saved because his Gods (monarch and pope) have no mercy, only demands and when met with disappointment, they turn their backs on their servants and let the benevolence of their cruelty begin. The mermaids

Columbus saw, the mythical figures – dog-headed men and women he enslaved and labeled as property “with breastplates of copper”<sup>49</sup>, take their weapons and revolt. With arrows they “cover the shore of Columbus’ dream.”<sup>50</sup> Now his perception of them is different, they are no longer “the Taino, whom he once called in dios. / They touch his white skin. / They have the faces of Christian angels.”<sup>51</sup> Their transformed appearance juxtaposes both religions: the monotheistic Columbus’ and the polytheistic religion of the Tainos. Suddenly, as he is leaving, they are the ones who could possibly save him. The Christian angels are now saviors of different kind.

McAdams’ approach in this poem is very singular for she puts herself in Columbus’ shoes, thinks with him, is empathetic. As if she was trying to access the colonization from the other side to finally find an explanation with which she could find better comprehension for what happened to her ancestors.

Poem “Leaving the Old Gods” stays within the realm of religion. Religion and its many versions that result in her double life: the first one in which she “didn’t think about God but the ones we used to worship”<sup>52</sup> and the second one about which she doesn’t know much about. The poem’s first part is dedicated to the Old Gods. In this stanza, we have to differentiate between two entities that McAdams addresses: “you,” equaled to “it” and “them”, “the ones who want your heart still beating.”<sup>53</sup> She works and lives in an environment where people don’t know anything about the time when there was “it”. I believe that the “it” is the Indianness in her that perishes in the company of non-Indians. Back then, she didn’t think about the Christian God but the Old Gods who differ, as McAdams believes, in person’s purpose of life and the aftermath of it. The Old Gods don’t want you to see this time on the Earth only as a preparation for the great life in heaven if one doesn’t live in sin. Their life then becomes the ultimate preparation for the afterlife. The Old Gods, on the other hand, “want your heart still / beating,”<sup>54</sup> reward you and sometimes trick you and “lure you to sleep deep in the cenote.”<sup>55</sup> Indians used to sacrifice objects and human beings into cenote as a form of worship to the Maya Rain God. Gods that were worshipped in the pre-Columbian era had many forms but what is important is that their characters (good or bad) resembled those of people, therefore they were closer to humans and more approachable and relatable. Yet the nature stays the same no matter what Gods we worship: “I could tell them: / That day it rained / the way it rains in the New World.”<sup>56</sup>

In the second stanza she questions the fate of her unborn child in her wound and her relationship to the father of her child. Even if Christian God wants an intercourse to be between married couple who rules out divorce as an option and stays together for better or



worse, she “would have left him then / for ten thousand pesos.”<sup>57</sup> She challenges the sole idea of monogamous relationship and traditional family setting. She ponders over her child: “I don’t know what world you inhabit, swimming there, baby, not-baby, part of my body, not me.”<sup>58</sup> She then talks to the Christian God and this time defies his mortality, for he never was alive and yet he is the wind that pulls “a face in the leaves / of the jacaranda, the only tree/ that lives outside my window.”<sup>59</sup> McAdams trusts her opinion that the voice of the wind in the tree must be God, because He is the one whose voice it is supposed to be. Eventhough she can hear his voice, she finds it beyond her comprehension: “comfort or accusation, / I can’t understand your words.”<sup>60</sup> McAdams might live in “His” New World but she will never be able to accept that fact and feel fully comprised in the post-Columbian era. As Allen puts it, “Christians believe that God is separate from humanity and does as he wishes without the creative assistance of many of his creatures, while the non-Christian tribal person assumes a place in creation that is dynamic, creative and responsive.”<sup>61</sup> In American Indian thought, “God is known as the All Spirit, and other beings are also spirit – more spirit than body, more spirit than intellect, more spirit than mind. The natural state of existence is whole.”<sup>62</sup>

“A Child’s Geography”, is a poem in which McAdams maps her own childhood and uncovers the fears of a child who has “no escape through the wooden wardrobe, no secret world below, no key, no underground tunnel.”<sup>63</sup> She explores her feelings towards her hospitalized father throughout her life, and doesn’t know which memory of her father to choose and remains undecided:

“My mother said:  
Kiss your father before you go.  
When I do, our flesh is light,  
unanchored by the past, the green field  
of memory where we float and cannot find  
a place to land.”<sup>64</sup>

She doesn’t let her explorations dwell in childhood for too long, for the following poem, titled “A Map of the Twentieth Century” uncovers the secrets of family history and its ties. The often addressed “you”, doesn’t have to be related only to her family, but to many American families out there whose ancestors moved to America long time ago. The title of each stanza in this poem tells us the person who directly experiences the hardships or prosperous times in the last century.

On the map of the twentieth century we don’t see just places, but history, more precisely family history on the background of events that not only shaped the twentieth

century but also affected its society. McAdams goes as far back as to her great-grandfather and introduces the twentieth century through its preceding events. She takes us back to the time when “the thought of Indian skin against the white skin of her grandmother”<sup>65</sup> was not found believable by the sister of her father since “three generations later we are pale as sand.”<sup>66</sup>

The Indian blood may circle in many Americans but being mixed-blooded means also having paler skin. McAdams wants to show here how many people living in the twentieth century have descendants of darker skin even if they don't know it, some of them being reluctant to accept it. She searches for her past on the map through the “yellowed records”<sup>67</sup> of the Indian removal initiated under the presidency of Andrew Jackson during which thousands of Native Americans died. Her Indian grandfather then decides to go by the name Moses, a Christian prophet, “that most conjures up the laws by which they could not live.”<sup>68</sup>

This problem is thoroughly explained by Allen: “The Judeo-Christian view is hierarchical. God commands first; within the limits of those commands, man rules; woman is subject to man, as are all the creatures, for God has brought them to Adam for him to name.”<sup>69</sup> So her grandfather, by accepting the name of Judeo-Christian prophet, attempts to approximate the Christian values even though he will ultimately fail.

From reservations, McAdams takes the reader to the Argonne Forest in France, place of a World War I battle. The battlefield that McAdams describes suffered the most casualties in single battle in American history. The stanza, titled “Nurse,” begins in a hospital where were the wounded taken. The wounded soldier is apparently unconscious and the author is there only as an imaginary bystander who tries to relate to what it means to be a soldier, who turns out to be one of her relatives, as we later learn.

The fourth stanza is an insertion of a prose writing in this poem. It is a reflection on the aftermath of the battle, on the lives who were lost in the Argonne Forest and the bodies that “are the Argonne Forest, you are the left leg of your partner, twenty yards from his body which lies stiff and unbreathing.”<sup>70</sup> Finally, the last stanza titled “Descendents,” describes the current state of things. And now we may look away from McAdams' family and imagine just any American family: there are 30 descendents, fifteen of the grandchildren. They live comfortably, they travel, lie on beaches, enjoy life, but the backpack they always carry with them is the one with the history they know so little about. “We don't know the story of Argonne Forest. / We make up the snow, the boy who died. / We make up the plane you jumped from.”<sup>71</sup> They also have to live through the disputes over the land that “we took and claim, and take back and claim again.”<sup>72</sup>

And eventually, it could be any “you” who “had one brown grandfather and one who kept his white robes hidden beneath the iron bedstead.”<sup>73</sup> McAdams touches the issue of breeds, described above as those, who have only one ancestor of Native American origin. When there are many destinies of many nations on our map and consequently on the map of the whole century, we can only imagine what it was like, we shouldn’t judge or regret or exploit what happened to members in our family tree, because

“Some of the dead are too useful for sympathy.

The past we own exists on stone and white paper.”<sup>74</sup>

Considering political events and personal history, McAdams tries to settle her multi-cultural past and hopes to find herself in the process.

In my opinion, the last part of McAdams’ collection embraces the “Native Americanness” in the author the best. “After the War” is introduced with a quotation by Sylvia Plath who explains in two simple sentences how McAdams feels about her nation’s past. “The moon is my mother. She is not sweet like Mary.”<sup>75</sup> Out of the nine poems that are included in the fourth part of the book, I find three of them the most important: “A Woman Speaks to Her Past”, “After the War” and “Cemetery Autumn”. I do not want to point out what these poems share but what makes them stand out and special towards McAdams’ conception of her inner Indianness.

When “A Woman Speaks to Her Past”, she exquisitely points out the most important thing about shaping our past – we can hide behind it: “Lies make us up like a bed no one’s slept in.”<sup>76</sup> McAdams dreams about walking through a city street in a company of another. I believe that this “another” is her past that guides her through the city of memory and images. All the three stanzas, each of five lines, form this central metaphor. Eventhough she has a company when taking the walk through the streets or alleys full of rubbish – the bad things – she has to see alone since “*You refused / to hold my hand.*”<sup>77</sup> The mural peeling of the building, just like our illusions, are peeled off and the *half brick* is uncovered. Usually crowded street – our mind full of memories – “*is empty for once, quiet as if everything / had just moved out of sigh.*”<sup>78</sup> as if it was possible to see everything with the glasses of inexperience all over again. When McAdams suggests that “*you’ve never particularly wanted to be anything,*”<sup>79</sup> She supposes that the past events shouldn’t be affecting us today, it is only a time that passes and is gone. However, the alleys of the past hang around us “*heavy with smoke and clouds / the air between us and the path we trace back.*”<sup>80</sup> And tracking back the history is what assists us to realise who we are and where we come from. Without ties to the

past, there are no ties to the present. So when a Native American Woman speaks to her past, she doesn't mean only the past of her family, but also her nation's past:

“I write this letter to tell you everything

but it is you who must speak.”<sup>81</sup>

“Cemetery Autumn” is one of the few poems of *The Island of Lost Luggage* that is inspired by the racism and controversy that Native Americans have to fight against even in the twentieth century and still in the twenty first. As McAdams explains in her notes: “The area of east Texas described in “Cemetery Autumn” was originally Caddo Indian land. There is now a single small burial mound in someone's front yard; the other mounds were excavated, and their contents are housed on the campus of Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas. Students at the school have a life-sized wooden Indian nicknamed “Chief Caddo,” which is passed to the winning team of the annual SFASU – Southeastern Louisiana football game. Efforts by the Native American student organization at SFASU to stop this practice have been futile.”<sup>82</sup>

The issue of different burial sites is introduced in the most personal way possible: “The wives didn't survive.”<sup>83</sup> Hence, we should realise that the deceased were loved, they had family, probably were mothers and they struggled for their life, fought for survival and eventually lost their battle. The graveyard isn't perfect: while the trees that grow above their buried bodies, shouldn't provide only shade but also comfort, beauty for the tragedy of death. Now, it is all just an attraction for tourists who want to snap a photo of something someone called a historical sight. That, however, doesn't change the unfortunate fact that “the wives did not survive.”<sup>84</sup> The first stanza of the prelude is opened and closed by the same line, only difference being the uncontracted verb form – did not which is supposed to emphasize that the women are dead. Second stanza of the prelude acquaints us with the women in more personal way, we learn their names and the spacing of their graves: Ella, Kizziah, Nettie Redwine – “they live / like railroad cars.”<sup>85</sup> She also provides the most likely explanation for their death: “they live, worn out or dead by childbirth.”<sup>86</sup> Next line somewhat vilifies the reasons for that, blames the climate of east Texas in which “those children did not thrive. / But the wives did not survive.”<sup>87</sup> Final line of the three wives' sonnet concludes very simple, yet lately unheeded aspect of those famous burial sites – the people are deceased and instead of taking pictures in the graveyard, the thought of the buried should be essential and primary.

The size of her past's sacred land has forced limitations – it was moved for the convenience of the white settlers. The meaning of the new graveyard is just an attraction to

the tourists but for her, it is heritage. However, by laying the wreath of the “quarter-acre past,”<sup>88</sup> she also “honors” the colonizers.

The First Nation’s shattered and broken past is also remembered in the last line of the third stanza. The image is split and continues in the fourth stanza. The Caddo, a confederation of South-eastern Native American tribes, “linger in a single mound,”<sup>89</sup> are introduced as an image of people gathered together, only to be reduced to just an effigy that is considered as a valueless possession by football fans. To them it is only a mascot, to McAdams, it is unappreciated history. The poem becomes more personal in its second part, where the author’s “I” is introduced. The graveyard is a place she’s been to before, but this time she ponders over the life of the buried “if Nettie died in childbirth, / there is no sleeping lamb, / no small stone here to mark the story.”<sup>90</sup> She realizes that we really do not know much about those who are dead unless we personally knew them. In the final part of the poem, she inserts her own life story into the site and considers it a sign of why she is not with the one she loves: “This tree, this metaphor / for everything not right between us.”<sup>91</sup> She feels alienated from her dislocated heritage and isn’t even sure if they, as Native Americans, are together, since they all have their own stories. As a woman she has a special understanding for the buried women and as a Native American woman she laments for the scattered Indian legacy.

In “After the War” McAdams writes about female’s mind and memories of abuse. The most horrid abuse that can befall a woman in love is physical male violence towards his woman. This kind of war have to face women in patriarchal societies everywhere. Such male behavior was not accepted in the pre-Columbian era amongst the Native American nations. Crimes towards women were punished twice as harshly as those committed on men. The poem tells a story of woman’s battle with a man she loves from the point of view in the aftermath, after one year and “that year I burned.”<sup>92</sup> There were four stages in her fight against abusive partner. The first one is titled “Drowning” and it reveals how such behavior bruises woman’s past, present and future and that the bad memories will never go away, even “when I write from a place / made safe by time and distance. I wish I had let you kill me.”<sup>93</sup> “The Late Show”, after the relationship has ended, the sky seems “bright, bright blue, the day heady with relief.”<sup>94</sup> Yet, when she walks the streets, it is the abuser flickering in her afterthoughts of what made him who he was – the car, the music he liked, not the bad things he did to her. But at nights, “I wake with a fist in my stomach as the sky rows down the difficult hours toward dawn.”<sup>95</sup> There is an apparent contrast between day and night and its effects on a fragile mind of an oppressed woman. “Politics of Compassion”, is the “medicine taken again and again.”<sup>96</sup> She forgives, tries to find a reason for his actions which can be

traced to the war in Vietnam that left the man a violent alcoholic. The safe haven she finds with another man brings relief and “I find so little anger finally.”<sup>97</sup> “Funeral rite” is the final stanza about the rituals during which she let go of the man who hurt her. The massage or treatment she gets, leaves her skin shiny and observing her hands and fingers, a transformation takes place in which her oily fingers are in contact with “the stack of balsa and smoke rises between them”<sup>98</sup> and gradually evaporates the fragments of those memories out of her body and mind and so “that year I burned.”<sup>99</sup>

McAdams’s collection *The Island of Lost Luggage* gives hope to a Native American woman that she can find her place in the world, but it also warns us that there is ugliness in the world that we need to resist, either passively or actively. Our modern lives are complex and the world around us is beautiful, as she proves in her powerful lyrical passages about nature that are tightly rooted in the Indian legacy. McAdams draws a thin line between our mortality and passage to the other side, as she very explicitly does in the title poem “Island of Lost Luggage”, because at some point we all, as Native Americans often do, find ourselves “in the line at Unclaimed / baggage, no one mourns for the sorry world / that sent them here.”<sup>100</sup>

Notes:

1 Basílica de Nuestra Señora de la Salud. 13 March. 2010

<<http://pagesperso-orange.fr/patzcuaro/mx/04/mx/04teba01.htm>>.

2 Bocanegra, Gertrudis. 13 March. 2010

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gertrudis\\_Bocanegra](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gertrudis_Bocanegra)>.

3 - 7 Janet McAdams, *The Island of Lost Luggage* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000) 3.

8 San Salvador. 13 March. 2010

<[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El\\_Salvador](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/El_Salvador)>.

9 - 16 McAdams 4.

17 McAdams 69.

18 McAdams 69.

19 - 28 McAdams 5-6.

29 McAdams 69.

30 - 37 McAdams 9.

38 - 43 McAdams 14 - 15.

44 - 51 McAdams 7 - 8.

52 McAdams 10-11

53 - 61 McAdams 10 - 11.

62 Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* (1986. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) 56.

63 - 64 McAdams 42.

65-68 McAdams 43.

69 Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop* (1986. Boston: Beacon Press, 1992) 58.

70-74 McAdams 43.

75 McAdams 47.

76 - 81 McAdams 49.

82 McAdams 69.

83 - 91 McAdams 62 - 64.

92 - 99 McAdams 54.

100 McAdams 13.

### 3.3 *Indian Cartography* by Deborah A. Miranda

Deborah A. Miranda's life story shows how difficult it turns out to be for breeds to seek ancestral connections to their Indian past. Miranda didn't learn about her Native American father until later in her life and her search for any documents that would put his family on the map of tribal identity fortunately resulted in success.

"I am a mixed-blood woman, the daughter of an Indian father of Esselen/Chumash ancestry, a white mother of European/Jewish ancestry. Perhaps because I look like my father, am seen by others as Indian, I identify most strongly as an Indian woman"<sup>1</sup>

Esselen Nation is one of the California tribes that was long believed not to exist anymore. "Because the truth of the matter is, for many tribes in California the words "all those Indians died" are horribly real."<sup>2</sup> Realising the heart-breaking reality of extinction and mixed heritage provide Miranda with thematic direction in her poetry.

I would like to begin my analysis of Miranda's *Indian Cartography* with the two poems that mercilessly describe childhood of a girl who, despite having a white mother, has to face bullying of her peers and sexual abuse. In "Stories I Tell My Daughter" we learn that besides the common stories parents tell their children, stories that are carved in adult memories due to the intensity of the experience, there are those that shape who we are for the rest of our lives. In the first part of the poem, author recalls a memory of being in a car at night, hitting an owl, a memory that has haunted and concerned her the whole summer season: "All summer I lay awake on cool sheets, window open, / waiting for a low urgent call."<sup>3</sup>

Then, she reminisces about the time when she was thirteen and bullied at school by boys "who called me squaw."<sup>4</sup> Playing drums, she released her anger into the strokes she made with wooden sticks against the drum. But the mercilessness of other children didn't end with verbal abuse. Another time, Damon sets her hair on fire and keeps the insulting comments coming. As much as she tries to cut herself off from her surroundings and focus only on drumming, she smells "stench of singed human hair."<sup>5</sup> Damon is the boy who „called to me in the halls, / I'll give you a little papoose, squaw! / holding a butane lighter, flame high, / orange and blue."<sup>6</sup>

Sadly, when she comes home from school with bloody sticks that were her only refuge and later protection, her mother doesn't find words of consolation and support because "she



expected nothing less / from a girl / who spoke / to owls. ”<sup>7</sup> It is apparent here that two unrelated memories become connected in a single moment. Her mother stains the memory of an owl whom Miranda when very little perceived as a magical creature with something very real and painful. Consequently her feelings of insecurity as a girl and a “squaw” won’t disappear when she comes home from school, but pervade every moment of her life.

As a mother she comes out with an important message for her daughter that has to be told. The first memory, of being in sync with nature, crying when it cries, would be a story through which a Native American mother would teach her daughter to respect nature and try to understand it. The second memory falls into the category of the post-colonial Indian abuse that has unfortunately become an unseparable part of stories that Indian women have to tell. Together, they are not just two memories but a revealed fragment of Native American woman’s consciousness.

Let’s remain in the realm of Miranda’s childhood and discuss another poem that describes sexual abuse that was inflicted on her at the age of seven.

“What part of me said yes?  
What part of me gave consent?  
What part of me motined you forward,  
nodded, spread my legs for you?”<sup>8</sup>

asks Miranda her abuser in “What Part of Me.” She wonders about the rapist’s attraction to her, or more precisely, what it was that lured him to take an advantage of a seven-year old. Not only did he put fear into her gut and anger into her mouth, he also “stole parts of me.”<sup>9</sup> She describes the stolen parts of her body as paralyzed and as such they remain.

Rape is one of the most common crimes that happens to Native American women even today. The struggle for physical and cultural survival is in the case of Native American women worsened by the violence against them that is initiated not only by non-Natives. In Miranda’s childhood, rape was, according to the Navajo Times in the fall of 1979, “the number one crime on the Navajo reservation.”<sup>10</sup> Allen mentions other journals that report incest and rape as common among Indian women seeking services and that their incidence is increasing.<sup>11</sup> A more recent surveys, as Sellers quotes from an April 2007 *New York Times* article, show that one in three Native American women is raped in her lifetime, which is almost double the national average of eighteen percent, according to the United States Justice Department. The article titled “For Indian Victims of Sexual Assault, a Tangled Legal Path” also revealed that in eighty six percent of the cases, indigenous women are targeted for sexual abuse by non-Native, primarily EuroAmerican men.<sup>12</sup>

Such experience shapes woman's self-consciousness and makes the emotional healing peerlessly difficult. Miranda assesses how will such damage to her body affect her life as a future girlfriend and wife. She wants to know, "what happens now when the edges of flesh and memory begin to awaken?"<sup>13</sup> Sexual abuse forces her to fear her being with a man as a young woman. She doesn't know what response it will awake in her and what impact it will have on her future relationships.

To the oppression that pervades an extensive part of her life, she dedicates a whole poem titled "Sorrow as a Woman." Imagining sorrow as a female has significance of its own. Not for a second does she think about using this metaphor for a man. She doesn't imagine sorrow being located somewhere inside her, but she imagines a woman coming from somewhere, from the outside world. She makes the reader feel as if she was actually looking at her. "Her legs are bare, her feet are dusty. She wears an old cotton dress the color of dark poppies."<sup>14</sup>

Comparing sorrow to a woman suggests she considers sorrow a partner that accompanies her throughout her life, a special friend she could not find in a human being. The author vividly describes the life journey with this special companion whom she also calls "My Sorrow. Dearest Sadness. Sweet Grief"<sup>15</sup>

Initially, sorrow wears the poet out and "compels you to fall to your knees in front of her and pray for grace."<sup>16</sup> But when sorrow opens up and tells her story, Miranda begins to understand and it is later revealed that sorrow used to be happy once "Ah, there was a place, she begins, *Beautiful, / magic woods ...*"<sup>17</sup> Once she gets to know sorrow she becomes aware of how to pray to her. Miranda has to "bathe her in water whose source is pure."<sup>18</sup> That is, to return with her to the times before the verdant lands were destroyed and before the spirits have moved on. They both go back to the very beginning of things when there was no need for a woman to be sad. Miranda sees sorrow as her constant fellow traveler and wants the reader to know that sorrow will be our most intimate lover who will never leave us and "from her womb she will birth heartbreaking beauty."<sup>19</sup> Once calling her by the name My Lost One, "she will call you by your secret name."<sup>20</sup> By the loss Miranda means the forlorn purity of land and people along with the spirits, all of which was destroyed and by going back to the Native beginnings she can revivify the secret and lost Indian identity.

The feelings of seeing parts of Indian heritage beyond reclaim also appear in "Lost Language." Here, Miranda describes a language that is not spoken anymore as one of the disappointing results of the Anglophone linguistic takeover. At the same time, the poet tries to defy this fact as she draws a line between spoken and written language. Some words can

never be forgotten. The most important word is the one written on her forehead. She admits the possibility of its being “stitched in tiny crimson beads, / flowing like Hester Prynne’s ‘A’ – gaudy, elegant, brave.”<sup>21</sup> Comparing it to a sign that was a punishment for Hawthorne’s Hester suggests that in a way she also sees her indigenous origin as a punishment or something to flaunt yet be aware of it as wrong. Miranda doesn’t see only a name, but also a code, even a lie. The Indianness that her great-grandmother murmured in her sleep and traced “on her own forehead with trembling fingers”<sup>22</sup> is now hated for being uttered, or more precisely hated for what it reveals, even though it is a sound „I have been waiting for, / the sound worth everything.”<sup>23</sup> I believe that as Native American woman she is proud of her origin and as much should this word grow with power when spoken, it only wounds her consciousness since being Indian is also a curse in the modern world.

She wonders about other connotations that this word unfolds. She desires the animal that is “pacing in my heart”<sup>24</sup> to be freed, not only to have more liberty over actions as a woman but I think she also wants to escape the pan-Indianic concept of that word on her forehead and become Native American in her own way. In the final lines she urges the reader to touch her face, her eyelids, lips, forehead and challenges the reader to think that she doesn’t know that word in the lost language: “won’t I remember all / they say I have forgotten / when you read the word / that is written on my forehead?”<sup>25</sup> And yes, she will remember, for as Miranda shows through this central metaphor of a word as Indian consciousness, they may have taken away her old language, they can confine her origins into her heart but they can never change who she is on the outside which ultimately signifies who she is, a proud Native American woman.

The search for her Native identity, doesn’t stop with the explorations of her heart or words inscribed into her countenance. In “I Am Not a Witness” she also looks for the land that was stolen from the First Nations and renamed. First, she owns up to the alienation that characterizes her relationship to everything Indian, that is in today’s world Indian no more. She doesn’t know the Chumash language, all the tools and inventions of Native Americans she knows from “behind museum glass,”<sup>26</sup> she only knows the names of natural landmarks in Spanish accents. But “these are not the real names.”<sup>27</sup>

In the next stanza, she reminds us how many lives were taken during the Mission, how many lives were lost due to the European diseases such as smallpox and measles and how many lives were taken in battles and the bones “washed down the river / whose name I do not know / past islands I cannot name / to the sea where / I have never sailed.”<sup>28</sup> The poet knows only what was done to her past and to her ancestors, but natural memorials of their suffering

come to her as distant. They do not carry the indigenous heritage anymore since they are all tainted and renamed.

In the final stanza she stipulates her claim by the only thing that, although tainted as well, is an immediate reminder of who she is: “my eyebrows, short nose, dark hands.”<sup>29</sup> She may not recognize the indigenous words, she may not find her ancestors in the mountains or rivers, but she can find it when she looks into the mirror, having her Indian female identity inscribed in her own body.

She also states a peremptory fact that is common to all Native American women today, decades after colonization:

“I am not a witness. I am left behind, child  
of children who were locked in the Mission  
and raped. I did not see this:  
I was not there – but I am here.  
Where is the place that knows me?”<sup>30</sup>

She laments all that was lost, yet proudly shows her presence. Being left behind, she has to search elsewhere to locate familiar places in which an Indian woman can forget years of oppression, violence and war.

“Without History” represents the stories of many indigenous women living on the Turtle Island today. In the first three stanzas, Miranda confesses to the naive belief of truth being objectively revealed. She used to believe that her dead ancestors would be found and the message that is in their bones and sacred skeletons would be “sung out in a genealogy of memory.”<sup>31</sup> She also thought that blood was like an indelible ink that could engrave into her heart the story of her community and later, she would pass that legacy onto her children in milk-language in “first sounds of dialect / woven from certain web of the past.”<sup>32</sup>

But such beliefs are shattered when she realises that she is alone and with no trail that would follow back the genesis of soul; she is “unable to tell what I lost.”<sup>33</sup> Her conclusion is quite logical since the colonizers stripped the land and the people off of everything that constituted their nations and she, being born into the twentieth century, can’t have the slightest idea of what it was like before.

She grieves the extinction of those who knew her along with the history that “abandoned me in smoke.”<sup>34</sup> The poet doesn’t appreciate being called a survivor, which has the connotation of something to be proud of, because she doesn’t find honor, nor joy “in a testimony of ashes.”<sup>35</sup>

The loss of land and consequently place of belonging Miranda equals to loss and emptiness in her heart. She cannot scream or let a tear roll down her cheek, she only sifts the earth for anything Indian that would allow her to relate. But “nothing remains-/ only my cupped hands / like burnt baskets / too empty to hold a cry.”<sup>36</sup>

“Indian Cartography” doesn’t explain how the indigenous people used to make maps, but how contemporary Indians perceive the land which used to belong to them before it was dominated by the Western civilization. When the author’s father opens a map of California, he doesn’t see just topographical landmarks. His family blood-lines are rooted in the land which is the record of his life as a place “where tragedy greeted him like an old unpleasant relative.”<sup>37</sup>

After lakes were dammed, valleys flooded, rivers moved, it didn’t confuse only the salmon who were “coming back to a river that wasn’t there.”<sup>38</sup> They also divided her father’s boyhood, “days he learned to swim the hard way, / and days he walked across the silver scales.”<sup>39</sup> The government, Miranda explains, paid Indians to move away but where even her father does not know.

Here, we can see how the political is closely connected to the history of the colonized nations. Her father finds solace and comforting dreams only after drinking a whole six-pack. Alcoholism, is one of the biggest issues that Indians struggle with today and the origins of such notoriety are engrained in the political manipulations that occurred early on. Interestingly, Miranda feels no anger towards her father for being an alcoholic. Rather she tries to find a way how to understand his following of the longing, a deepness. This deepness is the one into which he can dive and once his eyes open, he doesn’t see places “drawn on any map,”<sup>40</sup> that were tainted by the white hand. Under the surface of a river he can observe “people who are fluid, / fluent in dark water, bodies.”<sup>41</sup>

Miranda compares her ancestors to the “mouths still opening, closing / on the stories of our home.”<sup>42</sup> She suggests that they may have changed the river but what was inside of it, is still there, like in her or her father.

Notes:

- 1 Deborah A. Miranda: *Indian Cartography*. (New York: Greenfield Review Press, 1999) x.
- 2 Miranda ix.
- 3 Miranda 5.
- 4 Miranda 5.
- 5 - 7 Miranda 6.
- 8 Miranda 20.
- 9 Miranda 21.
- 10 Allen 191.
- 11 Allen 191.
- 12 Sellers 109.
- 13 Miranda 20.
- 14 Miranda 52.
- 15 – 17 Miranda 52.
- 18 – 20 Miranda 53.
- 21 – 25 Miranda 34.
- 26 – 30 Miranda 73.
- 31 – 35 Miranda 74
- 36 Miranda 75.
- 37 – 40 Miranda 76.
- 41 – 42 Miranda 77.

## 4 Conclusion

As I stated in the theoretical part of my thesis, in my analysis of the chosen collections, I did not intend to put limitations on their writings by simply calling my authors Indian poets who, as Kimberly Blaeser puts it, write Indian stuff. I acknowledge them also as equal members of the contemporary American literary community. However, for preservation of the Native American culture it is important to note certain differences. Such notions towards secularizing the Native American writing are most apparent in Miranda's collection and least noticeable in Adams'. What they all share can be summarized in the words of Rayna Green:

“Rather than re-creating the consciously Indian world, retelling the stories, the modern writer may hark back to the traditional world but moves on to the referential framework of contemporary life. But the spiritual and symbolic “baggage” remains, either to be dealt with or to be shunted aside. The bottom line here, however, is the harsh knowledge that race and gender superimpose on experience.”<sup>1</sup>

All of the three authors share the loss and recovery, compassion and despair over their heritage. They embrace beauty and ugliness of the world and try to see the best of both while reminding the Native American women that they are still alive. They draw meaningful connections between the personal and the political. Being defined as survivors, they find oppressive and insulting since it means something very different from the common interpretation which suggests that a survivor should be approached with sympathy.

Survival is for Native American women very specific and sensitive subject. Not only do Native American women have to face the battles of any colonized minority in the world, they also have to fight the beliefs that render them subordination because they are women. This dynamic runs entirely counter to the historic and cultural beliefs of gynocratic indigenous people, so the blow to the women because of their gender is particularly severe.<sup>2</sup> All of these arguments that Sellers provides are apparent in the poetry of my authors.

What is distinguishing in their poems is the hierarchy of the Indian values which they either already discovered or are trying to.

For Deborah A. Miranda, the Indian roots she so strongly desires to connect to, are the only mediator through which she can understand her past, present and future. At times, Miranda expresses her anger and sadness over what has befallen the indigenous peoples. She

finds the right words for abuse and oppression that Native American women have to face with gently insinuating the political reasons in the background. She doesn't seek equal rights for women by attacking those of men. More likely, she will blame the colonizers and American society as a whole for limiting her possibilities.

Her poems are a journey on which she takes us to search for her Native American roots. Some sweeps on that road are upsetting and make the poet feel hopeless and pessimistic. Eventually, she comes to the conclusion that despite having most of the Indian legacy lost, she is alive and so will be the Native American culture. We can see her spirit rise to new hopes for the Native American women today. She doesn't fight with harsh words but with love and effort to understand the actions of those in her own community as well as the non-Natives.

However, at times I found her poems too confined in the past. *Indian Cartography* is very retrospective. It seemed to me that if it wasn't for the constant quest for her indigenous background, she wouldn't be able to find her own identity in the present. What surrounds her now is not initial. She doesn't exist right here and right now. First she has to exist in the past to be relevant in the present.

Kimberly M. Blaeser's poems connect the indigenous dreams with the reality of every day life. She is proud of being able to connect to nature and its secrets in the Indian way. Her comprehension of all living things gives rhythm and pace to her poems. Being in sync with all that is bursting with life, she can see songs even in the motion of animals or insect. When she sleeps, it is with the rivers that were lost and newly found.

What I appreciated in her approach to the concept of contemporary Native American woman is how inventively she defied the generalization of Indian female character. She is a member of the indigenous community, yet some of her edges do not exactly match the concept of Lincoln's "now day Indi'n." She shows the reader that she would be special even without her Indian ancestry.

Moreover, as the only one of my authors, she describes the new version of the "noble savage" and realises that she is considered to be one as well: an educated Indian, preferably a university professor, who puts on the "Indian identity costume" only when appropriate and expected. She criticizes such practices as humiliating. Also, she distinguishes real Indian people from scholars who try to put restrictions on what is Native American and what is not.

In my opinion, Janet McAdams differs from the other two authors the most. Along with her personal explorations, she considers problems in Central America and Russia, love and loss in the life of a mixed-blood woman and the journey of her heart beginning in her childhood, encompassing the political, natural and circumfusing everything with the personal.



However, unlike other poets, she doesn't include the "modern pan-Indian values" into every aspect of her life, but rather sees it as a part of her multicultural heritage.

Her multi-ethnicity shows in the way that she can relate to contemporary political and social problems of other cultures and countries. She doesn't restrict her concerns only to the Native American minority. She is quite multinational which carries her to the core of Native American belief that we are all related to each other and that all people are our brothers and sisters.

Miranda and Blaeser aren't as cosmopolitan as Adams. However, they all write with balance so peculiar to Indian women. Even the darkest moments are balanced with hope and optimism.

They all describe their roles in today's society as women, daughters, mothers, wives. With passion and sometimes grief they show the bedroom as a battleground and sexuality as a threat they have to struggle with. They don't try to take the male roles in the patriarchal society but rebuild the ones of women by travelling between the past and present.

Deborah A. Miranda, Janet McAdams and Kimberly Blaeser give new voice to what was never lost, only modified. They all, as mixed-blood women, resurrect the old traditions and find place for them in the New World. Resisting the confinement that the term pan-Indian signifies, they declare that they are, as individuals, diverse and original. They refuse to be the Exhibit A who writes only about Indian things.

They prove that they belong not just into the Native American minority writing, but they are also American women poets and that Native American poetry is not poetry strictly about the indigenous past and desperate call to retrieve it. Native American poetry is poetry written by authors of Indian ancestry.



## Notes

1 Green 5.

2 Sellers 107.

## 5 Summary / Shrnutí – Současné americké indiánské básničky

Má bakalářská práce se zabývá básnickými prvotinami třech současných amerických indiánských básnířek. Americká indiánská literatura byla zprvu z politických důvodů zcela ignorována, aby ve 20. století začaly být znovu zaslouženě objevovány indiánské literární kořeny. Cílem mé práce je zejména analýza básnických sbírek, na nichž chci doložit obecné závěry, ke kterým došli nejen literární historici a teoretici, ale i samotní autoři s indiánským původem.

Autorky, jejichž počáteční básnické tvorby se má práce týká, jsou Kimberly M. Blaeser s prvotinou *Trailing You*, Janet McAdams se sbírkou *The Island of Lost Luggage* a Deborah A. Miranda a její básnický debut *Indian Cartography*. Důvodem pro výběr právě těchto sbírek je fakt, že všechny tyto sbírky byly oceněny literární cenou Diane Decorah Award od Native Writer's Circle of the Americas za nejlepší básnickou prvotinu roku.<sup>1</sup>

Výběr kritického přístupu byl v podstatě jednoznačný; rozhodla jsem se, na základě prostudování monografie *A Handbook of Critical Approaches to Literature* pro minoritní feministickou kritiku a *close reading*. Minoritní feminismus se liší zejména tím, že se jeho zastánkyně se nesnaží začlenit do patriarchální společnosti tím, že převzou role typické mužům, a tedy přijmou to, co kritizují, ale snaží se realizovat v patriarchální společnosti jako ženy, které si uvědomují svou minulost, kulturní dědictví a své postavení v současné společnosti.<sup>2</sup> Africký Americký autor, W.E.B. DuBois zmiňoval již dříve termín „double consciousness“, tedy dvojité vědomí. DuBois tím myslel pocit vyplývající ze sociální ambivalence každého černocha, který žije v bílé společnosti.<sup>3</sup> V případě ženy žijící v menšině jako právě Indiánky či černošské autorky je velmi vhodné, dle Guerina, užít termínu trojího vědomí: žena, tmavší pleti, žijící v menšině.

Indiánská literární historie a její počátky jsou odlišné od počátků např. evropských. Zásadní rozdíl se nachází ve způsobu literární prezentace díla.<sup>4</sup> V období předkoloniálním hovoříme v souvislosti s původními indiánskými národy výhradně o literatuře v ústním podání, tj. neexistují žádná psaná literární díla, pouze transkribované verze mluvené, které následně musely vzniknout k prezervaci díla. Tomuto procesu říkáme překlad a textualizace, jejíž cílem bylo přizpůsobit tuto literaturu dobovému čtenáři. Tato původní indiánská literatura má kořeny v tradicích a mýtech jednotlivých národů, které jsou zásadním způsobem vázány k půdě a přírodě, s níž měly indiánské národy vždy přímý kontakt a zároveň na jejich

přízni záviselo i přežití národu jako takového. Kenneth Lincoln ve své publikaci nazvané *Native American Renaissance* hovoří také o nenávratném poškození ústně předávaných textů a jejich generalizaci bez ohledu na původ mluveného textu v rámci jednoho kmene. Tento vývoj tkví v přestěhování kmenů do rezervací, kde se kmenová specifika začala postupně ztrácet.<sup>5</sup>

Severní Americe trvalo značně dlouhou dobu než si uvědomila zásadní význam indiánské literatury pro literaturu americkou. 60. léta 20. století můžeme nazvat renesancí indiánské americké literatury ve smyslu tom, že byl vytvořen nový, velmi zobecněný koncept Indiána, současně s občanskými právy jako svoboda slova, tisku a náboženství, která pro Indiány dříve neexistovala.<sup>6</sup>

Rok 1969 můžeme zároveň považovat za literární milník pro indiánské literární dědictví. N. S. Momaday z kmene Kiowa vydal toho roku román *House Made of Dawn*, jehož kvalita byla oceněna Pulitzerovou cenou za literaturu. Výsledkem byl zvýšený zájem o tvorbu původních amerických obyvatel, resp. jejich potomků. Jak dále dokládá Lincoln, většina současných indiánských autorů byla narozena až po druhé světové válce.

Zásadní rozdíl mezi původní a současnou indiánskou literaturou, který je třeba zvážit, je jazykový. Joy Harjo a Gloria Bird již v titulu své publikace *Reinventing the Enemy's Language* vyjadřují postoj k angličtině jako ke staronovému komunikačnímu jazyku současné indiánské literatury. Angličtinu, „jazyk nepřítele“ či „jazyk kolonizátorů,“ není přijímán výhradně pozitivně, protože právě v angličtině byla ukradena původní indiánská půda a poškození její potomci. Důvod pro takový vývoj je velmi prostý, mladá Indiánská generace byla postupně plně začleněna do edukačního systému „nové Ameriky“, tedy byly aplikovány anglofonní výukové metody s primárním mateřským jazykem, kterým je přirozeně angličtina. Původní indiánské jazyky se tím přesunuly na periferii jazykových znalostí původního obyvatelstva.<sup>7</sup>

Harjo a Bird však nevidí tento vývoj zcela negativně. Jsou přesvědčeny, že tento vývoj znamená pouze nové objevení původních tradic, tedy jejich začlenění do západoevropských literárních tradic.

Tyto literární tradice jsou velmi konkrétně popsány v publikaci *The Sacred Hoop* od indiánské autorky Pauly Gunn Allen. Ta považuje jisté elementy indiánské poezie za vlastní všem autorům. Za nejvýraznější z nich považuje metaforu. Metafory nejvíce vyhovující indiánským autorům jsou ty, které kombinují složky a které se bezprostředně týkají kmenových tradic, jež mají schopnost kompatibility se současným světem. Allen uvádí jen

některé z nich: porozumění cyklu měsíce, lidských vztahů, ženství, dále pak indiánská rodea, dálnice, letiště, indiánské bary a indiánské sněmy.<sup>8</sup>

Z toho vyplývá další teze, že porozumění světu jako celku je v případě současných Indiánů postavené na dualismu. Jedna část je postavena na porozumění původních indiánských hodnot, opozice je pak ta, která je ignoruje. Dalším charakteristickým a nevykořenitelným znakem je duchovní pojetí vesmíru, které poskytuje vnitřní stabilní formu jak vědomí, tak umění. Toto vnitřně objektivní pojetí duševní síly a jejích entit, vede k tomu, že indiánské ženy píšící poezii, která je interně spojitá a ucelená.<sup>9</sup>

Dále je třeba zmínit témata, která jsou pro indiánskou poezii také běžná. Frekventované je odcizení způsobené neznalostí svého původu, a tedy pocity jisté nezakořeněnosti. Proto se současní potomci Indiánů ocitají na rozhraní dvou kultur. Rozhodnout se pro tu „nejvhodnější“ je mnohdy těžké a básníci a básnířky se s tímto již zmíněným dualismem často vyrovnávají ve své tvorbě. Současně reagují na sociální otázky, které od příchodu otřásají indiánskou kulturou, popř. jejími pozůstatky. Jsou to mj. alkoholismus, nezaměstnanost, sebevraždy. Stará indiánská mytologie je velmi běžné téma, stejně jako víra. Rozhodnout se mezi monoteistickým křesťanstvím či polyteistickou vírou předkoloniální doby je dnes záležitostí povšechně vyřešenou, vzhledem k tomu, že většina Indiánů přijala křesťanství.

Jestliže už víme, jak se se střetem staré a nové kultury vyrovnávají Indiáni, musíme i zmínit, jak se s nimi jako s „minoritním národem“ vyrovnává bílá Amerika. Fakt, který je v dnešní době ignorován je ten, že Indiánská kultura nesestávala pouze z jednoho národu, ale z mnoha kmenů, jejichž tradice byly v některých případech diametrálně odlišné. Koncept, který vytvořili bílí přistěhovalci a který se pak objevuje i v dílech Fenimora Coopera a dalších, je Indián v podstatě shrnutý do balíčku vlastností, které jsou vlastní každému z nich bez ohledu na individualitu a specifika každého jedince.<sup>10</sup>

I mezi indiánskými literárními kritiky a teoretiky jsou takoví, kteří se koncepce nového Indiána zastávají. Jedním z nich je i Lincoln, který koncept tzv. „now day Indián“ popisuje jako soužití s bílými lidmi prostoupené městskými ghety, snahou udržet si zaměstnání, studiem v anglofonním prostředí, apod.<sup>11</sup>

Ovšem bylo by chybné domnívat se, že každý Indián je „pouze Indián“ a jeho uplatnění je tímto termínem nějak limitováno. Mnohdy může označení „sbírka básní od indiánského autora“ spíše ublížit. Brian Swann hovoří o tom, co odlišuje indiánskou poezii. Definuje ji jako významné historické svědectví, jež má kořeny v minulosti, které sahají až do přítomnosti. Navíc je označení „indiánský“ v dnešní době z výše uvedených důvodů spíše

neurčitě. Je třeba uvědomit si individualitu každého autora a dle Swanna, generalizace může odvrátit pozornost od toho, co je významné v tvorbě daného básníka či básnířky.

Pozice dnešní indiánské ženy je tedy velmi složitá. Jak informuje Stephanie Sellers, dnešní indiánské ženy musejí překonávat dvě překážky současně. Nejdříve musí znovu získat důvěru a jistotu v sebe sama a pak jako ženy s tmavou pletí. Dále se musí vyrovnat s izolací, které jejich kulturní dědictví mnohdy přináší a vyhranit se jako právoplatné členky nejen minoritní literární obce, ale i té americké. Většina Indiánů jsou dnes Indiáni jen „napůl“, tj. mají jednoho z rodičů jiného původu. Takovým se potom říká „breed“ či mixed-blood“ a u nich je odcizení od původní kultury zvláště zjevné, neboť mají tendenci hledat to správné a stojí před volbou si vybrat.<sup>12</sup> Moje autorky, jejichž prvotiny podrobuji analýze, si vybrali přijmout kořeny indiánské.

První autorka, jejíž sbírku ve své práci podrobuji analýze, je *Trailing You* od Kimberly M. Blaeser. Ve své prvotině nás Blaeser vítá do světa moderní Indiánky. Básně pokládá za realizaci sebe sama: zvuků a obrazů. V titulní básni *Trailing You* znovu definuje, co indiánské vědomí znamená. Blaeser nestačí jen pohled na staré fotky a vzpomínky, ale požaduje znovuprožití starých vzpomínek ve snech, kterých si tolik váží. Uvědomění si sebe sama jako ženy probíhá na několika rovinách: je to rovina dcery, matky a manželky. Jako dcera si v „*Rituals, Yours – and Mine*“ uvědomuje dědictví, které jí zanechala její matka, a které si vždy bude nosit v srdci. Popis jednoho rána, kdy je s matkou v kuchyni se pak pro Blaeser stává obřadem, který přináší svět matky do světa dcery.

Jako matka si je Blaeser vědomá, že v životě syna přijde doba, kdy jeho „dětské království“, v němž dovoluje pobývat i jí, se stane královstvím, ve kterém její pobyt bude pouze okrajový a všechna rozhodnutí už budou jen na něm. Vědomě dává svému synovi svobodu a vzdává se možnosti ovlivňovat jeho budoucí rozhodnutí.

Jako manželka bílého muže, která věří v odlišné věci, musí nalézt způsob, jak přiblížit svůj svět tomu jeho. Postupně začíná její muž akceptovat význam snů v životě své ženy, když poznává, že stejně důležité jsou sny a jejich interpretace i pro ostatní členy indiánské komunity. Jako poslední fázi ve své transformaci, dochází u muže k porozumění autorčiných hodnot.

Za nejzásadnější báseň považuji ve sbírce *Trailing You* báseň „*Native Americans*“ vs. „*The Poets*“. V ní Blaser napadá velmi běžné praktiky, kdy je vzdělaný Indián potřebný v akademické instituci brán jen jako figurína, kterou je třeba v dnešní době mít. Blaeser ji popisuje jako „*Exhibit A*“. Proto se Cooperův „ušlechtilý divoch“ přesouvá z divoké přírody na univerzitu, v níž se chová jako každý člen akademické obce a oblek Indiána na sebe obléká

jen ve chvíli, kdy je to vhodné. Blaeser kritizuje, že i v dnešní době mnohdy nikdo neví, co si jak s indiánskou literaturou, tak s Indiány samými, počít.

V básni „American Indian Voices: I Wonder If This Is An Indian Poem“ striktně odlišuje samotné Indiány od teoretiků a vědců, kteří se Indiány jen zabývají. Jsou to právě oni, kdo nemají právo určit, kde začíná sféra, ve které se může hovořit o „indiánství“. Pro Blaeser je „indiánství“ vše, co se týká Indiána samotného a ne to, co napíše nějaký učenec. Nikdo přece neví, co je indiánské než Indiánka sama.

Janet McAdams, autorka *The Island of Lost Luggage*, se zabývá ve svých básních tématy a příběhy, které mnohdy s „indiánstvím“ jako takovým nesouvisí. Kromě osobních hledání vlastní identity, zvažuje problémy ve střední Americe a píše o lásce a její ztrátě v životě Indiánky. Cesta jejího srdce od dětství až po dospělost je protknutá politickou rovinou, která je s Indiány spjatá od počátku. Uvědomuje si sama sebe jako multi-kulturní osobnost, ne však striktně jako Indiánku. Její multi-etnicita se projevuje ve způsobech, jak se může zapojit do politických a sociálních problémů jiných kultur. V první části sbírky, nazvané po jedné z básní, „Boulevard of Heroes“, se nachází jako cizinec v San Salvadoru a prožívá tamní válečné události jako pozorovatel i jako žena, jejíž odcizení se projevuje jako nechuť zabývat se tamními problémy. Zároveň ale přiznává, že jiný život, než ten v boji nezná. Je zde patrná aluze na život Indiánů, kteří stále bojují, byť ne již se zbraněmi, za rovné postavení. V „Hands of the Taino“, se snaží porozumět Kryštofu Kolumbovi, který si podrobil původní obyvatele Baham a Antil. Nejsou ale jen ruce Tainů, které jsou svázané. Ty Kolumbovi stahuje královna i církve: obě po něm toho chtějí mnoho. Svázanost rukou a možností je pak relativizována – co považoval Kolumbus za spasení skrz křesťanské anděly, odehrává se rukama mýtických postav Tainů.

V básni „Leaving the Old Gods,“ přiznává, jak obtížné je přijmout náboženství křesťanské ne proto, že je správné, ale proto, že to tak má být, vzhledem k tomu, že je vyznáváno všemi. Ostatní v jejím okolí neví o jejím dvojím životě: staří bohové, kteří jí chtěli vždy živou, spasenou na zemi, ne až po smrti, jak prohlašuje křesťanství. Jediné, co se nemusí náboženství přizpůsobovat je příroda a její živly. Proto déšť a strom jsou tím, co ji váže k oběma kulturám a přechod mezi nimi ji usnadňuje.

Deborah A. Miranda je ve svém hledání indiánských kořenů nejvíce radikální. Kritizuje přístup bílých Američanů a zároveň bez obalu popisuje dětství indiánské dívky, kterou kvůli svému původu potkala ve škole šikana, ve velmi mladém věku znásilnění. Nyní jako matka považuje ve „Stories I Tell My Daughter“ za důležité, aby její dcera věděla obojí, tedy to dobré i špatné co ji jako Indiánku může potkat.



V básni „Lost Language“ běduje nad neznalostí původního jazyka svého kmene. Přestože již žádná slova nezná a mnoho historických artefaktů zná jen z muzeí, jedno slovo je vyryto na jejím čele stejně jak bylo vyryto na čele jejích babiček. Na toto slovo je velmi hrdá, zároveň ho ale po jeho vyslovení také nenávidí. Tento dualismus koření v obojakých pocitech k jejímu původu, které se následně obrací pouze k těm indiánským. „Indiánství“ tedy přichází i přirozeně bez toho, co by měl Indián znát. Je Indiánka, protože má svůj původ v krvi, ve svém vzezření. V básni „I Am Not a Witness“ si uvědomuje jak velkou ztrátou je ve světě Indiánky ztráta půdy, díky níž by se mohla alespoň částečně spojit s dědictvím, které má ve své krvi odkázané.

V titulní básni „Indian Cartography“ popisuje osud svého otce, který hledá záchranu před světem v alkoholu a ve snech, které přináší. Jeho dětství, půda na které vyrůstal, byla přetnuta přehradou, se kterou se těžko vyrovnávají i lososi v řece. Kritizuje vládu, která zaplatila Indiánům, aby se odstěhovali pryč. Zajímavé je, že alkoholismus svému otci nevyčítá, ale snaží se mu porozumět. Jen když je její otec opojen, může se potopit do řeky, která je plná vzpomínek. Když se ponoří a otevře oči, vidí věci, které nejsou na žádné mapě, a tedy na žádném dokumentu bílých obyvatel. Až zde má její otec možnost se opět spojit s předky a dědictvím, které bylo ztraceno, protože vnitřek řeky, stejně jako vnitřek člověka, změnit nelze.

Všechny tři autorky sdílí ve své tvorbě ztrátu a znovuobjevení indiánského dědictví. V světě objevují krásu i ošklivost a snaží se nalézt to nejlepší z obou světů. Připomínají dnešním Indiánkám, že i když indiánská kultura není to, co bývala, ony jsou stále naživu, a tedy i kulturní odkaz stále žije. Odmítají označení toho, kdo přežil, místo toho požadují být nazývány ty, co tu stále jsou.

Navzájem je odlišuje žebříček hodnot, na které své „indiánství“ staví.

Pro Mirandu jsou indiánské kořeny jediným spojníkem mezi její minulostí a přítomností a také jediným způsobem, jak se vyrovnat se svou vlastní existencí. Mnohdy popisuje osud indiánských kmenů s hlubokým smutkem, aby nakonec převládla víra v úspěšnou budoucnost dnešních potomků Indiánů. Nachází ta správná slova pro násilí a utlačování, se kterým se Indiánky bohužel setkávají.

Její básně jsou cesta, na níž se se čtenářem vydává s cílem získat zpět vše ztracené. Miranda je značně retrospektivní a její tvorba je nejpevněji svázána s odkazem minulosti. Blaeser spojuje indiánské sny s realitou každodenního života. Je hrdá na to, že může najít spojení mezi časy minulými a dneškem skrz odkaz, který jí její předci zanechali. Nachází zvláštní spojení k přírodě, které je Indiánům vlastní. S přírodou je v rovnováze a porozumění všemu

dává její poezii život, pevný krok a víru. Vyhraňuje se proti generalizované koncepci Indiána a je si vědomá toho, že do ní nemůže a ani nechce zapadnout. Janet McAdams je nevíce kosmopolitní. Svůj původ nevidí jako zásadní pro svou existenci. Zohledňuje problémy ostatních kultur a národů a nalézá paralely s historií indiánskou.

Deborah A. Miranda, Janet McAdams a Kimberly Blaeser dávají moderní indiánské literatuře nový has, který nebyl nikdy ztracen, pouze se musel upravit. Volnými verši obnovují nové tradice a nachází pro ně nové místo v době současné. Odmítají být Exhibit A, který píše pouze o indiánských věcech. Dokazují že kromě označení indiánské, jsou i básnířky na úrovni ostatních současných amerických autorek. Vše, co je indiánské může být také moderní a to tvorba těchto autorek dokazuje.

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## 6 Synopsis

The goal of my thesis is to explore and analyse contemporary Native American poetry written by Indian women poets who endorse to the indigenous culture of the First Nations. As a result of my analysis, I would like to find an answer for the following: How do the authors re-discover and revoke the Native American literary traditions, if they do so. If it is even appropriate to talk about literary traditions that differ from the contemporary American poetry, since all the authors write in English as their native language. What do the women poets share in their collections as the new post-colonial Native American generation of women living in patriarchal society and what makes their poetry anomalous. The analysed collections are *Indian Cartography* by Deborah A. Miranda, *Trailing You* by Kimberly M. Blaeser and *The Island of Lost Luggage* by Janet Mc Adams. For my analysis I use the minority feminist and close reading critical approaches which I consider most appropriate for my analysis.

My thesis consists of theoretical and practical part. The theoretical part provides general background regarding the Native American literature and culture. In the practical part I apply this information when interpreting and explaining the collections of poems.

### **Anotace**

Cílem mé bakalářské práce je zkoumání a analýza básnických sbírek napsaných současnými severoamerickými indiánskými básnířkami. Na základě své analýzy bych ráda našla odpověď na následující otázky: Jak autorky znovu objevují indiánské tradice, v případě, že se o to snaží. Zda je vhodné hovořit o literárních tradicích, které se liší od současných tradic amerických, vzhledem k tomu, že všechny autorky píšou anglicky. Co mají sbírky mých autorek společného a čím se odlišují. Sbírkou, které ve své práci podrobuji analýze jsou: *Indian Cartography* od Deborah A. Miranda, *Trailing You* od Kimberly M. Blaeser a *The Island of Lost Luggage* od Janet Mc Adams. Kritický přístup, který jsem k analýze zvolila je close reading a minority feminist criticism, protože považuji ho za nejvíce vhodný pro svou analýzu.

Práce má dvě části, a to teoretickou a praktickou. Teoretická podává informace o obecných závěrech týkajících se indiánské literatury a kultury. Na základě těchto závěrů pak interpretuji a vysvětluji básně jednotlivých autorek v části praktické.

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