For the White poets who would be Indian Study Guide

For the White poets who would be Indian by Wendy Rose

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Introduction

Often, when poets create work that is inspired primarily by anger toward an individual or a group of people, the poem turns out "preachy" or too emotional. Wendy Rose's poem "For the White poets who would be Indian," first published in *Lost Copper* (1980), is based on her feelings of indignation toward non-Native American writers who claim they can understand how it *feels* to be Indian and that they can create work truly from an Indian perspective. Rose's contention is that this cannot be done. She does not call out any "White poets" in particular in this poem, but she does offer descriptive insight into the way they go about their work and the possible reasons that these poets choose to adopt another culture as their own□at least in their poetry. Because Rose is able to present her beliefs in graphic, illuminating language (as opposed to an overly emotional diatribe) and to maintain a sense of honest poetry throughout the piece, it does not fall into the ranks of dull sermonizing.

"For the White poets who would be Indian" draws upon the idea of "white shamanism," a term used by some Native American poets□including Rose□to address the issue of white writers pretending to be so entrenched in Native American ways and beliefs that they are "just as Indian" as those born into the culture. The word "shaman" refers to a very powerful and revered figure in many tribal societies, indicating one who acts as a link between the visible human world and the invisible spirit world. A shaman practices magic or sorcery to heal the sick or to control natural forces. The term "white shamanism," then, is a sarcastic comment on the hypocrisy displayed by white writers "who would be Indian," and Rose explains why in this poem.

Author Biography

Wendy Rose was born Bronwen Elizabeth Edwards on May 7, 1948, in Oakland, California. Her father was Hopi, and her mother descended from both Miwok Indian and European ancestors. The fact of her mixed blood played a large role in Rose's struggle for identity as a youth, as did her suburban upbringing in Oakland, where life exhibited much more of the European, or "white," influence than Native American, on or off a reservation.

Rose's adolescence during the 1960s was as distressed and unrestrained as the times. She dropped out of high school and into the bohemian, artistic circles of San Francisco. But even as a vulnerable teenager on her own in a large city, Rose's ongoing interests were those that would develop over the years and become a major impetus for her writing and painting□self-identity, a desire to embrace her heritage as a Hopi Indian, and fighting the exploitation of Native American culture. During this time, she began writing poetry, although many of her earliest poems would not be published for several years, her first collection, *Hopi Roadrunner Dancing,* coming in 1973. In the 1960s, she also traveled to her father's birthplace in Arizona, Hopi Indian territory, and was deeply moved by the experience, enhancing her longing to identify with her Native American heritage.

In spite of the decision to drop out as a high school student, Rose would return to school in 1966 and spend the next fourteen years earning both undergraduate and graduate degrees and completing course work toward a doctorate in anthropology. Although she was a prolific poet and painter, Rose concentrated her studies on social science and received her master's degree from the University of California, Berkeley, in 1978. Between 1966 and 1980, she also published five volumes of poetry, including *Lost Copper* in 1980, which contains "For the White poets who would be Indian." As a part of her quest for self-identity and self-creation, Rose has experimented with her own name over the years. Many of her early works were published under the name "Chiron Khanshendel." She chose Chiron, the name of the wise centaur of Greek mythology, because of her love for horses, and Khanshendel was simply a name she devised on her own. Eventually, she settled on the abbreviated version of her birth name□Wendy in place of Bronwen□and the last name of a man with whom she had a close relationship as a young woman□Rose. Despite the fluctuation, one decision was clear: the very astute, European-sounding "Bronwen Elizabeth Edwards" would not do, and she abandoned that moniker for good.

After completing her doctorate, Rose opted to remain in academia, and she has been a teacher, researcher, and advisor, as well as head of the American Indian Studies Program at Fresno City College in California. She is also, of course, a noted anthropologist and a renowned spokesperson for Native American causes. She resides with her family in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California.

Poem Text

just once
just long enough
to snap up the words
fish-hooked from
to our tongues.
You think of us now
when you kneel
on the earth,
turn holy
in a temporary tourism
of our souls.
With words
you paint your faces,
chew your doeskin,
touch breast to tree
as if sharing a mother
were all it takes,
could bring instant and primal
knowledge.
You think of us only
when your voice
wants for roots,
when you have sat back
on your heels and
become
primitive.
You finish your poem
and go back.

Plot Summary

Line 1

It is important to single out the first line in "For the White poets who would be Indian" because it makes a significant point about the individuals addressed in the work. The line is actually a continuation of the title, which is itself a prepositional phrase that seems to open a sentence. (Notice that the main words in the title are not all capitalized as they would be normally.) The words "just once" indicate that the "White poets" for whom the poem is written would really want to "be Indian" only one time, if they were given the chance. This is the first touch of sarcasm from the poet, as she calls into question the sincerity of non-Native Americans who claim they would like to be a part of Indian culture.

Lines 2-3

These lines continue the irony, implying that white writers would be Native American "just long enough" to steal words from *real* Indians to use as their own. Rose is not accusing non-natives of literal plagiarism here but rather of a theft of style, language, and spirit□all the intangibles that are sacred to a certain culture and that outsiders cannot truly copy or lay claim to.

Lines 4-5

Here, Rose incorporates the first sense of anger and bitterness into the poem. The Indian poets' words are not just "stolen" or "taken" or even "grabbed." Instead, they are "fish-hooked from / our tongues," insinuating a violent, painful ripping away of Native American property. This metaphor is strong and well chosen in at least two ways: it connotes a feeling of personal attack on Indian writers who believe pieces of their culture have been yanked out by intruding non-Natives, and it also draws from a major activity in Indian history, culture, and economics□fishing.

Lines 6-9

In these lines, Rose refers to the deep reverence for mother earth that is a part of all Indian societies. The words imply that the white poets who try to imitate a Native American lifestyle and who pretend to hold the same values and beliefs as Indians do so only briefly when they "kneel / on the earth," presumably in a stereotypical prayer position. Again, the poet uses irony and sarcasm in saying that the non-Natives "turn holy" when they are one with the earth, as though they share the same sense of kinship with nature as is inherent in Indian culture.

Lines 10-11

These two lines present a striking contrast between the shallow superficiality of "temporary tourism" and the obvious depth and spirituality of "souls." Rose likens the "White poets who would be Indian" to vacationers touring places in which they have no right to enter. A tour is generally brief and whimsical, and an attempt to "vacation" in the soul of an entire race is both offensive and unfruitful.

Lines 12-15

The opening lines of the second stanza refer, metaphorically, to the lengths that white writers will go to in order to "fit in" with Indian culture. Face paint and doeskin (used primarily for gloves and boots; chewing it causes the leather to soften) are Native American symbols, and the phrase "touch breast to tree" is again mindful of the closeness between Indians and nature. The *key* phrase here, however, is "With words." It implies that white poets follow Native practices only on paper. Whereas actual members of a tribe may paint their faces for ceremonial custom or chew doeskin or *physically* touch trees, stones, the earth, and so forth, the hypocritical "wannabes" do those things only with words.

Lines 16-17

The "mother" referred to in this line is the mother earth. Rose acknowledges that human beings of all races rightfully inhabit the planet and, given that, all people share the same mother. The poet does not believe, however, that "sharing a mother" is "all it takes" to blend the races and to allow passage from one into another simply by adopting certain belief systems or appreciating the lifestyle of another culture.

Lines 18-19

These lines complete the thought started in line 15 ("touch breast to tree") by pointing out the false notion that sharing mother nature can "bring instant and primal / knowledge" to people who try to become something they cannot. The word "primal" means first or original, and it drives home the fact that a white poet can only pretend to be an Indian poet since any "knowledge" he or she may attain is necessarily second-hand. It cannot be "primal" because only *original* Indians can have original Indian knowledge. The fact that Rose placed the word "knowledge" on its own line displays the significance of its meaning in the poem. Knowledge is a powerful and sacred possession, not something that one gains "in a temporary tourism."

Lines 20-22

Line 20 ("You think of us only") is almost a verbatim repetition of line 6 ("You think of us now"), and the meaning is essentially the same white poets think about being Indian only when the moment is "right." In this case, the moment is when the non-Natives' "voices" need "roots" or a rich heritage and cultural strength from which to gain inspiration and meaningful insight. The implication here is that the white writers lack a real cultural *core* or a sense of history within the race and that they must, therefore, borrow the roots of other people when they feel the urge for heritage and belonging.

Lines 23-24

These lines also complete the "You think of us only" phrase, but they hold a double meaning as well. On one hand, they make reference to another stereotypical Indian practice that of sitting in a crouched position on the ground with the buttocks resting on raised heels and arms crossed over the knees. The idea is that sitting "back / on your heels" is simply another adopted (or temporarily stolen) custom that white poets use to "feel Indian," like kneeling on the earth, face painting, doeskin chewing, and touching breast to tree. But the phrase "sitting back on your heels" has also become a derogatory cliché meaning annoying complacency or the tendency to wait for something to happen and then react to it instead of taking self-initiative. In this sense, Rose takes a stab at white poets who seem to acquire their culture in passing, as though it is something that can be captured on a whim.

Lines 25-26

The fact that these two lines are made up of only one word each signifies their importance in the work. The word "become," of course, implies something that is now what it was not before. In the human sense, one who *becomes* a certain thing must not have been that way originally. What the people addressed in this poem become is "primitive." Rose again turns to irony since "primitive" (like "primal") in this case means first, earliest, or original. Try as they might, the "White poets who would be Indian" cannot actually come to be what they never were in the first place.

Lines 27-28

The last two lines of the poem are a final angry reproach of those who have been Indian "just long enough" (line 2) to feel they have written a poem from an authentic Native American perspective. Sarcastically, Rose accuses, "You finish your poem / and go back." The place the non-Natives "go back" to, of course, is their white world where they will remain until the urge to be Indian comes once again.

Themes

White Shamanism

The term "white shamanism" may be an unfamiliar one to many readers of this poem, but its significance as a theme in the work is unmistakable. First coined by Rose and fellow poets Geary Hobson and Leslie Silko, white shamanism has been misinterpreted over the years, especially by non- Native American writers who may feel a personal affront by the term. In an interview with fellow poet and author Joseph Bruchac, published in *Survival This Way,* Rose tried to explain what it really means:

It's assumed that what we're saying is that we don't want non-Indian people to write about Indians. That's not it. Many non-Indian people have written beautifully and sensitively about Indian people. . . . The difference is that there are those who come out and say that they are Indian when they are not . . . . There are those who come out and do not claim to be genetically Indian, but who do claim that what they are writing is somehow more Indian, or more legitimately Indian, than what real Indian people are writing. . . . They claim to be shamans and it's impossible to be a self-declared shaman. Your community has to recognize you.

In "For the White poets who would be Indian," Rose clearly addresses those individuals who make these claims, not just any non-Indian who has ever written about Native Americans. Writing *about* a different culture or a certain race of people is not the problem. What angers Rose and others who share her position are those poets who "snap up the words / fish-hooked from" real Indians' mouths and who think they can actually "become / primitive" by simply taking on the mannerisms, behaviors, values, and customs of American Indians. The idea of white poets going so far as to consider themselves shamans is alluded to particularly in the lines "when you kneel / on the earth, / turn holy" and again in "could bring instant and primal / knowledge." The intent of these lines is to mock the belief that people from one race can ever truly understand how it feels to be from another race, much less *become* a member of it. Rose scoffs at the notion that one can gain true knowledge simply by "sharing a mother" (the earth, in this case), and she accuses the white shaman poets of thinking that that is "all it takes."

The false, hypocritical beliefs themselves are not the only cause of Indian poets' anger toward non-Natives who "practice" white shamanism; further insult is added by the fleeting, on-again off-again nature of the desire or need to be Indian. The first two lines of Rose's poem ("just once / just long enough") point sarcastically to this aspect of the problem, and the lines "in a temporary tourism / of our souls" emphasize it even more. Here, "tourism" has a negative connotation, implying a frivolous and petty jaunt so out of place in reference to human souls. The poem faults white poets who think of Indians "only / when your voices / want for roots" or only when their own words and poems seem pale and dull in comparison to those written from authentic heritage and with authentic voice. The poem ends with perhaps the greatest indignity related to white shamanism from a Native American's point of view□the tendency to shift back and forth

between worlds. According to Rose's work, the white poets she addresses visit the Indian world just long enough to steal some ideas and words for their poems, and, once the work is finished, they "go back" to their own world. The insincerity this designates is at the center of the controversy over white shaman poets.

Nature

Feelings of community with nature and regarding the earth as "mother" are not unusual in American Indian culture, and it is common for expressions of it to show up in the work of Indian writers. Although Rose's "For the White poets who would be Indian" is more heavily laden with the theme of white shamanism, it still speaks to the closeness and oneness this poet feels toward the natural world. Even in her angry and sarcastic remarks to non-Native American writers, she uses metaphors that draw from nature and that reveal her reverence for it in spite of the accusatory makeup of the poem. With such words and phrases as "fish-hooked," "kneel on the earth," "doeskin," "touch breast to tree," and "want for roots," Rose packs this brief piece with images that emphasize the irony in white poets' attempts to "become" Indian. The voice in the poem makes the pairing of nature imagery with hypocritical human beings obviously out of place. Even though it is the white poets who are portrayed as kneeling on the earth, chewing doeskin, and touching trees, there is an overwhelming sense of unnaturalness in their behavior. This, of course, is Rose's point□that "sharing a mother" is *not* all it takes to move from one race into another. While the nature theme may appear subtle in comparison to the complaint against white intrusion on Indian culture, it actually serves to enhance that subject. Acknowledging the role of nature in the lives of Indians is crucial in understanding the need and desire to protect it from those interested in only a tour of it.

Style

"For the White poets who would be Indian" is written in free verse and is a brief poem, not only in terms of its twenty-eight lines but in the relative shortness of those lines as well. Here, the form complements the simple, somewhat calm, direct address from the poet to her supposed adversaries, and, too, it reflects the poignant, down-to-earth lifestyle of most Native Americans. But simplicity does not imply artlessness. This little poem is full of staunch imagery and a compelling voice that is made stronger by its succinct, halted cadence throughout. Read the poem slowly, stopping at each line break, and notice the repetitive "drumming" effect, how the lines□including those made up of only one word□tend to sound almost dull and heavy-laden. Lines such as "our tongues," "turn holy," "of our souls," "become / primitive," and "and go back" are especially loaded with both sound and meaning, and they command the reader's voice and mind to stop and pay attention to them. Like nearly all free verse poems, the work is not completely "free" of any poetic device.

Whether near-rhyme or alliteration (like-sounding consonants and vowels) occurs by happenstance or careful planning, there are usually a few examples of them in all types of poems, and they lend "a nice ring" to the work, if nothing else. In Rose's poem, there is obvious alliteration in "now" and "kneel," "temporary tourism," "touch breast to tree," and assonance in "want for roots," and perhaps though not so obvious in "once" and "enough," "holy" and "souls," and "sat back." Though putting only one word on a line may not be considered an official poetic device, it serves to make the poem's construction more vital to the entire work. Rose intentionally stresses the words "knowledge," "become," and "primitive" because they are essential to the poem's main theme. Along the same lines, she incorporates the title of the poem into the body by presenting the words in lower case and by making the first line a continuation of the thought begun in the title. By doing so, she allows the form of the poem to intertwine specifically with its meaning.

Historical Context

Rose began writing and publishing poetry during one of the most volatile times in American history □the 1960s. Her poem "For the White poets who would be Indian" was most likely composed later in the 1970s, but regardless of the current time in which Rose was writing, the subject of most of her work is based on a history that spans hundreds of years. The plight of Native Americans since the landing of the Europeans is no secret to members of any race in the country. Their struggle has been not only to physically survive but also to retain their lands, their lifestyle, their religion, and their culture. While these battles have been going on since the first encounter between Indians and whites, Rose addresses a relatively recent problem in the relationship between the two races, among poets in particular. Probably not until the 1960s, when young Americans began to shift toward different attitudes and lifestyles, did the idea of "stealing culture" seem so threatening to those whose identities were suddenly vulnerable. American Indian society □with its sense of community, its respect for the earth, its protection of wildlife, and an overall "one with nature" perspective□was especially appealing to white youth who had tired of the urbanized, technology-driven status quo. Some only adopted the more selfless, environmentally conscious attitudes of the Native Americans, but others went too far, according to Rose, in actually claiming to "become" Indian.

Rose's own struggle for identity was fueled by her mixed-blood heritage, and it was the Hopi side to which she wanted to belong. The Hopi creation story is very indicative of what developed over the centuries into "The Hopi Way," which is based on humility and peacefulness. According to the web site "Hopi: The Real Thing," the following tells the story of the tribe's creation:

[The tribe] the Great Spirit, Maasau'u, came to visit them and to test their wisdom. The people were divided into groups, each with their own leaders that they had chosen. Then Maasau'u placed ears of corn of different lengths in front of each leader. As each leader pushed forward to grab the biggest ear of corn the Great Spirit gave that group a name and a language. The humblest leader picked the shortest of the corn, and the name 'Hopi' was given to those people: the little ones. Hopi means to be humble and peaceful, but if the people do not live the Hopi way the name will be taken from them.

In reality, of course, the Hopi Indians experienced their share of turmoil and found it difficult, if not impossible, to remain humble and peaceful. Not only did they have the invasion of the white man to contend with but there was also an ongoing dispute with the Navajo tribe over land ownership in northeast Arizona. Both groups laid claim to it, and in 1882 President Chester A. Arthur established the Hopi reservation along the southern end of Black Mesa, which meant the Hopi were actually surrounded by the Navajo reservation. This "settlement" was hardly appeasing, and the problems continued. An article at the web site "Hopi: The Real Thing" explains the situation:

Because land is a part of each tribe's religion complications arose concerning the use of land by people living on land that is considered to be holy. [Today] there are eleven Hopi

villages in NE Arizona on Black Mesa, a rock land table [and] current Hopi population is between 10,000 and 12,000.

Native American history is an accumulation of attempts to hold on to what is rightfully Indian from land to lifestyle and everything in between. Given such, it is understandable that Rose and other Indian authors would address the issue in their work, incorporating both historical facts and events that are taking place around them. The 1960s and 1970s saw major political moves by Indian tribes across America. One of the most highly visible and long-lasting actions was the takeover of Alcatraz Island by members of several different tribes on November 20, 1969. A web site article entitled "Indians of North America: Alcatraz" describes this period of American Indian history:

The nineteen-month occupation of Alcatraz Island . . . is a watershed in the American Indian protest and activist movement. . . . The Alcatraz occupation brought together hundreds of Indian people who came to live on the island and thousands more who identified with the call for self-determination, autonomy, and respect for Indian culture.

For the next decade, Native Americans would bring attention to their concerns through more than seventy uprisings and occupations, and Alcatraz is recognized as the "springboard" that gave rise to them. The article states "these occupations continued through the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] headquarters takeover in 1972, Wounded Knee II in 1973, and the June 26, 1975, shootout between American Indian Movement members and Federal Bureau of Investigation agents on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota."

All these events provided much motivation for Indian poets' work. Occupations and uprisings, however, did not tell the entire story, at least as Rose and others saw it. There was a separate struggle going on, as well, and that was the fight against white shamanism. Less noticed and much less understood by the general white public, this battle is just as important to Native American writers as are the more obvious protests.

Critical Overview

Wendy Rose's most notable contribution to contemporary American poetry is her ability to present controversial subjects in an insightful manner and to make them accessible to the general reader. She has been especially acclaimed for describing the tragedies and injustices of the Native American experience and doing so in a way that retains the poetic effect while still making political or social comments. Some critics have found her words disturbing, not only for their accusatory tone but also for their sense of untamed emotion and an "if you feel it, say it" agenda. Others, however, point out that this tendency is a strength rather than a weakness.

Just as interesting as the critics' responses to Rose's work are *her* responses to the treatment of Native American writing in general. In her interview with critic and fellow poet John Bruchac in *Survival This Way,* she had this to say about reviewers:

It's a great frustration when people won't review our work, for example, in the usual professional way, saying that they don't have "the ethnographic knowledge" to do it or something. That's a frustration to me because some of us . . . come out [of prestigious writing schools] and then find out . . . that they're culturally too obscure to be reviewed as a real writer. That's not true.

Rose has also pointed out that her books often end up in "Native American" sections of bookstores and libraries instead of in the general poetry or American literature sections. She finds this a personal affront to her work as a poet. Most store owners and librarians (and critics as well) may deny any intentional disrespect by this practice, but Rose's point is in keeping with her continuing struggle for Native American rights and acceptance.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
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- Critical Essay #3
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Critical Essay #1

Hill has published widely in poetry journals and is the author of a collection entitled In Praise of Motels. *In the following essay, she presents Rose's poem as a work of controlled anger, written in a voice both poetic and indignant.*

How individuals deal with feelings of injustice or anger toward an entire group of people can be as varied as the personalities of those going through the experience. Human history is full of any number of reactions to unfair treatment and intrusion on personal space□from the creation of social and political reforms to murderous revenge by a few and all out war among nations. The so-called founding and development of America by Christopher Columbus and the Europeans who followed were accepted without question for most of the 500- year history of this country. Despite the reluctant acknowledgement of how that founding impacted the lives of people who had been living on American soil for centuries, many non-Native American citizens have found ways to "justify" the usurpation of Indian lands and the deaths of those who tried to stop it. Some, however, have done a 180- degree turn in *support* of Native American causes, embracing the culture so much that they feel an actual part of it. Rather than becoming true allies of Indian tribes of the late twentieth century, these white, would-be Natives are regarded as only one more link in a long chain of invasion and injustice suffered by those who are still fighting for what is rightfully (and exclusively) theirs.

Rose is all too familiar with the struggle to find and maintain self-identity. Her poetry reflects the awkwardness and emotional stress of being caught between two worlds□the white, European heritage of her mother and the Native American world of her Hopi father. There is no doubt, however, which side she prefers, and she appears to have spent much of her life thus far in attempts to enhance and solidify her identity as an American Indian. "For the White poets who would be Indian" is a poem that may make readers think Rose is a full-blooded Native, that she has never known the bewilderment of being part of two races. Certainly, in this poem there is no indication of any sympathy for the "White poets." Instead, the voice in this work is angry, yet controlled. Rose does not fall over the edge into some mindless ranting but instills in this poem the rich imagery and provocative circumstance that create good poetry, all the while berating a race of fellow poets for their intrusion into her world.

From the outset of the poem, Rose accuses white poets of theft. The animosity is clear in the third line in which the phrase "snap up the words" conveys her belief that non-Native American writers who pretend to be Indian do so by stealing words, phrases, and topics that they think *sound* Indian.

These are the poets that Rose accuses of "white shamanism," a term referring to the claim by non-Natives that they are somehow "more Indian" than actual Native Americans and that their poetry is also more Indian than that written by real Natives. One noted poet who would fall into this category, according to Rose, is Gary Snyder, whose work does often reflect and imitate Indian manner and subjects. His lifestyle, too, is patterned after that of Native Americans, and he lives "close to the earth" in the

American West. Whether or not Snyder is actually guilty of white shamanism is for poets on both sides to argue, but his work is a clear example of what riles some Indian poets into angry rebuke.

Despite the indignation revealed in the opening lines of "For the White poets who would be Indian," Rose maintains a poetic sense in the image of words being "fish-hooked from / our tongues." This phrase is still angry and accusatory, but it is also creative in the use of "fish-hooked" as a strong and apt verb describing how white poets acquire the words for their Indian poems. When Rose next attacks the sincerity of these white poets, she retains a poetic voice in the fresh and unlikely metaphor of "temporary tourism / of our souls." Comparing the shallow would-be Indian poets to fleeting tourists on a holiday is an inventive way of expressing cynicism and disgust over having something as sacred as souls treated in such a frivolous manner. But sustaining the metaphorical application throughout the poem is indicative of the control Rose holds on to in spite of the very volatile subject matter.

This brief but powerful poem gains some of its strength from Wendy Rose's own striving for personal completeness□her longing to be a whole Indian. Given her lifelong struggle, the idea of becoming Indian on a whim, the way some white poets have done, must be an even harder slap in the face than usual. The web site "Voices from the Gaps: Women Writers of Color" suggests that:

the diversity of Rose's poetry is not about distinctions, but about wholeness. Her contempt for the "white-shaman" is out of the lack of wholeness which they represent, a wholeness which she has struggled to define in herself and her work. As she was struggling to find her identity within her mixed lineage and culture, using poetry to express herself, the "white-shaman" simply stole from her culture. As her poetry bespeaks the position of injustice, the "white-shaman" spoke from a privileged position.

This lack of wholeness on the part of the white poets who would be Indian is implied in the second stanza of the poem especially. Rose isolates three examples of Indian practices that white poets perform only "With words." Those examples□ face painting, chewing doeskin, and touching "breast to tree"□point out the incompleteness and hypocrisy of people who think *writing about* a few behaviors reminiscent of Indian culture is "all it takes" to become Native American. Rose is particularly sensitive to the notion that "primal knowledge" may be obtained instantly and easily. In her estimate, white shaman poets serve only to cheapen *real* native insight and knowledge by assuming they can gain it by *acting* Indian. Including much nature imagery and addressing Indian concerns in the work does not make a white poet an Indian poet, regardless that the two races are "sharing a mother" in the planet Earth. But the fact that Rose makes this statement by using nature imagery herself (doeskin, trees, the earth) and that she does so in interesting and unique metaphorical depiction keeps her from seeming too didactic or emotional. Her anger is mollified by creative description. Its presence is still felt, but the poetics hold it in check.

One could argue that the white poets addressed in this poem are not the only ones who "want for roots"□that Rose herself has had a perpetual struggle to claim her own roots

in the Hopi Indian culture. The fact that her mother was part white seems to have been a thorn in the side of the daughter who wanted to be *all* Indian. In an interview with fellow poet Joseph Bruchac, in *Survival This Way: Interviews with Native American Poets,* Rose spoke candidly about her feelings on being of mixed race:

I was in a situation where I was physically separated from one-half of my family and rejected by the half that brought me up. And in this case it was because of what there is in me that belonged to the other half. The way that a lot of us put it is you're too dark to be white and you're too white to be Indian. . . . I was in that situation where the white part of my family had absolutely no use for any other races that came into the family. . . . The Indian half is in a situation where, among the Hopi, the clan and your identity comes through the mother, and without the Hopi mother it doesn't matter if your father was full-blooded or not, you can't be Hopi.

There is a sense of resentment in Rose's statements, apparently for the white side of her family, the side that brought her up and yet rejected her as well. It is the same resentment that shows up in her other accusation, but it is also a resignation on the part of the poet. She seems to accept that this is just the way things go and that her anger and indignation may be justified but will not likely change anything.

Wendy Rose's poetry is provocative, but it should not be mistaken for racism. Even though she singles out a particular group of people to speak against in this poem, the selection is not based on skin color alone. Rose does not convey any ill feelings toward white poets (or white *people*) in general □only those who claim to be what they are not, only those who intrude on a culture and pretend it is their own. In Rose's mind, it is the Indian who has been insulted, and poems like this would not need to be written if the attack had not been launched in the first place.

Source: Pamela Steed Hill, Critical Essay on "For the White poets who would be Indian," in *Poetry for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #2

Hart, a former college professor, is a freelance writer and copyeditor. In this essay, she projects the theme of Rose's poem "For the White poets who would be Indian" onto the larger screen of ethno-poetics, the movement in poetry that inspired the writing of the poem.

The first impression a person might have after reading Wendy Rose's "For the White poets who would be Indian," might be that Rose has a dislike (or worse) for all white poets who write about Indians.

But this is not true. In an interview with Laura Coltelli (1985), Rose says that she has "no difficulty with people taking on an Indian persona and trying to imagine through their work what it would be like . . . to be a man or a woman in Indian society. Fine. As long as it's really clear that that's what it is□an act of imagination." What troubles Rose and what prompted her to write this poem are the people "who say that they have some special gift to be able to really see how Indians think, how Indians feel." It is a matter of integrity, says Rose.

Rose and fellow poet Geary Hobson have coined the phrase *white shamanism* to refer to the practice of white poets (as well as other cultural workers) who delve into Native American myths and native literary forms, taking the liberty to retranslate them according to their own literary styles (although they may have little or no knowledge of the culture or the language) and then claiming a profound understanding of the native culture to the point of claiming shamanistic or mystical powers. One such poet, Jerome Rothenberg (to whom Rose wrote the poem "Comment on Ethno-poetics and Literacy") is considered one of the organizers of the poetic movement called ethno-poetics. Understanding Rothenberg's philosophy as well as his reasons for organizing the ethno-poetics movement, gives the reader a better appreciation for the sentiments behind Rose's poem "For the White poets who would be Indian."

The ethno-poetics movement lasted from the late 1960s through 1980. Ethno-poetics, according to Peter O'Leary in a review of a book written by Nathaniel Tarn (another influential poet in the ethno-poetics movement), is described as follows:

[Ethno-poetics is] a brand of American surrealism that combined poetry with anthropology by incorporating the belief that the poet, either through vocal effects that echo those of the proto-poetic shaman, or verbal and visual effects that are the latter-day remnants of those vocal effects, can retrieve or restore something of sacred reality through his or her poetry.

Meredith James, in a book review for *World Literature Today,* states that "ethno-poetics uses literary techniques to capture the vitality, complexity, humor, and artistry of traditionally oral works." Ethno poets believe that old translations of Native American songs (poems) and myths are outdated. The old translations were done mostly by linguists, anthropologists, and missionaries who had no flare for poetics. "Ethno-

poetics," says James, "adds poetic devices such as rhyme, meter, and structure" to the older translations. If done carefully, James states, ethno-poetics could offer a more realistic representation of the native cultures and their literary forms.

Unfortunately, not all translations are done carefully. And in this context, James reinforces Rose's concern for lack of integrity on the part of the poet. James adds that when the translations are not careful, "ethno-poetics creates a text that misrepresents the content and meaning of the original work, so that the stories are not so much the subject but instead the tool of ethno-poetics, telling the reader more about the translator than about the story." In order to understand this better, there is a need to look a little deeper, first, into ethno-poetics; and then into what people within the Native culture are asking for in terms of integrity. In reference to the first step, this essay will take a closer look at Rothenberg's stated definitions of and aims for ethno-poetics.

In the fall of 1970, Rothenberg published the first issue of *Alcheringa,* a journal devoted to ethno-poetics. In that issue, he printed a "Statement of Intention." Three of the intentions of the journal were: 1) to offer a place "to provide a ground for experiments in the translation of tribal/oral poetry"; 2) "to assist the free development of ethnic self-awareness among young Indians"; 3) "to combat cultural genocide in all its manifestations." The first intention was easily provided by the publication of the journal. The second, however, seems a bit pretentious in that Rothenberg appears to be stating that it is through a re-interpretation of Native poetics (namely ethno-poetics) that the "young Indians" would develop their ethnic self-awareness. According to James, as stated above, careless translation actually provides a misrepresentation of the original work. So poor ethno-poetics could lead the "young Indians" in the wrong direction from what their own ancestors had intended. Also, according to James, the so-called translator of these ancient poems becomes the focus of attention, while the story (or poem) fades somewhat into the background. Rothenberg confirms this in his "Pre-Face to a Symposium on Ethno-poetics" by emphasizing the ethno poet's role as the shaman. The ethno poet "performs alone . . . because his presence is considered crucial . . . [he] is needed for the validation of a certain kind of experience important to the group . . . [his madness] flows out to whole companies of shamans, to whole societies of human beings: it heals the sickness of the body but more than that: the sickness of the soul."

But it is in reference to Rothenberg's ethno-poetics third intention that Rose might very well have written her lines: "to snap up the words / fish-hooked from / our tongues." In other words, Rothenberg is a hunter who is stealing the "tribal/oral poetry," then mutilating it, and offering it back to the youths of that tribe as a gift□an act that seems quite contrary to the stated third intention. Rothenberg says that these youths are the "remnants [of hunting and gathering peoples who] exist as an endangered [and] ultimately doomed 'fourth world.'" And it is toward the goal of stopping "cultural genocide," of stopping the ultimate doomsday of this "fourth world" that Rothenberg takes on the "performance role that resembles that of the shaman." Or in Rose's words: "with words / you paint your faces / chew your doeskin, touch breast to tree / as if sharing a mother / were all it takes / could bring instant and primal / knowledge." Rose is telling Rothenberg and all *white-shamans* that it takes more than claiming yourself to be a shaman, to become a shaman. Rose also claims that movements such as ethno-

poetics can displace, marginalize and even belittle Native Americans' own stories, resulting in (contrary to Rothenberg's intentions) cultural genocide.

"You think of us only / when your voices / want for roots / when you have sat back / on your heels and / become / primitive," continues Rose's poem. And Rothenberg confirms Rose's sentiments with his statement that the poet "who had once been seer" has become an outsider in his own culture. And because the poet has become the outsider, he is constantly in search of his "primitive roots" that he believes can be found only in "something vastly older like the 'nature-related cultures' " such as the cultures of the Native Americans. Rothenberg adds that he should have learned as much from his "own origins, from which [he] had been running for most of [his] grown life." Whether it was because he lost his own roots or failed to heed them, Rothenberg believes that by reaching back to the "primitive" he will heighten his "awareness of the present [and] the future." But what does this have to do with Native Americans? Is Rothenberg trying to save their culture? Trying to rescue it from eminent extinction? Or is he searching for something else?

In her article "The Great Pretenders, Further Reflections on White-shamanism," Rose offers the following thoughts: "We accept as given that whites have as much prerogative to write and speak about us and our cultures as we have to write and speak about them and theirs. The question is how this is done and, to some extent, why it is done." This brings up the question of integrity. Part of the definition of integrity is discussed in Christopher Ronwaniente Jocks' article "Spirituality for Sale." First Jocks summarizes the critiques of several Native American writers' opinions (including Wendy Rose's) concerning the adverse affects of carelessly re-translated Native American poetry and stories. There are the commercial adaptations and academic interpretations of American Indian knowledge and practice that is "often plainly inaccurate." Also, distortion often occurs when non-Native American authors try to interpret Native American concepts by using non-Native American definitions. This often occurs when non-Native American authors try to explain Native American religious concepts. An example of this is the concept of shaman, which is often associated with the Native American culture, but actually has its roots in northern European culture. Jocks continues that there are also "numerous examples of descriptions that distort by selecting only the most pleasing (read, 'marketable') elements of Native experience to 'reveal.' Typically, practices that seem to involve 'mystical' individual experiences are promoted, while other elements considered equally or more important by Native participants are ignored: elements such as kinship obligations, hard work, suffering, and the sometimes crazy realities of everyday reservation life."

Many non-Native American authors publish information for which they have not been granted permission. Much of this information is considered sacred by the Native American culture and there is a breach of ethics involved when that information is made public through "deeply offensive commercial enterprises." Jocks explains that these songs (or poems) are all parts of spiritual ceremonies and "a sacred practitioner is, by definition, a person integrated into the place and the community out of which she or he works . . . traditional American Indian ceremonial work is of a piece with traditional economic structures which, in turn, are based on reciprocal relationships within a

community." Rose's poem sums up these objections in the lines: "You think of us now / when you kneel / on the earth, / turn holy / in a temporary tourism / of our souls." Tourists come to a place from afar. They are not part of the community. What they take from that community will be designated a souvenir. What they pay for that souvenir will be in dollars. The souvenirs do not cost them anything of themselves. Jocks elaborates next on a definition of integrity □what is required of an author who reinterprets Native American stories. He states that "knowledge cannot be traded in some imagined neutral 'marketplace of ideas,' as if it were itself a neutral, disembodied object. . . . We simply need to demand that those who put forth their interpretive opinions in public form, printed and otherwise, stand up and tell their stories fully." He believes that an author cannot learn about what goes on in a Native American community without living in it for "a long time." It takes many years to understand the "the subtleties of perception, history and communication that inform it. In fact, one really needs not just to reside, but to reside as a relative," a vital part of the community. Jocks then lists what he believes are "a few bare suggestions" on how he perceives that one can judge the integrity of an author. First, there is reciprocation. If an author makes a living from information that he or she receives from a Native American community, there should be some kind of reciprocation made to that community. Second, authors need to "provide clear and comprehensive accounts of their relationships with the Indian communities they study." They should also be required to give to that community a full explanation of their motives. Mere curiosity or wanting to use the information to "test existing Amer-European essentialist theories" should not be considered valid reasons.

Although ethno-poetic intentions include an awareness of the challenges that face Native American communities, they do not state an intention that includes working with the community. More specifically, Rothenberg focuses on only the poetic form itself. He wants to explore and re-interpret the ancient poetry so as to hold it up against the "Amer- European" forms, and from that comparison, hopefully create a new poetry. "On the one hand," he writes, "the contemporary forms (the new means that we invent) make older forms visible: [and] on the other hand the forms that we uncover elsewhere help us in the reshaping, the resharpening, of our own tools." If this is an exchange, what is Rothenberg giving back to the community?

"Sharing of spiritual practices and knowledge can only rightly take place . . . in a discourse of mutual respect," says Jocks, "with the permission of both parties." Rose adds her thoughts by saying that this has already occurred many times before.

"Many non-Indian people have □from the stated perspective of the non-Native viewing things Native □ written honestly and eloquently about any number of Indian topics. . . . We readily acknowledge the beauty of some poetry by non-Natives dealing with Indian people, values, legends, or the relationship between human beings and the American environment. [But] a non-Native poet cannot produce an Indian perspective on Coyote or Hawk, cannot see Coyote or Hawk in an Indian way, and cannot produce a poem expressing Indian spirituality. What can be produced is another perspective, another view, another spiritual expression. The issue, as I said, is one of integrity and intent."

From her poem, Rose summarizes all these feelings of lack of integrity, suspect intent, and noninvolvement in the community when she writes: "You finish your poem and go back."

Source: Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on "For the White poets who would be Indian," in *Poetry for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #3

Ketteler has taught literature and composition and has studied Native American literature. In this essay, she discusses the ways in which Wendy Rose's poem "For the White poets who would be Indian" is a response to her white peers, who appropriate Native American culture for the sake of their art. It looks at the cultural context for such appropriation and the ways popular culture has responded to and stereotyped Indians for centuries.

In the poem, "For the White poets who would be Indians," Wendy Rose responds to white America's appropriation of Native American culture. Specifically, she is addressing white poets who want to take part of Native American culture and make it their own for the sake of art. As a woman with both European and Indian ancestry, Rose is caught between the white world and the Indian world, between English language and Native traditions. She struggles with her own identity even as she sees that identity "borrowed" by her white peers. In fact, identity conflict is woven throughout Rose's words, as her tone floats between resentment and anger.

"For the White poets who would be Indians" was first published in 1980 in Rose's collection of poems entitled *Lost Copper.* At that time, Native American literature, as an entity, was still fairly new, having only gained critical attention and academic standing a short ten years before. Of course, that is taking into account only a narrow definition of Native American literature, which includes an oral tradition of storytelling dating back thousands of years. At the time of Christopher Columbus' arrival in 1492, there were more than 300 different Indian cultures in North America, each with its own creation stories, histories, governments, social structures, and customs. Even to speak of Native American literature is somewhat of a misnomer. In fact, it is many traditions, many histories, and many different ways of communicating those histories.

To understand the underpinnings of Rose's angry and distrustful tone, it is important to revisit American history. The seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries were full of shameful genocidal practices toward Indians on the part of European settlers. Policies ranged from forced removal to reservations to systematic slaughter to broken treaties and outright lies. Children were forcefully removed from home and sent to boarding schools where they were punished if they were heard speaking their native languages. At the same time that Native Americans were encouraged to assimilate, they were cast as exotic objects, called noble savages or bloodthirsty warriors. It is a dirty history altogether, one that has shaped Native American literature throughout the centuries.

It was in the 1960s when the Native American civil rights movement came to power. Literature began to blossom, too, with the publication of N. Scott Momaday's novel *House Made of Dawn.* The 1960s were an important time for Wendy Rose as well. Born in Oakland, California, she dropped out of high school and mingled with the bohemian scene in San Francisco. In 1966, she went back to school, ultimately completing her Ph.D. in anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley.

She struggled with her identity as a mixed-blood person as well as with her identity as a scholar while at Berkeley. Rose, as quoted in the article, "The Nether World of Neither World: Hybridization in the Literature of Wendy Rose," by literary critic Karen Tongson-McCall, explains her struggles and her exclusion:

The fact is, the only department at Berkeley that would deal with my dissertation, which involves Indian literature, is the anthropology department. Comparative literature didn't want to deal with it; the English department didn't want to deal with it, in fact the English department told me that American Indian literature was not part of American literature and therefore did not fit into their department.

That frustration is very much alive in "For the White poets who would be Indians." By the time Rose wrote this poem, however, what had changed in the academic and literary world was that to "be" Indian was suddenly in vogue. In this way, white writers are trying to appropriate, or steal and make their own, Native American beliefs and traditions. The poem opens with a violent image of theft: "just once / just long enough / to snap up the words / fish-hooked from / our tongues." Like fishermen catching fish, white poets are in search of words, and they sink their hooks in deep to extract them. The poets Rose is addressing don't seek a holistic understanding of Native American culture and history; rather they want for the words of Indians; they want for the stories, for the traditions, for the language. They don't want the identity of Indian for permanent use, just long enough to claim an artistic connection, one that makes them appear more sensitive, more in tune with the earth. And in the end, of course, they can still keep their white skin and the privilege that goes along with it. The "fish hook" Rose speaks of is a stinging image, one rooted in a bitter and misunderstood history.

Scholar Vine Deloria Jr., member of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, as well as theologian, attorney, and political scientist, understands this identity- snatching phenomenon some Indian scholars have labeled "white shamanism." He recounts, in a tongue-in-cheek manner, his experiences working for the government:

During my three years as Executive Director of the National Congress of American Indians it was a rare day when some white didn't visit my office and proudly proclaim that he or she was of Indian descent. Cherokee was the most popular tribe of their choice and many placed the Cherokees anywhere from Maine to Washington State. . . . At times I became quite defensive about being a Sioux when these white people had a pedigree that was so much more respectable than mine. But eventually I came to understand their need to identify as partially Indian and did not resent them. I would confirm their wildest stories about their Indian ancestry and would add a few tales of my own hoping that they would be able to accept themselves someday and leave us alone.

Rose's poem echoes these exact sentiments. Her language is rich and forceful, calling to mind the tourist industry that has been built around Indians, presenting them in shallow and untruthful ways. "You think of us now / when you kneel / on the earth, / turn holy / in a temporary tourism / of our souls." Not only are white poets able to engage in this "tourism" of souls, white America has built an industry around it: selling cheap, unauthentic souvenirs in shops, taking advantage of limited economic resources of

Indians to hire them to dress up in Plains-type headdresses when they most likely belong to a tribe nowhere near the West with a completely different culture than Plains Indians' culture.

Popular culture appropriates Native American culture because there is money in it. White Americans get to "go native" by visiting an Indian reservation, buying some arrowheads, getting their picture taken with an Indian in costume, even if it resembles nothing of their traditional costume. It allows them to, as Rose says, "turn holy." And claiming Indian ancestry is just the icing on the cake.

Rose speaks of the way white poets mimic the traditional Native practices, engaging in rituals like kneeling on the earth. For these imitators, ritual is merely a commodity up for grabs, a thing with no inherent value. This is highly disrespectful and infuriating to Rose. Rose, if readers recall, has struggled with her own identity in the way she lives in two worlds. Her heart may lie with her Native American ancestry, her skin may be dark, but she writes in English for an audience of English-speakers. She is living, as the title of Karen Tongson- McCall's article suggests, in the "nether world." Rose writes about this experience herself in her introduction to *Bone Dance,* a collection of poems in which "For the White poets who would be Indian" appears. She says, "Without a Hopi mother, I am not even part of a clan. Learning all of this had a great deal to do with my writing of poetry. How can you hope to speak if you have no voice? Neither cast-offs, nor mongrels, nor assimilated sell outs, nor traditionalists, those who are like me are fulfilling in our way a certain level of existence." Therefore, not only are white poets stealing part of Rose's people's culture and identity, they are failing to understand the complexity of what they are stealing, the struggles that have shaped identities in flux, those voices from the nether world, over the past three hundred years.

"For the White poets who would be Indian" is full of images from nature, "primal" images. White poets are trying to use words to get "back to nature." "With words / you paint your faces / chew your doeskin / touch breast to tree." These writers try to adorn themselves with nature garb through their words. They practice "white shamanism" to call up spirits and write poetry about mother earth. "As if sharing a mother / were all it takes," Rose says. We can read this as an implicit critique of the way European-Americans have tended to treat the earth, as more of a dumping ground than a mother. Whereas most Native American religions posit people as the children of the earth, the caretakers of it for future generations, Christianity□and along with it, Western culture□posits people as the masters of the earth, the controllers of it. The "instant and primal knowledge" Rose refers to is that knowledge of the cycles of the earth; the "mother" she speaks of in the previous line is the earth. And while both whites and Indians share the earth, or share a mother, their relationship to that mother is completely different. For white poets to try to use words alone to reinvent a relationship to an earth-mother is preposterous from where Rose stands.

Also implicit in Rose's response to those white poets who would be Indians is the enduring image of Indians as savages, as primitive. "You think of us only / when your voices / want for roots, / when you have sat back / on your heels and / become / primitive." White American culture has repudiated the savage, casting it as the "other."

At the same time, labeling Indians as savages has been the justification in the imagination of white America for the savage acts against Indians. This system of ideas is the same one used to justify slavery. If white Americans who owned slaves could cast them as the "other," as something not even human, but as property, then buying and selling them could be justified. What's different about Native Americans, however, is the romance of the West, the idea of the noble savage, the silent warrior. White poets' desire to become "primitive," then, is a shallow one, rooted only in stereotypes, mostly of Plains Indians, who represented the last American frontier.

It is perhaps the last two lines of the poem that best uncover the true posturing of the white poets. "You finish your poem / and go back." This completes the image of the "temporary tourism" of souls that Rose speaks about earlier. Because the white poets are in fact white, they can always go back. They don't live inside Indian skin from day to day or inhabit the margins of a society, desperate to find a voice. They are not silenced or cast as others because they are part of the dominant culture. *They can always go back,* and this is key for Rose. They try on a mask, take what the want, and return to the security of their whiteness□echoing the pattern of American history and Native Americans' vexed place within it.

Source: Judi Ketteler, Critical Essay on "For the White poets who would be Indian," in *Poetry for Students,* The Gale Group, 2001.

Critical Essay #4

In the following interview excerpt, Rose clarifies her intent in "For the White poets who would be Indian."

In his preface to your collected poems □Lost Copper□ N. Scott Momaday said that it was a book, "not made up of poems, I think, but of songs." Would you agree with that distinction of Momaday's?

In a subjective sense, yes. I don't think that the poems are literally songs the way that we usually understand the term. But I use them the way that many Indian people traditionally use songs. They, in a sense, mark the boundaries of my life.

So that would be one of the differences between your poetry and traditional English verse.

Yeah, I think so. My perception of them. The way that they function in my life.

Is there any other way in which they're song?

I think oftentimes that audiences feel them that way. People sometimes call them songs when they talk about them but, I don't know, I couldn't speak for what it is they are perceiving. I couldn't really put words in their mouths to try to clarify what they mean, but people call them songs and maybe they're feeling the internal parts of it the way that they have meaning for me.

In that same introduction Momaday also spoke of your language, saying, "it has made a clear reflection of American Indian oral tradition." Do you perceive a relationship between your writing and that oral tradition?

I would like to but I would have to say probably not too much. I think that there are some important differences, and I think that my particular work probably leans more toward European-derived ideas of what poetry is and of who poets are than Native American in spite of the subjective feeling that I have of the way that the poems are used in my life. There are some important differences, one of which is the sense of self-expression. The need to express the self, the need to make one's own emotions special and to explain it to other people, I don't think really exists in most Native American cultures. And I think that is an important component in my work.

Are there any other distinctions that you'd see or any other things that you would use as definitions of the American Indian interpretation as opposed to the Western interpretation of the use of song or poetry?

One way that I think perhaps they do function, and I hope it doesn't sound like I'm contradicting myself too much, is that gradually the various Native American communities are re-establishing links with people using oral tradition. And sometimes this extends even to those of us who use the printed word and who publish. So in recent

years I'm finding that the poet is right there with the orators and is speaking in council. I'm finding more and more that, when there are gatherings of Indian people, there will be poets who will contribute to what's happening. This was lost for awhile because of the effect of the white man's education in that for a while Indian people were discounting the contribution that poets were making in the same way that the white man discounts the contributions of his own poets. But increasingly I think that contemporary poets in Native American communities are coming to be valued in a traditional sense even though the work itself might be different.

What are the roots of your poetry? How did you personally become a writer and then a writer who identifies so strongly with your Native American roots?

That's a complex question. Influences as far as poetry are concerned□they're just so multiple. Perhaps the earliest one that I remember is Robinson Jeffers, who of course was not an Indian poet. But some of the first published poetry I was ever exposed to was his and that was important to me, and I think it was my first sense of being able to think in terms of putting a poet in a landscape that's familiar, because the area that he was writing about was where I grew up□the northern California and central California coast. That was an early influence. Other influences that were fairly early□I figured out that it was okay to be an Indian and a writer at the same time probably, as many of us did, through the influence of Scott Momaday. His getting a Pulitzer prize in fiction made a real difference to us because I think so many of us had assumed that no matter what our individual goals might be, we had to somehow choose between fulfilling the goal and having any degree of integrity as Indian people. Whatever influences there are from Native American culture□I'm being fairly careful not to cite tribe here because I was born and grew up at a distance from my tribe, so I'm trying to deliberately separate myself from saying Hopi literature or Miwok literature□my community is urban Indian and is *pan* tribal. But whatever Native American traditional influences that might be in my work, I don't know if I can pick them out individually. I missed out on a great deal by not being exposed to tribal traditions as a child. In the city I was exposed on the one hand to a great many traditions and on the other hand to nothing that was really complete. I don't know. Perhaps that's an unanswerable question. I know that there was also this: in terms of identifying as an Indian writer, that was partly and perhaps mostly a function of how literature is published and distributed in this country □which is that in this particular instance if you are of a minority group and you are a writer, you are simply not allowed to do anything other than be a minority writer.

I think this would be a good place to ask you this question. In your poem "Builder Kachina," you have these lines "a half breed goes from one-half to the other." And of course The Halfbreed Chronicles *is the name of the collection you just read that first poem from. That word "halfbreed*

seems to be very important to you. What is it? What does that mean?

Well, again, I have to answer on at least two different levels. One is the obvious thing of being biologically halfbreed, being of mixed race. I was in a situation where I was physically separated from one-half of my family and rejected by the half that brought me

up. And in this case it was because of what there is in me that belonged to the other half. The way that a lot of us put it is you're too dark to be white and you're too white to be Indian. James Welch expressed it well in *The Death of Jim Loney* where Jim Loney answers someone who says to him (to paraphrase), "oh, you're so lucky that you can have the best of both worlds and choose whether or not at a given moment you will be Indian or you will be white." And he says, "it's not that we have the best of both worlds, it's that we don't really have anything of either one." I think that's really a very true statement. You don't get to pick and choose but rather you're in a position where you have no choice whatsoever. I was in that situation where the white part of my family had absolutely no use for any other races that came into the family. The white part of the family had no use for it. The Indian half is in a situation where, among the Hopi, the clan and your identity comes through the mother, and without the Hopi mother it doesn't matter if your father was full-blooded or not, you can't be Hopi. So that left me in that situation. The first years of writing, perhaps, the motivation from the very beginning was to try to come to terms with being in that impossible situation. But then maturing as a person, halfbreed takes on a different connotation and that's where *The Halfbreed Chronicles* are coming from. Now *The Halfbreed Chronicles* depict a number of people, and genetics doesn't have a great deal to do with it. For instance, the poem "Georgeline" is relating to people who are a full-blood Lakota family. There are other people who are depicted in *Halfbreed Chronicles* who would not be identified as halfbreed. People who are Japanese-American. People who are Mexican-Indian but spent their lives as sideshow freaks. People like Robert Oppenheimer. You don't think of these people in the same sense as you usually think of halfbreeds. But my point is that, in an important way, the way that I grew up is symptomatic of something much larger than Indian-white relations. History and circumstances have made halfbreeds of all of us.

Then maybe you wouldn't be offended by my bringing in something I just thought of . . . a quotation from Matthew Arnold. He described himself back in the Victorian era "one half dead, the other powerless to be born." There seems to be, as you see it, a world dilemma not just of people of mixed Indian and white ancestry but of the modern culture that we find ourselves faced with.

Yeah, and I think that the point does come out in *The Halfbreed Chronicles* because one of the responses that I get is from people who are genetically all Caucasian, or all black, or all Indian; people who are genetically not of mixed race come up to me afterwards and say I know just what you mean by those poems. I feel like a halfbreed, too. So I know the message is getting through. We are now halfbreeds. We're Reagan's halfbreeds and Dukmejian's halfbreeds.

I find it interesting, too, that that poem, which I cited a quotation from, is called "Builder Kachina" and there is no Builder Kachina as I understand it.

No there isn't.

But you have imagined a Builder Kachina?

In a sense, yes, but based on things that my father really said to me. The poem is based on an actual conversation that I had with my biological father, which is the Hopi side of the family. And the conversation was basically my going down to the reservation and sitting down and talking to him and presenting the situation to him at a point where I was in crisis over it and saying what can I do because I can't be a member of a clan, because I can't have your clan? You're my father not my mother, I'm not entitled to any land or any rights or any privileges on the reservation. Yet, at the same time, my mother's family doesn't accept me, never has, probably never will, because of the fact that you are my father. So what do I do? His answer to me was, "Well, sometimes it's difficult, sometimes people don't point out to you what your roots are but your roots are on this land, and you just have to stand here yourself on this Hopi land and build them," and from that came the imagined person of Builder Kachina. I've invented lots of Kachinas. I hope that it's not thought of as being too sacrilegious. But I've invented Kachinas that go into outer space. I've invented Kachinas that are in the ocean and a lot that have appeared in the visual arts. This particular one appeared in poetry.

Yes, the Kachinas are something I find occurring again and again in your writing. What are the Kachinas to you? How would you define them. I know there's a definition on strictly a tribal level . . .

Well, there's no real agreement even on that definition because they aren't any one thing. They're not strictly nature spirits and they're not strictly gods. They're not strictly ancestral spirits and yet they're all of that. They are spirit beings who grow and evolve and have families and live and possibly die. Humans have to communicate with them and have to relate to them. One way that they can be thought of is if you think of the entire earth as being one being and we as small beings living on that large being like fleas on a cat. The Kachinas in a sense are aspects of that cat that are communicating with us. This is one way to look at it.

I see then in your "Builder Kachina" a sort of balance emerging out of that duality and chaos caused by the conflict between two forces which seem to be mutually exclusive. The two worlds of the European Indian. The two worlds of the two parents that you describe in your own life.

Well, of course, one thing also is that the Hopis say that the Europeans being on this continent is something that isn't all that important in the long run, that eventually the continent will be purified. The evil parts of that influence will be gone, and things will eventually return as they were and the cycle will continue. This is really only a small thing that we inflate with our own self-importance into meaning more than it does. For those of us who are in my position, I don't know whether I'm supposed to be saved with the Hopi or wiped away with the whites.

Thinking of evils, I've seen several particular evils singled out numerous times in your writings. Let me give you some examples the California missions, the attitude of anthropology toward Indian people in general, cities and the concept of modern cities. Why do you choose those particular targets?

I don't see cities as evil first off. I don't think there should ever be more than, at most, a couple of thousand people living in one unit. I think beyond that it's impossible to be governed with any sense of integrity when you don't recognize each other and have no obligation to each other. But in any case I don't see cities as evil per se. They're evil for me. I'm not able to adapt to living in cities even though I've tried. I become intensely uncomfortable in cities and I see cities destroy people that I love. As for the other things, the California missions, of course, were not a spiritual endeavor; they were an economic endeavor. They had more to do with the conquest of a new bunch of natural resources by the Spanish crown than they did with the saving of souls. The point behind incarcerating Indian people there was to have a cheap labor force, a slave force if you will, to make blankets and to make pots and pans and various kinds of things for the Spanish settlers, for the colonist. Also to have everybody in one place so there wouldn't be any Indian people to stop settlement and there wouldn't be any Indian people out there able to act on their own. So they were incarcerated. Reduced is the actual Spanish term, the *reducciones.* It killed off some incredible number, something like during just ten years alone, in the early nineteenth century, the California Indian population was reduced by some incredibly high number like 80 percent. It was because of a combination of disease, of unnatural living conditions, and the punishment for running away. What a lot of people don't realize is there were a number of revolts against the Spanish mission by the Indians. But they don't tell you this in the museums. In fact, the museum right here in Oakland paints a ridiculous picture of the missions with the happy little natives making baskets in the shade of the adobe with the benevolent padres walking around rattling their rosaries. That just is not the way that the missions were.

And then there is the attitude of anthropology toward the Indian people. It seems linked to what we were just talking about with the missions.

In fact there's a saying that□I've heard versions of this saying from people from Africa, from Australia, from New Zealand, various American Indian people□first comes the explorer, then comes the military, then comes the missionary, then comes the anthropologist, then comes the tourist. Actually, though, as you know, in one sense it's ironic that I should be so highly critical of the field since at the moment I am teaching lower division anthropology at a junior college. However, I'm teaching it in an unorthodox way, and I hope I don't get in too much trouble for it. But, yeah, anthropologists have certainly been one of the main targets of some of my anger, probably stemming from my intimate association with them as a Ph.D. student in anthropology at Berkeley which contains both the best and the worst. I've run into some incredible racism in that department and, as faculty now, I see my Indian students running into situations that are even more bizarre than things I had experienced because it's becoming increasingly okay among the general population to become racist again or to express the racism that was always there. It's no longer cool to try to be tolerant or understanding or liberal or even to recognize that America is a plural country. There are a number of anthropologists, however, who are very, very good people and are sensitive to these issues. Unfortunately, I think they are still in a minority probably because anthropology is part of a European-derived institution run by the white male power structure. So Indian people along with many other kinds of people□women, gay

people, people from fourth world nations and from third world nations—all of these people are coming into anthropology now and changing the face of it. But it's very slow because that old guard of course is still there. A lot of Indian people are going into anthropology just to become super informants and don't realize it.

In part two of Lost Copper *there are some poems that were originally published as a chapbook under the title* Academic Squaw: Reports to the World From the Ivory Tower. *I'm always interested in titles. What did you intend by it?*

Well, obviously, it was intended as ironic. The publisher inadvertently left off a postscript that was supposed to be on the title page. I think in *Lost Copper* they did put the postscript in. In the chapbook it originally appeared in, it was inadvertently left off. It explained how the term "squaw" is used in a purely ironic sense. That was really an important thing for two reasons. One is because "squaw" is an offensive term, regardless of its origin. It is now and has been for many, many years an offensive term much like "nigger" or "spic" and has been degrading not only in a racist way but in sexual ways as well. Because the image of the so-called "squaw" is a racist and a sexist image. So, on the one hand, people who are aware of that might otherwise think that I was using it without any kind of clarification, that it was just as if it were part of my vocabulary. As if I really saw myself that way. And people who don't know any better might assume the same thing not realizing there's anything special about the word. I have run into people who simply think that that is a word for Indian women. Just like they think that "papoose" is a word for Indian children and so forth.

Or "pickaninny" is a word for a black child.

Yeah. I know a man who thought that Jewish men really were called Jewboys and would call people that to their faces in total innocence because that's the only way he had ever heard Jewish men referred to. Things like this. So there is an innocence there in one sense but there's also a maliciousness.

I meant the title, of course, in a completely ironic sense and the poems were written in that context because I had just spent two years as an undergraduate at the University of California at Berkeley in anthropology and had just, in fact, by the time the book came out entered graduate school as a Ph.D. student. So the book encompasses experiences at both the graduate and undergraduate level as an anthropology major. And, as I was saying, there were some racist things that happened. There were a lot of things that happened that I had to come to terms with. There were many times when I almost dropped out. I spent the entire first year at Berkeley, in my junior year as a transfer student from a junior college, huddling in a corner in Native American Studies drinking tea and trembling. This is all coming from somebody who was raised in a relatively urban area right next to the university all her life, so I can't imagine what it must be like coming from a reservation, from someplace that's very different from Berkeley. The poems were written as a survival kit, really. And in fact one of the most pleasant things I have ever done was the day that the book came out from Brother Benet's press, I went and stuck copies of it in all my professors' mailboxes.

Why have you chosen to enter that Ivory Tower world? That world of the academic?

I'm not in the Ivory Tower. I'm a spy.

Okay, good. You say also in the poem "Handprints," "in this university I am a red ghost."

I'm a spy.

A spy. Great.

Don't blow my cover.

Oh, no. No, we'll never tell. (laughter) Let me move on to another area, Wendy. How has your art affected your writing? You now have a reputation both as an illustrator and as a writer. In fact, in some of your poems you speak directly of that world of art in rather magical terms. Sometimes you even speak as a mother speaks of her children. I'm thinking of the poem "Chasing the Paper Shaman," or the poem "Watercolors." How has your art affected your writing and how do they work together?

I can't imagine them really working apart. Nobody bothered to tell me until I was an adult that there was anything wrong with being both a visual and a verbal artist. I think that's the only reason why that isn't the case with more people, and I think that's the reason why it is the case for so many Native American people. Look at the number of Native American authors who illustrate their own work and who illustrate other people's work. There is a tremendous number. There is nothing unusual about it among Native American people at all. There's a tremendous percentage of writers who do so in contrast to the non-Indian writers, where it's very seldom the same person who does both. But the way I think of it□ now I don't really know where the poems or where the art comes from, I don't know where the images come from□but however they come or wherever they come from is like communicating with a person. It's a whole person. That person shows you things and has a certain appearance but also tells you things. So as you receive images, they are either received through the ear or through the eye or through the tongue and that's just the way it feels.

Another thing that I find different about your work and also that of a number of American Indian writers (as compared to the typical writer of the traditional English mold) is your attitude toward death. Death seems to be very important in your work. Why is that so?

I don't know. I never really thought of it as being important to the work. I guess if I really think about it, yeah, I've got a lot of bones rattling around in there. I guess there's a sense of feeling□sometimes I feel like I'm dead. Like I'm a ghost. Similarly, sometimes I feel that I'm alive but there are ghosts all around me, so that's part of it. But as far as the symbols go, of things like the bones for instance, I think maybe it's argument against death. Maybe what I'm saying is that the bones are alive. They're not dead remnants but rather they're alive.

You have these images of returning to the earth and images of bones. These don't strike me as morbid images, as they would be in, say, a poem written in the eighteenth century in England.

Well, you know, the rocks are alive and all the components of a tree, for instance, live. A pine cone falls down from the tree and it's alive. It carries the life of the tree in the seeds that are in the pine cone. And I think the parts of the body must be the same way. The brain isn't all there is to human life. The consciousness that's inside the skull is not all there is.

There is a poem of yours in What Happened When the Hopi Hit New York *"Cemetery, Stratford, Connecticut" with these lines: "I know that what ages earth has little to do with things we build to wrinkle her skin and fade her eyes." You also say "I have balanced my bones between the petroglyph and the mobile home." These different things, balanced in some way, seem bound to lead in a different direction than just finality.*

Well, that's really what we are, isn't it? We're bones that are just covered with flesh and muscle. The part of us that is spirit is just a component that is part of that entirety. We are parts of the earth that walk around and have individual consciousness for awhile and then go back.

I could see someone looking at your poems and saying these are evidences of bitterness, of hopelessness, of a very dark perception of life.

That's what a lot of white people see in them. Indian people almost never do.

As a matter of fact, I'm playing the devil's advocate because I think there is a question we may have to address. What do you think American- Indian poems have to offer to non-Indians? Are there problems of perception like this which may make them inaccessible to the non-Indian reader?

I don't know. I want to say no, they're not inaccessible because it's a great frustration when people won't review our work, for example, in the usual professional way, saying that they don't have "the ethnographic knowledge" to do it or something. That's a frustration to me because some of us□people like Joy Harjo or any number of other people that actually have M.F.A.s from prestigious writing schools□come out and then find that they're being told that they're culturally too obscure to be reviewed as a real writer. That isn't true. I think that a person does need to stretch the imagination a little bit, perhaps, or to learn something about Native American cultures or Native American thought systems or religion, or philosophy. Just a little bit. But I don't think any more so than you need to become a Kabbalistic scholar in order to understand Jerry Rothenberg. This is a plural society and all of us have to work at it a little bit to get the full flavor of the society. I have to. Boy, do I have to work at trying to understand the Shakespearean stuff! I have students in my creative writing classes who are into Shakespeare and write tight verse and rhyme and do it very, very well. They're not doing it unsuccessfully, but I have to really work to understand where they're coming

from. Just simply that what they're expressing is a dominant cultural mode in this particular country is not sufficient reason to say that that is the only way it should be. If I have to work at understanding that stuff, then I don't see why they shouldn't work a little bit to understand mine.

Hasn't it often been the other way? Literary critics have celebrated the greatness of someone like James Joyce because Finnegan's Wake *and his other books are so complicated.*

If they think the complication is individual rather than cultural, then they really love it, sure. *Good point.* But if they think it's cultural then they think that we're insulting them somehow by expecting them to understand it. That we're asking them to go out of their way. And of course, really, we're not asking any more of them than they ask of us when we pick up books in this society and read them.

What images, aside from those I've already mentioned, seem to be recurrent in your poetry?

I think I have a lot of female images. A lot of times I think that just talking about rocks or trees or spirits, where there's no real reason to put a gender on them, I automatically tend to make them female. I think that's something I've noticed more recently. Themes? I've been writing a little bit of science fiction poetry lately about colonizing other planets. But of course it's not from the colonizing viewpoint, it's from the viewpoint of the people on the planet. But that's sort of off the wall. I don't know, it's pretty hard to see the themes in your own work. I'm always amazed at what other people see in them. At first I don't believe them, and then I go back and I read it again and I realize they were right. Sometimes.

Which of your already published poems express most clearly for you what you want to say as a writer?

As a writer? Oh, boy! Of the published poems? I don't know. I guess the things that are most current in my mind or the things that I most want to say are what I've said most recently, which usually isn't published at that time. I guess what I want to say is bound up in *The Halfbreed Chronicles,* and as of now few of them have been published. One of the major focal points in *The Halfbreed Chronicles* section was published in *Ms. Magazine* in the June 1984 issue. That's kind of exciting to me to finally get a "pop" readership.

Is this the one about the woman who was . . .

The woman in the circus, about Julia Pastrana, yeah. They're publishing that one.

That's a particularly powerful poem, to me, for any number of reasons. I heard you read it about a year ago and was very moved by it.

Well, it's about a Mexican Indian woman who was born physically deformed. Her face was physically deformed to where her bone structure resembled the caricature of

Neanderthal man that you sometimes see in museums. She had hair growing from all over her body including her face. So she was Neanderthal looking and hairy in visual appearance, but she was also a graceful dancer and a singer in the mid-nineteenth century. She was a very young woman. She was billed as the World's Ugliest Woman and put on exhibit, where she would sing for the sideshow. The poem is not just about the exploitation of her being in the circus but is like a step beyond that. It's an ultimate exploitation. Her manager married her and it was, presumably, in order to control her life in the circus. She believed that he loved her, though, and really, what choice did she have emotionally? When she finally had a baby, the baby looked just like her. The baby had all the same deformities, but also had a lethal deformity of some kind and died just shortly after birth. Then she died a day or two after that. And her husband—and here's where the real *Halfbreed Chronicles* come in—her husband had her and the baby stuffed and mounted in a wood and glass case and continued to exhibit them in the circus even though she couldn't sing anymore. There was just something about the horror of that which in *The Halfbreed Chronicles* is coupled with the poem called "Truganinny" about an Aborigine woman who happened to be the last living Tasmanian native.

Truganinny went through a similar situation. She had seen her husband stuffed and mounted by the British museum people as the last Tasmanian man. She asked her aboriginal friends to please make sure that when she died that didn't happen to her. She wanted to be buried way out someplace where they couldn't find her body or just be thrown into the sea or something. And they tried but they were caught, and so she was actually stuffed and put in a museum too. Just like her husband, as the last specimen of a Tasmanian human being. The two of them together, Julia and Truganinny, represent the ultimate colonization. They're not side by side in *The Halfbreed Chronicles.* They're separated slightly by a couple of other poems. But they're intended as a pair in a sense because of the similar fate and because the circus treatment of the so-called freaks is another kind of colonization. Then too, what is it that happens to the colonized if not being made into a sideshow? So that's basically the point behind the Julia Pastrana poem and also the Truganinny poem. We are all in that situation. We are all on display that way.

There seems to be a growing consciousness on the part of American Indian women, both as writers and as people speaking up. In the postscript poem in Lost Copper *you say "Silko and Allen and Harjo and me our teeth are hard from the rocks we eat." What do you have in common and why choose those particular women?*

This will sound sort of funny, I guess, but I could have gone on and named many, many more Indian women writers. I chose those particular ones because I felt that they were fairly well known, that a reader who has been reading very much contemporary Indian literature will immediately recognize the names. I feel that they have all made strong statements about being Indian writers, both in their creative work and peripheral statements in interviews or in articles that they have written. The actual fact of the matter is that I stopped after naming just those ones because that was the meter of the poem. (laughter) What I intend there is to go on with the list—and Hogan and north- Sun and Burns and Tapahonso and so on and so on. They're in there.

What is exciting about their work for you?

I know that when I read their work it makes chills go up and down my spine in a way that really most other people's work doesn't. It's not just Indian women's work, but work by minority American writers, by writers of color in general. It very often has that effect on me. When I read work that does have that effect on me, it is usually by such a writer. I tend to be terribly bored by the writing of white academic poets. Hopelessly bored. I really don't care how many sex fantasies they had watching a bird on a fence. If you'll pardon the phrase, I think in academia, in English departments, that the writers are just masturbating.

Of course there are also the writers who are putting on headdresses.

Yes. Yeah. There are those, but even they are not generally in the academic situation. Even they are a little too peripheral for academe.

Um. Those white poets who would be Indian as you title that one poem of yours.

Yeah. And of course that needs some clarification too because it's widely misunderstood□the whole thing about the "white shaman" controversy that Geary Hobson and Leslie Silko have addressed themselves to, that I have addressed myself to. It's widely misunderstood. It's assumed that what we're saying is that we don't want non-Indian people to write about Indians. That's not it. Many non-Indian people have written beautifully and sensitively about Indian people. Even in persona. The difference is that there are those who come out and say that they are Indian when they are not, in the case of some. There are those who come out and do not claim to be genetically Indian, but who do claim that what they write is somehow more Indian, or more legitimately Indian, than what real Indian people are writing. There are these people who claim to be what they're not. They claim to be shamans and it's impossible to be a self-declared shaman. Your community has to recognize you. And we know that the word is Siberian but we also know what is meant by it in popular usage. Yeah, it's directed toward these people and it's a matter not of subject matter but of integrity in the way in which the subject matter is approached.

You've been editor of The American Indian Quarterly, *taught Native American Literature, worked on a major bibliography of Native American writing. What do you see happening with American Indian writing today?*

Well, I think that there is a small nucleus of people who are primarily associated with the Modern Language Association who are acknowledging that it is a legitimate field of study. People like Karl Kroeber and LaVonne Ruoff and Andrew Wiget, Larry Evers. There's a whole crew there. These are people who have been interested in it all along. But through their influence and the influence of Indian writers who have become involved in that end of the writing business, the scholarship end of it, it's becoming better accepted in academe. But it's very slow as in the fact, for example, in the University where I taught (Berkeley), we were just recently told by the English Department that they would not hire people to teach anything about American Indian

literature "because it's not part of American Literature." So, it's very slow. But it's gradually happening because of people like the scholars that I named . . . although it took a long time even to get to where Indian people could go speak for themselves, where Indian writers could go deal with their own work even in the Modern Language Association because the tradition for so many years was that the white scholars would sit around and talk about the work without having the writers there to deal with it themselves. That's changing.

You feel then that the current small popularity of American Indian contemporary writing is more than just a fad? That its message is large enough to go beyond this moment?

The message is large enough to go beyond the moment□whether anyone is listening or not, I'm not sure. I think that the way that a lot of us started, particularly those that are around my age in their thirties and forties, was on the basis of a fad. We were brought into it, many of us, before we were mature enough as writers, really, to do it. We were brought into anthologies and so forth, and our work was exposed to critical masses, so to speak. But I think that maybe if we work hard enough at it that we will somehow be able to make sure that it is incorporated into general American literature. And here I'm not just talking about Native American, I'm talking about Afro-American, I'm talking about Asian-American, I'm talking about Chicano and Puerto Rican, Indo-chinese. All of the various cultural elements have their literature that becomes modified and yet retains its cultural integrity as they come into America. Or as they leave the reservations and go into the cities that are in America. I think this is going to happen, whether anyone is out there listening or not, it's going to happen. And I know that the Indian communities respect their writers more now and that's the part that's really important to me. I would much rather be respected by the Indian community through my writing than to have my books reviewed in the *New York Times.* I really would.

Last question. What would you say to young American Indian writers now in the way of advice?

Like that old civil rights song says, don't let nobody turn you 'round. Although they probably never heard the song. (laughter)

Source: Joseph Bruchac, "The Bones Are Alive," in *Survival This Way: Interviews with American Indian Poets,* University of Arizona Press, 1987, pp. 252-69.

Adaptations

There do not appear to be any specific Rose recordings on tape or online, either of her reading poetry or being interviewed. However, there are many web sites that include her biography and her poems, and they can be reached by doing a general search under her name.

Topics for Further Study

Write an essay in response to Wendy Rose's concept of "white shamanism," keeping in mind her own explanation of it rather than the ways in which it has been misinterpreted.

Wounded Knee, South Dakota, has been the center of attention for Indian-U.S. government relations on two major occasions. Research the events that took place there in both 1890 and 1973 and write an essay describing what happened.

Explain how the title "For the White poets who would be Indian" makes you feel and what you would think the poem was about if the name were all you were given.

Write a poem called "For the _____ poets who would be _____," substituting any groups of people or things into the blanks.

Compare and Contrast

1969: Indians from various tribes set up an occupation of Alcatraz Island in an attempt to establish a cultural center, museum, and community for any Native American who wants to live there. The occupation lasts until 1971 when FBI agents and federal marshals forcibly remove the Indians who remained after two years of fighting with the U.S. government.

1973: Members of the American Indian Movement (AIM) lead 200 Sioux Indians in a seventy- one-day takeover of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, to demand a review of at least 300 treaties with the U.S. government.

1989: In Browning, Montana, the Blackfoot tribe win a dispute with the Smithsonian Institution when the museum has to return the remains of sixteen of their ancestors for burial on native soil.

1990: Leaders from the United States and the Soviet Union say no to a proposal by environmentalists at the Geneva Convention to burn less oil to avert global warming. The United States accounts for 24 percent of the world's carbon dioxide emissions.

1992: Columbus Day of this year marks the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' first voyage to America. There are both celebrations and condemnations, as some Americans praise the explorer and others vilify him.

What Do I Read Next?

Although published nearly forty years ago in 1963, *Book of the Hopi,* by Frank Waters and Oswald "White Bear" Fredericks, is still one of the most interesting and insightful books on this fascinating culture. It covers the complete Hopi history, including the origin of the clans, the four migrations, and common ceremonies, among many other aspects.

In the early 1990s, editor Patricia Riley put together a provocative collection of twenty-two essays by Indian writers, called *Growing Up Native American* (1995). This book is excellent for introducing readers to Indian history, literature, culture, and Native American authors. While it does address the tragedy and hardship that many of the writers experienced, it is also full of funny stories, jokes, and recollections of mischievous pranks.

As part Hopi, Wendy Rose has always been fascinated with learning more about her heritage, anand she has had to face the challenges of the intrusion of other people on it. Frederick Dockstader's *The Kachina and the White Man: The Influence of White Culture on the Hopi Kachina Cult* was first published in 1954 when Rose was a child and presents good insight into how the pressure of white culture affected the Hopi lifestyle, with particular attention to religious changes.

One of the most sensitive and revealing firsthand accounts of a spiritual Indian leader is *Black Elk Speaks: Being the Life Story of a Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux* (1932), with a preface by John Gneisenau Neihardt. The narratives of this visionary Native American who lived from 1863 to 1950 describe the terror, anger, and confusion that afflicted his people as they struggled to survive the invasions on their homeland. It was first published in 1932 and is just as enlightening today as it was seventy years ago.

Further Study

Brown, Dee, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee,* Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1970.

When this fully documented account of the destruction of Indians in the American West first appeared in the early 1970s, it was met with both shock and shame by the general public. It begins with the "Long Walk" of the Navajos in 1860 and ends thirty years later with the massacre of Indian men, women, and children at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Reading this book provides insight into the basis of long-held Indian anger toward and mistrust of white society.

Coltelli, Laura, *Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak,* University of Nebraska Press, 1990.

This book is presented in interview format and includes a photograph of each American Indian author. It includes Wendy Rose, Paula Gunn Allen, N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, and others.

Rose, Wendy, *Hopi Roadrunner Dancing,* Greenfield Review Press, 1973.

This is Rose's first published collection of poems. It includes many of her early works, which she wrote during her years in San Francisco and in college, including several poems about the occupation of Alcatraz Island by Indians seeking to create a new community among tribes.

□□□, *What Happened when the Hopi Hit New York,* Contact II Publications, 1982.

This "middle" collection by Rose contains poems that reflect mainly on travel and that were inspired by various archaeological sites. One recognizable difference in this book is the number of humorous or light-hearted poems as opposed to Rose's typical expressions of conflict and anger.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Poetry for Students (PfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, PfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of PfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of PfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in PfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by PfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

PfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Poetry for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the PfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Poetry for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Poetry for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from PfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from PfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Poetry for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Poetry for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of PfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Poetry for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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