

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Literature

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5sc909sf>

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**Publication Date**

2000-09-01

Peer reviewed

## The Ghost Dancers (Timbisha)

They made no effort to hide their hatred  
from the “white hairs” on the reservation.  
Nor, they said, would they cater anymore  
to the tourist trade, whether at casinos  
or cavorting in war paint with palefaces  
as dictated by the tribe.

And though they numbered fewer  
than fifteen, they somehow rustled  
a reluctant consent for a mountain  
beyond the dry lake beds,  
to sow their summer moons,  
and dance with the ghost warriors  
of genocided generations,  
with a rhythm and writhing  
not parodied on any newsreel.

Yes, I had befriended many of these baby  
renegades in my sojourn there. But as one  
with tainted blood, I was *persona non grata*  
up that rock-rutted trail, hodge-podged  
with sagebrush and shot-gun shells, in that  
last-ditched drive for tribal purity—  
perhaps to stave off extinction itself.

—Mike Catalano

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Mike Catalano recently completed a two-year sabbatical throughout North America, visiting American Indians of some fifty tribes. His poetic collection, *Silent Thunder*, details his journey.

### Gathering Water (Paiute)

When Desert Woman said we needed  
to gather water, I envisioned Amish elders  
parading their pails from a distant well.  
I thought she would slap on her overalls,  
spit out some imaginary chaw and spoon  
water from a nearby creek.  
Instead, she drove her 750 gallon truck  
(with brakes working on alternate days)  
over bumps and bruises of a dirt road.

At the igloo-like water station  
amidst the wings of tarantula hawks  
mere inches from our ears,  
she poured the water,  
using her hand as a barometer on the tank.  
She said, "If it is cool, that is where  
the water is. Anything else is unfilled."

I could only marvel at one who,  
every week for the past eighteen years,  
gathered her own liquid outside of town.  
Long after I left her shadows,  
I never took faucets  
for granted again.

—Mike Catalano

## **Canyon de Chelly**

In a certain place where the canyon wall  
meets the sand of the canyon floor

at a forty-five-degree angle, an aged  
Navajo woman is weaving a basket

under a canyon wall streaked with stains  
of ancient rain, a massive canyon wall

rising hundreds of feet above the deft  
maneuvering of her fingers in a quiet place

where the scream of a long dead hawk  
echoes in a timeless ricochet

in this certain place where the Navajo  
live whole lives buried beautifully alive

in a sacred grave packed with the breathing  
sand of sky and turquoise desert air.

—*Larry D. Thomas*

**In Dinehtah\***

the women  
are sleeping  
in wombs of logs, brush,  
and sun-dried earth.

The women  
are dreaming  
of their sheep  
grazing in the cold

mountain night,  
steeping thick wool  
in starlight, moonglow,  
for the intricate looms

of deepest lineage.  
Ever-so-close  
to their lips  
their bronze hands,

darkened with hues  
of natural dyes,  
are splayed  
on wool blankets

where braids  
of thick hair are coiled  
like black rattlers.

As the women sleep,  
their deep  
and even breathing,  
sweetened

with fresh corn,  
mists the sky—  
blue stones  
of their ancient rings.

—Larry D. Thomas

\* Dinehtah is the sacred homeland of the Navajo.

## Song of the Cloud Maiden

Sometimes I dream how it might have been—  
the umbilical cord-cutting mother and her assistant

present me to the sun over the Sangre de Cristo  
Mountains, let the ruddy spirit of dawn pour

over my cheeks, my squeezed-shut eyes white  
as a perfect ear of corn. The Hunt Chief, my father,

has a sand painting of a buffalo made in my honor,  
and he recites a short prayer, rubs medicinal water

from an abalone shell onto my buckskin-soft feet.  
I am from this land of spearpoints, sacred mountains,

basket dance and place of endless cicada singing.  
I am *poeh*, a life cycle on the path to emergence.

I dip my hands in the dark pottery bowl used  
by my father in his naming ceremony, decades past,

and let water, cool as clothes on a line snapping in the wind,  
spill between my fingers, the valleys of my flesh

that echo with wild aster, saguaro, the sky-rupture  
yelp of a single wolf still on the hunt into morning.

—*Maya Quintero*

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Maya Quintero, a graphic artist from Milwaukee, now teaches rhetoric and composition at Tallahassee Community College. Her poetry has appeared in *Indefinite Space*, *Phoebe*, and *Flyway*, and new poems are forthcoming in *Spin*, *Green's Magazine*, and *Meanjin*.

### Cansada

Honestly, I have tried.  
Barbie therapy did not work;  
unkinking my hair and frosting it,  
equally unfruitful.

Primped in pleated skirts  
and bright scour-on makeup,  
I was a prairie chicken  
scuttling among peacocks.

I have practiced and practiced  
but still these thick words  
spill awkwardly from my lips.

I spoon up *sopa de arroz*  
and *albondigas*, old recipes,  
the only legacy of *mi abuela*.

Tomorrow I shall wear stockings  
and a tight wool sweater,  
but even that might not be enough  
to hold my weak flesh together.

—*Maya Quintero*

**Late Afternoon in North Dakota—A Meditation**

deep in blue shadows  
wind-chill shreds the low-bellied clouds

reddening leaves

red, red earth  
even the mist swirls red as my thoughts  
spirit wings

dusk looms like a mountain  
somewhere, here, everywhere

my grandfather perfumes the air with peonies  
his ghost making light of such cold

a string of crows tie sky to earth  
all alone with my shadow  
I whisper soft

*Always, you are mine*

silence complete  
the dance begins

—*Maya Quintero*



## Tell Me Why

First day of school, they passed me a paper cup  
at lunchtime. *Eat it* they said. *It's a hot dog.*  
*American food.* So I did. Mushy, black, and bitter,  
it wasn't at all what I imagined but it was my first day.  
This was my new country. So I ate.

My shiny, short skirts made all the boys look.  
Attention like that kept the South-of-the-Border jokes  
down. A policeman drove past me after school once,  
said my skirt was real pretty. He offered me a ride.  
I said yes. He was *la policía*.  
I barely made it home in time for supper.

The party raged on, but I don't recall it.  
He said it was for fun, so I swallowed the emerald pill.  
It looked like a bluejay's eye lit up by a moonbeam.  
The next morning, I walked slowly home.  
My hair frowzy, my back stiff.

Gramma said *it's a hard, hard place to get along.*  
She tried the big Northern cities once before surrendering  
to her yearning for simple Veracruz sand, the life she knew  
best.  
*Do whatever you can to fit in—it's the only way,* she said.  
So I do. Sometimes, though, it's hard.

—Maya Quintero

## Low Haze Over LA

My mother is a sturdy woman,  
companionable and wide-shouldered,  
hands that flex hard during sleep.

Perhaps this is why he left  
the third time, the last time,  
for eyes the color of a neon bikini.

*Estamos mejor* without him,  
she lied, taking to her second job  
like the earthquake-rumble she feared.

Here in America, the land of opportunity,  
she wrapped herself in black skins,  
the spiral thread memory of his cigars,

how his hands were transparent hardness,  
an alphabet of velocity, sudden light.  
The next three years were all silence.

*Titán de piedra*, titan of stone, my mother—  
Always *guardada en las tinieblas*.  
The night was never your friend,

the cluster of stars, geometric beauty  
like you never knew, dear *mami*;  
this story unfolds still, its syllables

mingle with rain and sluggish highroads.  
*No es mi boca suficiente*—  
under a cotton dress trembling, your body, you.

—*Maya Quintero*