
A previously published Native American poet, Lance Henson, a Cheyenne, evokes traditional Native American characters, customs, and beliefs and demonstrates the tension between the new and the old, attempting to reconcile a traditional closeness to the land and to the past with apparently incongruent modern phenomena.

Henson, an accomplished and polished poet, employs images—consciously evoking or imitating the Japanese haiku—which resonate long after the poem is read, as in the descriptions of a young girl, whose face is “a sudden petal in matchlight,” and whose

small trembling hands
flower into a cold wind that smells
of the moon.

In another poem the speaker tastes in his glass “a cemetery of stars,” while in another the evening dusk is “prairie light through a red shawl,” and still another notes the singular isolation of a woman

holding her
apron

and elsewhere the persona follows the “embering sun” as a portrait dies “in [his] eyes”:

i am alone near the lake on a december
night without

Henson’s predilection for mixing the old or traditional with the contemporary is illustrated as

owl calls over the din of footsteps
the laughter in bars

Past mingles hauntingly with the present in Henson’s poem with the intentionally pedestrian title “at the ramada inn,” whose verse moves smoothly from bourbon and juke boxes to a place

a brown wind pauses among spider webs.

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four miles distant
on a windy cemetery hill

where
    a stone eagle that marks geronimo's
    grave
    rises into the night.

The speaker in “we are the people” convincingly assures us that there is no
distance between the name
    of my race
    and the owl calling
    nor the badgers gentle plodding
    we are a people born under symbols that rise from the dust to
    touch us
    that pass through the cedars where
    our old ones sleep
    to tell us of their dreams.

Many of Henson’s poems are infused with the yearning to be reunited
with the “old ones” and with the wisdom of his race, embodied in the
speaker’s grandfather, whom he has
    heard all night
    singing among the summer leaves.

The sense of the past, in the farmhouse where the persona (and the poet)
was raised, is inextricably linked with the present:
    i have watched a long time from the window of this old house
    all that i have lost is here
    the world fills with its presence.

Despite the solitariness and loneliness of Henson’s personae, however, the
collection as a whole resonates with powerful optimistic faith, as in this
apostrophe to the forces of nature and of his forefathers:
    eagle of fire whose
    wings are scented cedar
    moon of forever who guards
    the sacred seed
    keep us strong
    to meet the
    coming days.

— Abby H. P. Werlock
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Hijuelos’ novel, a Pulitzer Prize winner, earns it laurels through the
author’s craftsmanship. Its unusual flashback structure, its characteriza-