

⁸A. Grove Day. *The Sky Clears: Poetry of the American Indians*. (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1964) 108. "The Osage rituals include a group of 'Black Bear' songs which relate to the myth about how the soil of the earth was given to the people by the black bear as a sign of vigil when they appealed to the divine power for aid in overcoming their enemies. "This act of the bear in disclosing the sacred soil is a sacred and mysterious act; therefore, he who is to open the earth in order to take from it with his hands the soil to be used in this vigil must simulate in detail the actions of the bear.' The soil is used to blacken the face for the later rites." A. Grove Day, 108.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Dennis Tedlock and Barbara Tedlock, eds. *Teachings From The American Earth: Indian Religion and Philosophy* (New York: Liveright, 1975) 15. "In the darkened [Inuit] house one hears only sighing and groaning from the dead who lived generations earlier. This sighing and puffing sounds as if the spirits were down under water, in the sea, as marine animals, and in between all the noises one hears the blowing and splashing of creatures coming up to breathe. . . . [the above song] must be constantly repeated; it is only to be sung by the oldest member of the tribe. . . ."

¹¹John Bierhorst, ed. *In The Trail of the Wind: American Indian Poems and Ritual Orations*. (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1971) 19. This narrative was translated from the Navajo by Washington Matthews. 178-179.

¹²Stan Steiner. *The New Indians*. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968) 17.

¹³D. Taylor. *Project NOW* (Fairbanks: Students of Project NOW, 1975) 2.

¹⁴Dolly Bird. "Can I Say." *Akwesasne Notes*. Vol. 4, No. 3 (Late Spring, 1972) 48.

¹⁵Corey McQueen. "Original American Blues." (from her book, *American Indian Blues*) *Akwesasne Notes*. Vol. 4, No. 4 (Summer, 1972) 48.

¹⁶Stan Steiner. *The New Indians*. (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1968) 14.

Critique

The author of "Change in American Indian World Views . . ." is not only a teacher and student of poetry, but is also a poet who writes about his heritage. It is appropriate that he chose to compare traditional songs and the contemporary pleas of American Indians. A poet can be and is described as "one who is especially gifted in the perception and expression of the beautiful or lyrical." Poetry is the art or work of a poet. If we follow these views of poet and poetry, then we would have to place both of the categories of which the author is speaking in the clear realm of poetry.

My husband and I were standing on the desert in the Southwest admiring the mountain range in the distance. Making an arch with his hand, he said that his people used to run from one end of the arch to the other and within those mountains they would be given songs to bring back to the people (Chiricahua Apache). There was then and is

now no doubt in my mind that if we would go into those mountains today, and if all things were right, we would be given songs. I do not need to know how, by whom or what; I would know and recognize the phenomenon when it happened. Songs of western mountains remind me of a statement made by Gary Smith in his book, *Windsinger*, and how, when he was a ranger in the Flaming Gorge area and in the canyon lands of Utah, he became a friend of LaSalle Pocatello, grandson of Chief Pocatello. LaSalle gave Gary Smith some of his songs and told him that he had *caught* them. Some of them he had *caught* at Devil's Tower. Gary remembered when he had climbed to the top and heard the wind swirling through them producing sweet sounds he had been too "busy" with official business to really hear anything. A few years later while sitting in front of the fireplace in an old ramshackle lodge on the shore of Spirit Lake, Gary *caught* a melody. He said, "The mood was mellow and a little mysterious. The only light in the place came from the fire. Suddenly, in just the way LaSalle explained it, I *caught* a melody." He played it on his guitar and the words started to flow. A friend grabbed a pencil and paper and in a matter of minutes there was a complete song.

Brito speaks of the complications in translations. He is so right. Note the losses that come with the added lines in the translation of "Chant to the Fire-fly."¹

Chant to the Fire-fly (Chippewa Original)

Wau wau tay see!
 Wau wau tay see!
 E mow e shin
 Tahe bwau e baun-e wee!
 Be eghayn-be eghayn-ewee!
 Wau wau tay see!
 Wau wau tay see!
 Was sa koon ain je gun.
 Was sa koon ain je gun.

Literal Translation

Flitting-white-fire-insect!
 waving-white-fire-bug!
 give me light before I go to bed!
 give me light before I go to sleep.
 Come, little dancing white-fire-bug!
 Come, little flitting white-fire-beast!
 Light me with your bright white-flame-instrument—
 your little candle.

Literary Translation

Fire-fly, fire-fly! Bright little thing,
Light me to bed, and my song I will sing.
Give me your light, as you fly o'er my head,
That I may merrily go to my bed.
Give me your light o'er the grass as you creep,
That I may joyfully go to my sleep.
Come, little fire-fly, come, little beast—
Come! and I'll make you tomorrow a feast.
Come, little candle that flies as I sing,
Bright little fairy-bug—night's little king;
Come, and I'll dance as you guide me along,
Come, and I'll pay you, my bug, with a song.

More Literal Literary Translation

Flitting white-fire insects!
Wandering small-fire beasts!
Wave little stars about my bed!
Weave little stars into my sleep!
Come, little dancing white-fire-bug,
Come, little flitting white-fire beast!
Light me with your white-flame magic,
Your little star-torch.

Britobegins his conclusion by stating, “The older orations addressed themselves to nature, Indian cosmology and religion, whereas the current poetry has little relevance to those vital aspects of life.” He does an excellent job of educating us on the differences and similarities of the oral narratives and contemporary poetry of the American Indian. Indian people are still seeking songs, and some of what we seek will show up in our contemporary songs and writings.

—Juanita Palmerhall
Mescalero, NM

Note

¹Thomas E. Sanders and Walter W. Peek. *Literature of the American Indian*. (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1973) 105.