

Lance Henson. *Selected Poems, 1970-1983.* (Greenfield Center, NY: The Greenfield Review Press, 1985) 47 pp., \$5.00 paper.

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
catching the snow.

A Whitmanesque quality inheres in the voice of the solitary wanderer who crosses the same

endless
bridge
wrapped in
a strange garment
looking for
myself;

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
a
coat
sipping coors
and crow.

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
a brown wind pauses among spider webs.

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

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
St. Olaf College

Oscar Hijuelos. *The Mamba Kings Play Songs of Love*. (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1989) 407 pp., \$18.95.

Hijuelos' novel, a Pulitzer Prize winner, earns it laurels through the author's craftsmanship. Its unusual flashback structure, its characteriza-