

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Madonna of the Hills (Poem)

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/3hz4d90p>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 4(4)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Allen, Paula Gunn

**Publication Date**

1980-09-01

**DOI**

10.17953

**Copyright Information**

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License, available at <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

## MADONNA OF THE HILLS

She kept finding arrowheads  
when she walked to Flower Mountain  
and shards of ancient pottery  
drawn with brown and black designs —  
cloud ladders, lightning stairs and rainbirds.

One day  
she took a shovel when she walked that way  
and unburied fist-axes, manos, scrapers,  
stone knives and some human bones,  
which she kept in her collection  
on display in her garden.

She said that it gave her  
a sense of peace to dig and remember  
the women who had cooked and scrubbed  
and yelled at their husbands  
just like her. She liked, she said,  
to go to the spot where she'd found  
those things and remember the women  
buried there.

It was restful, she said,  
and she needed rest . . .  
from her husband's quiet alcohol  
and her son who walked around dead.

—Paula Gunn Allen

## SHADOW COUNTRY

I walk in from evening, fresh and cool, happy, loud —  
sting of fog on my face, in my eyes. The poet tells of woe,  
blood and shattered bones on the pavement of his wishes,  
childhood splattered all over the floor in broken memory  
and I sit, cloaked in steep mesas waiting for night, so  
far from here, and hold to the feel of your hands on my face  
like five o'clock thunderheads and cirrus on my cheeks  
cool 10,000 foot fog across my nose and eyes

this is not death. Maggots in the bowl  
do not draw me as they draw the poet crying in the mike, his  
intensity. The prancing black stallion of *I*  
quiet for now in me, in this  
shadow country where corpses shuffle to the bar,  
get their meaning dry or sweet,  
red or white, dark or light, in the pitcher or the glass  
to cool their mouths, to sweeten their breaths, to bring  
wholeness to their memory, gone like smoke, like knowing for sure  
how it was yesterday.

Behind my eyes,  
beneath my hearing,  
I know you feeling the wind,  
fingering silence and sound as though you could measure  
their significance, winnowing like Circe with the breeze  
and I stop my ears, my thought,  
try to discover what it is you do.  
I feel the sun putting its brand on my chest  
still scaled and purple-red, sign of the master,  
my heart: *The Southwest furthers*, the oracle said  
and I taste the cool wet north where the sky touches the ground,  
hold myself silent in the posing late-day air — knowing  
sun and dark, side by side.

—Paula Gunn Allen