

refrigerator but also of the coldness and alienation in her own heart. She confesses that she is a stranger in this world, “An Indian in a white man’s land.”

The short stories of Native American writers also confront directly the contemporary social and economic problems of Indian people, demonstrating the reserves of strength that are available to individuals as they struggle to survive and prevail. Duane Niatum (Klallam), in his evocative story “Crow’s Sun,” describes the prejudice and verbal abuse that a young Indian sailor faces as he enters a Marine Corps brig. The white sergeant punnels the sailor and tells him, “Down home where I come from, we fry niggers like ya’ in chicken fat and feed the remains to the hogs.” The sailor stays calm, reaching deep within himself for the strength given him by his father and grandfather. “When the world’s too broken for the heart, live in the cave inside your skull: follow hummingbird’s flight through the yellow light to the center of our birth.” Life behind bars is also the subject of “Going Home,” a short story by Abenaki writer and publisher Joseph Bruhac. Harold Buffalo, a medicine man, insists that he be allowed to build a sweat lodge for his fellow Indian inmates at the Fort Grant “rehabilitation center.” When the warden denies his request, Buffalo escapes to a nearby mountaintop to build a fire and pray. After being recaptured, Buffalo again confronts the warden with his request and this time he prevails. “When something like that is going to happen,” says the medicine man, “you can’t stop it.”

Ed Edmo (Shoshone-Bannock) is a traditional storyteller and writer who also addresses the personal indignities that Native Americans often must endure. In “After Celilo,” Edmo describes the dispersal of Indians displaced by the building of a freeway and dam at Celilo Falls on the Columbia River. After being relocated to an all-white community, the narrator recalls being humiliated by a little girl who spat on him and told him to go back to where he had come from. “I couldn’t go back because there was a freeway where my house used to stand,” he remembers thinking. “I couldn’t understand why she said that.” Later, when he hitchhikes his way to Portland, a friendly driver drops him off at a bridge where the transients and homeless stay. The driver, with unconscious irony, instructs him, “Walk across the bridge, kid, an’ you’ll find your people.”

Although the ravages of poverty are presented with unflinching honesty, the short stories by Native writers often portray Indian people surviving with their dignity intact. Nookack writer Mickey Roberts’

story “The Indian Basker” describes three generations of Native women going door-to-door bartering baskets for bits of cast-off white clothing. She emphasizes that although these women were losing a valuable part of their maternal heritage not all was lost. “As we peddled our treasures in those early years, we probably appeared to be a pitiful people. We were, however, living in as dignified a manner as possible while selling a part of our culture.”

The debilitating problems of alcohol and drug abuse also appear in Native American short stories, but often are accompanied by a hope of healing and recovery. In “Northern Lights” by Joy Harjo (Creek), a Vietnam veteran is wounded while “flying on heroin.” After the war, he pawns his service medals for a quart of alcohol and becomes “an acrobat of pain in the Indian bars of Kansas.” Years later he dances once again in “the circle of hope” and speaks proudly of his daughter, “sober after drinking away adolescence,” who shares with him the “intimate knowledge of survival from the abyss.” Likewise, Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk) describes the successful struggle of a mixed-blood alcoholic woman to remain sober. In “Swimming Upstream,” she portrays Anna May as the grieving daughter of an alcoholic father who has just lost her own son in a drowning accident. Anna May stops by a deserted river bank where she is tempted to get drunk, but is distracted by the struggle of a salmon spawning upstream against the powerful current. “Make it, damn it, make it!” she cries as the battered fish leaps over the final obstacle. From this transformative experience—this reemergence in the natural world—Anna May finds the strength to resist the lure of the bottle.

As in the novels by Native Americans, the most common path to the discovery of an authentic Indian identity leads the protagonists of the short stories to some encounter with traditional culture. Elders and ancestors are the revered source of knowledge necessary for individuals to survive in a rapidly changing world. Elizabeth Woody (Wasco/Narajo) recalls with deep appreciation the stories and songs of her grandmother in the short story “HomeCooking.” Woody confesses that she did not know any songs “or even know Indian,” but from her grandmother she learns much. Gramma tells her of the old days when “our people knew how to do everything for themselves. Not like nowadays, where we have to hire big shots to come in and boss us around.” The stories and songs Woody learns from her grandmother are magical and filled with power; they give her a feeling of connection with the magic that is “this soft rumble of blood-life,

laughter, our great heart under the land." The power is still there for those who have eyes to see. "I see segments of this power," Woody writes, "hanging from the hands of old ladies as they dance at gatherings."

Similar acts of recovery and affirmation are described in Vickie Sears's "Dancer" and Roger Jack's "The Pebble People." Sears, a Cherokee writer and therapist, tells the story of a displaced five-year-old foster child named Clarissa who is "fill up with anger and scared-ness." When her new foster parents take Clarissa to a powwow, she is fascinated by the dancing of an old woman in her seventies. As Clarissa learns the traditional dances and songs, the "angry part of her slowed down." She proudly announces one night at supper, "I'm an Assiniboin." Roger Jack (Colville), a graduate of the Institute of American Indian Arts in Santa Fe, portrays eight-year-old Ben Adams as a youngster intent on repeating with exactitude what he had learned from his uncle about the proper discipline necessary for performing the dances of his people. Like Clarissa, Ben finds traditional culture to be a deeply satisfying part of his young life.

The narrator of "Aunt Moon's Young Man" by Linda Hogan (Chickasaw) is likewise drawn to the wisdom and knowledge of a tribal elder. Aunt Moon lives alone, wears her long hair braided "in the manner of the older Chickasaw women," prepares medicine herbs, and knows well the ancient stories of her people. She passes her knowledge on to the young narrator, teaching her creation stories and explaining that the soul is a small woman who lives inside the eye. She gives her a bag of herbs and an old eagle feather "that had been doctored by her father back when people used to pray instead of going to church." The story ends with the narrator leaving home, strengthened by all that she has received and ready to meet the larger world. "I had Aunt Moon's herbs in my bag, and the eagle feather wrapped safe in a scarf. And I had a small, beautiful woman in my eye."

Although many of the short stories of Native Americans are filled with characters establishing their own authentic identities, others tell of Native people who confront and refute the stereotypical images of Indians that litter the dominant culture. Thomas King's "A Seat in the Garden" is an uproarious romp through the minefields of cross-cultural misperception. King, a Cherokee professor of American studies at the University of Minnesota, describes the vision of two white men who think they see the spirit of a "big Indian" in their garden. Joe Hovagh and Red Mathews are puzzled by this apparition that some

how reminds them of Ed Ames, Sal Minico, Victor Mature, and Anthony Quinn—white actors who often portrayed Indians in Hollywood films. When Red suggests they seek the help of some local Indians, Joe replies, "There aren't any Indians around here." Red points out three vagabond Indian men who collect cans for recycling, but Joe does not consider these flesh-and-blood people to be real Indians: "They don't count." In desperation, Joe and Red ask the men for help, but the Indians claim they cannot see any spirit in the garden. King's humor cuts both ways: ~~The white men, whose vision is distorted by seeing too~~ many Hollywood Indians, have difficulty seeing the real Indians before them. The Indians, whose vision is clear enough, cannot see the image conjured up by the white men's imagination.

Images and stereotypes are also at the heart of "It's All in How You Say It" by Mickey Roberts, a story that begins with the author's childhood encounter with an inaccuracy in a school textbook. The textbook stated that dried fish, a delicacy of many Native people, tasted "like an old shoe, or was like chewing on dried leather." Roberts, who knew otherwise, objected. She showed the textbook to her father who "told me in his wise and humble manner that the outside world did not always understand Indian people, and that I should not let it hinder me from learning the good parts of education." Years later, the author remembers her father's wise counsel when she is told by a tactless and unthinking white man that a group of "professional Indians" will be brought in to perform at the county fair. The words hurt deeply, for Roberts knew the "professional Indians" were not Indians at all. She comforts herself with the words of her father—words that may also serve as a challenge to all who have not yet heard the eloquent voices in Native American literature—"They just don't understand Indian people."

POETRY

One of the most remarkable features of the Native American literary renaissance was its profusion of poetry as well as prose. Leading Indian novelists and short story writers proved themselves to be accomplished poets also, writing in multiple genres with equal skill. Their themes remained consistent, raising questions of identity and commenting on the problems of contemporary Indian life. Yet the poetry of Native Americans was largely ignored by the general public and by the arbiters of American literary taste. As Alan R. Velie has pointed out, several