

**UCLA**

**American Indian Culture and Research Journal**

**Title**

Literature

**Permalink**

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/89m9j07z>

**Journal**

American Indian Culture and Research Journal , 24(2)

**ISSN**

0161-6463

**Author**

Brito, Silvester J.

**Publication Date**

2000-03-01

**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/>

## Charlie Coyote and the Wedding Ceremony

The other day I heard that Charlie Old Coyote was going to be in the area. Some party from up around Fish Bay, Wisconsin had invited him to a New Age wedding. This was to be a ceremony done in the old bohemian country style—maybe it would even have a few hippie elements to it. I say this because the middle-aged couple getting married are, as some would say, leftover hippies. In fact, I was told that the wedding festivities would be like a classic scene out of one of the chapters of a Richard Brautigan novel. I imagine this to be so because about a year ago I met the bride and groom at a Milwaukee outdoor concert in the lakeside area where they hold the annual Summer Fest. We were listening to some older groups from the '60s and early '70s playing music, and these two were dancing like people from the Beat era. The man, Ed, likes to listen to jazz while eating breakfast and he reads Truman Capote during his lunch hour. The bride to be, Monica, is somewhat like Ed, but more of a free spirit, a flower child. Both of them love Mother Earth and her ecologically minded people. This could be one of the reasons they like Indians, even rascals like Old Coyote.

I knew that Charlie would not pass up such an invitation, for if nothing else, the hippie factor would be just too enticing for him to resist. I remember seeing him play out the role of an Indian-like hippie in Rio Hondo, New Mexico, so I just happened to be on the scene when Charlie Old Coyote arrived. He had a few cool beers and indulged himself in as much food as he possibly could. I guess he was rather hungry after all the fish he lost to marauding ducks, because his anus was waging war against him and did not wake him up from a deep sleep. While he was dreaming, the ducks from Thunder Bay ate all his "hard catch of tasty Salmon." I heard they were big ones, weighing about ten or twelve pounds each.

Anyway, Charlie was in one of his ravenous moods, eating almost everything in sight. I went up to him and cautioned him to slow down, for he was going to make himself sick. I have seen him do this on numerous festive occasions, especially at the fabulous feasts put on by the Menominee Indians when they celebrated either the winter or summer solstice. I told him that the wedding party might not be too pleased with him if he ate up most of their specially cooked

---

Silvester J. Brito (Comanche/Tarascan) is an associate professor in the English Department at the University of Wyoming. Brito received his doctorate in folklore from Indiana University and has published several books of poetry, including *Man From a Rainbow*, *Looking Through a Squared Off Circle*, *Red Cedar Warrior*, and an ethnography, *The Way of A Peyote Roadman*.

dishes. For once he listened to me and stopped eating, but went on to saturate himself with any kind of alcoholic beverage he could get his hands on. This was a bit unusual for him because, in general, Charlie may do funny things or even enter into actions that are not good for him, but getting totally sloppy is not his style. Maybe he had a spat with one of his many girlfriends from one of the tribes he frequented, always playing subtle tricks on young and old. But I did not think he would pull one of his traditional pranks here. That is, he generally behaves himself when he is an invited guest of Anglo people. This is probably why we seldom read about any of his wild escapades in the logs of frontier writers. In fact, most whites and a few converted Indians only see him in his canine form and not in his humanoid attire.

Anyway and anyhow, as my Uncle Henry might put it, Charlie managed to behave himself, at least through the country wedding ceremony and during the wedding banquet. But after that he saw some rare, young, sun-bathed Anglo beauties; they have always been part of his trouble. Thus he needed to devise some scheme to get their attention, maybe even get one to go to bed with him. But to his surprise, the farmer and father-of-the-bride asked him if he would like to ride one of his horses, for he knew from other occasions that Old Coyote liked to show off his riding skills, especially in the presence of seductive and attractive ladies. This was just the thing he was looking for to show his wares to the girls.

This time I thought that Old Charlie Coyote might be falling into one of his own trickster acts, for he had a few too many mixed drinks—and I mean terrible mixed alcoholic beverages like beer, wine, whiskey, and vodka—under his belt. But as always he never showed that he was drunk on either trickery or alcohol. This is why most humans never notice any of his wild conditions, except for the time when he got a few women to think that the tip of his penis was a wild strawberry. They soon found him out and made him pay for his frolicking act; but I'll let Crow tell that story.

So the farmer brought out what seemed to be a very tame horse. But I could tell by the look in that filly's eyes that she was up to no good. I even tried to tell Charlie this, but he just shrugged off what I had to say. He was too busy looking over at the pretty women, especially one, a stunning redhead who kept giving him the roaming love eye. Charlie liked that. He was so ecstatic that he missed the stirrup on his first try to ride that ornery horse. The second time, however, he mounted that big bay mare like a real rodeo champ, the kind Buffie Saint-Marie sings about: "He is an Indian Cowboy and I love him so." Charlie made that horse dance and prance and back up until the mare decided to do her own thing. She took off straight for a barbed-wire fence and just before she got to it she stopped dead in her tracks. There went Old Coyote, flying right over her head, scratching himself good on that hide-ripping, machine-made demon. Thankfully, it was nothing like the scratches he had received from Sonoran cactus fences.

Nosiree, that little incident with the iron-mouth horse was not going to stop Charlie from putting on a show for the women. He got right up, crawled under that vicious fence, and leaped on that stubborn horse again. Off they went, but he could not get her to stop or turn until she pulled one of those tricky horse rodeo stunts. She stopped abruptly and rolled on the ground,

almost crushing Charlie's legs. You should have seen him scurry out from under that half-ton animal. This time Charlie led her back to the farmer, saying that he was going to give her a needed rest. He didn't want to abuse her, he said. So farmer Joe, being the considerate man he is, offered to let Old Coyote ride one of his prized Arab horses. Charlie took him up on it. He mounted that high-spirited horse with all the grace of a ballerina. That old sorrel horse began bucking and jumping and side-stepping until he got Charlie quite dizzy. But Charlie hung on for dear life, looking like Clint Eastwood in *Bronco Billy*. Then, like a fantastic magic act, the horse reared up, standing almost on the tip end of his hind legs and Charlie went a-flying, did a fancy backward somersault, and landed on his one, very banged-up leg.

The women loved it. They were so taken by his valiant performance—especially the dismount—that they showered him with tight hugs and hot-lipped kisses. It's a good thing they didn't try to tear off his clothes or they might have seen his furry tail. And that red-headed bombshell, the one Charlie was flirting with, well, she was the last one to congratulate him on his flamboyant ride, whispering something sweet into his hairy ear. Charlie must have really liked what she said for his eyes lit up as they always do when he thinks he is going for a wild roll in the hay with some rare beauty. He was going to trickster heaven.

Of course, Charlie never told the women, as he never does, that his fancy dismount was not part of his performance, but just a lucky accident. I know this, for the next day he called, telling me play by play about his amorous escapades. Then he asked me to take him to the hospital, for he wanted to check out those fabulous Milwaukee nurses.

—*Silvester J. Brito*

## **Charlie Coyote and the Ski Bunnies**

So there he was, Charlie Old Coyote, wanting to get his hands on a Big She Rabbit. His desire was so great that he said he would go to any lengths to get his arms around one of those rose-hipped mountain beauties. Of course, what he was talking about was one of those classic ski bunnies, the kind that are dressed to the hilt in the most modern ski outfits. He also liked his mountain Amazons, for he thought that he was the creator's gift to all women equipped in the latest eye-dazzling colors, psychedelic reds, blues, greens, and yellows. But in order to really hit it up with these rare white ladies, he would have to learn how to ski. That might be a little hard to do; in fact, it might become a major undertaking since he was now about forty years old, but with a desire for sensuous women like a nineteen-year-old-boy-man with out-of-control hormones dominating his mind, body, and soul. That was Charlie Coyote; you just never knew what role or age he was playing.

Anyway, Charlie went to a winter indoor-outdoor garage sale. There he bought himself some old wooden World-War-II skis along with some rather warped bamboo poles and a vintage set of leather alpine boots (you know, the

kind that look like old Jim Thorpe football helmets). So there he was, at the top of the bunny slope, for this would be his first run, and all the people were staring at him. He thought that he looked great all decked out in a Goodwill cowboy hat, a pawn-shop blue-jean jacket, and a pair of knee-torn Levi's to match his faded, worn-out jack-ass working gloves. But as I recall, what was probably—no, definitely—the most interesting part of his new get-up were his skis, terribly scarred up from being sold and resold in Asian and East Indian garage sales. He had on a shiny pair of two-hundred cc gliders. Yes, he was so well equipped with such a fine set of state-of-the-art ski gear that he was ready to come down the slopes and get himself one of those delicious mountain rabbit women.

Charlie could not fail. At least, that's what he thought.

*Swish*, one went by him, and *swish, swish* went another two. And *swish, splat* went the fourth mountain bunny, nearly running right over Old Man Coyote. But those fast speeds did not bother old Charlie Coyote, for he always said he liked fast women. So off he went, first on one ski, then the other; people thought he was pretty good. In fact, some said that he was just outstanding. And some even asked, "Who is that great mountain Indian boy who can do such impressive ski work?" Yes indeed, he was a spectacle to see, doing all those acrobatics on vintage, elk-hide boots and government skis. What they did not know is that fast Charlie was a hot-desert breed who could not even run a basic snow plow.

So there he goes, missing one and then another mountain beauty. And *wham*, before he knew it, he was hugging a tree. I made my way down to him and asked, "Charlie, what in the name of heaven are you doing?"

With all the poise in the world, he candidly told me that he just hit one of those solid ladies. His approach was a little fast, even for him. "So, she kind of scratched me up a bit," said he.

Then he went on to say, rubbing his chest, that he liked a large lady who would put up a good fight. That meant she really wanted him. But this one, she was just too much for him. That is why he was hugging a tree.

"OK, Charlie, but watch yourself," I cautioned.

On his second try, down a more advanced beginner's slope, he was losing his balance again. He was just about to go off a huge snow cliff, but out of nowhere two dynamic ski ladies swiftly came to his rescue. Each one grabbed him firmly by an arm and escorted him down the slope, until he said he could make it the rest of the way on his own. So they turned him loose.

As soon as he was on his own again, he did a double somersault, coming down hard, head first into a snow bank; good thing it was not packed down or he might have broken his neck. I skied over to him and asked if he needed any help. I could not hear what he was saying for he had his head stuck quite deep in the snow, with his Chinese scarf choking him.

I hollered, "Charlie, quit flinging your skies so violently. What will the ladies think?" That calmed him down a bit, but I just could not get him out of the bank. I started to get worried and somewhat desperate, for even if he was fantastic Charlie Old Coyote, this time he may have carried his trick a bit too far. I decided it was time to get some help.

With the aid of three ski patrol fellows, we pulled him out. Charlie's face was almost blue with cold, but he smiled and said, "It's about time you pulled me out. I was about ready to have one of my travel dreams, and become a blue snow bird if need be." What Charlie meant was that he was about to transport himself out of that precarious situation. He always manages to change himself into an appropriate animal, depending on the situation, when he cannot get help from some human, animal, or other being.

When we got him into the ski lodge and by the fire to thaw him out a bit, we asked him, "So, how did it go?" He said that the women were just plum crazy about him, so much so that they let go of him just to fight over him.

I think he was a bit delirious, but you never know. Charlie always manages to put on a class act. No doubt, next time I hear from him he will probably be on the white sandy beaches of the Yucatan, running after one of those cosmopolitan, green-eyed ladies, or maybe a classy Mayan woman. But who knows? Only Coyote Man and the Trickster Gods know what he will do next. That's Charlie Old Coyote for you.

—*Silvester J. Brito*

## The Feather

Running late for slack, I drove straight through,  
a shortcut through Pine Ride, home of the Sioux.  
Fifty miles from nowhere, an old man stood in the rain.  
His legs were bent and twisted, he packed a cane.  
I had to stop for him as it was bitter cold.  
He thanked me, produced a jug and Duram hand rolled.

As the level of the wine and the miles diminished,  
he told me of his life, over and finished.  
He said "I'm Indian, but I once was a cowboy too.  
It made me kind of soft on cowboy girls like you.  
Yes, I knew Casey, and Larry Mahan was my pard.  
With my spur and riggin, I could rake 'em hard.

"Then came Korea, years on the other side.  
Lost my legs and damn near all my pride.  
I am of Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, and Gall.  
Us Oglala boys are still warriors all.  
And though I'm the eldest son of a chief,  
wine is now my only source of relief."

As I stopped to let him out, he dug into a sack,  
pulled out an eagle feather, sleek, white, and black.  
"Wear this on your hat," he said. "It will bring you luck.  
Maybe you'll remember this broke down cowboy buck."  
He refused my money, just took his bag and cane  
and without a backward look, walked into the rain.

Indians do not give feathers lightly, on a whim,  
and oft, I've pondered what motivated him.  
Was it wine, the ride, or some nostalgic memory  
which prompted his unexpected generosity?  
Though I'll never know, this feather that I wear  
tells me: the giving is the prayer.

—Clara "Clem" Caufield

---

Born and raised in Montana, Clara "Clem" Caufield (Northern Cheyenne) attended the University of California, Los Angeles in the 1970s and later finished an education degree at Eastern Montana College. She has been a teacher, federal program director, staff member for the Senate Select Committee on Indian Affairs and US Senator John Melcher, and vice president of her tribal council. Clem has recently published a book of poetry entitled *A Full Measure*.





## Nalungiac Remembers His Grandfather's Face

That summer they would hide in the ice house at night, and after they made love, he would take his jack knife and chip away a jagged piece of ice for her, and then or himself, and they would lie together on the canvas he had spread over the saw dust, letting the ice slowly drip into their mouths. He

was a Chippewa man, so quiet and gentle wild birds would land on his hands, and when he spoke, it was almost with apology—apologizing to the earth and sky for saying what was obvious.

They would lie on the canvas sometimes holding hands not saying a word listening to the night, and he would tell her how every sound had a face—a life of its own. He talked to her in his animal voices, his face would change in front of her eyes, and her laugh would go straight to his heart. Years

later, this is the way she would remember him—his face changing into animal character, his hands gentle and light on the small of her back. And he would

remember her laughter when he took the beating from her brothers—when they threw him into the empty boxcar, their laughter became hers, and the memory of her laughter is what kept him alive as the train rifled into the night, through the next day, and into the years he would live without her.

When the baby came, he had red hair and green eyes, but his skin was the color of shiny new copper pennies—dark enough for the midwives to gasp for a moment, dark enough for her brothers to wish they had killed the Chippewa—

but they didn't kill him, and the little boy grew up to be

quick and strong, would disappear into the woods  
for hours, so quiet and gentle, wild  
birds would land on his hands, too.

He lived a long time, became my grandfather, and died  
holding tools—like going under water, his  
copper-colored fingers slowly loosening  
their grip on a handle of a hammer, and when I  
look at his picture on the wall, the picture

speaks, tells me everything, tells me  
it was a good life, and a good death, and what's  
bred in the bone is as indelible  
as the memory of a jagged piece of ice  
slowly melting in the palm of your hand.

—*J. C. Ellefson*

## Wild West Shows and Other Histories

*At the age of three he was with Pawnee Bill's wild west circus.*

—Norman E. Brown on Mose YellowHorse, 1921\*

There's magic in the sentimental smack of a boy's feet pattering on smooth ground, in the pull of his arms and hands moving him to a full sprint. There's magic, too, in a barker's call, "Come one! Come all!" and how it attracts thousands eager to part with their skinny nickels. In 1901, that's the only way to explain it, how they scramble for peeks into italicized versions of an *American* past. Boys in New York, Boston, and Philadelphia will gawk at the wonder of an arrow's spin snapping into a man's body, and how minutes later he'll rise again to wave at the crowd. 1901, and Mose YellowHorse's job title reads something like *savage Indian boy*. He's to "run and scream," and to "keep his bow and arrow ready for projection." He's told this in English and Pawnee and nods at both. But his eyes might be stretching to the line of camels, to the waving ears of African elephants. There's too much to see—the Italian sword swallower and Lady Weaver's blond beard. During the show's *Indian Attack*, he aims at white actresses who hike up their dresses and scurry for cover under authentic 1853 wagons. Every night he hears stories and sleeps between Pawnee men who've warned him of old enemies: the *Sioux*, *Cheyenne*, *Osage*. When he wakes in the mornings, he has no idea how to measure three months. No way of knowing when he'll return home to Black Bear Creek. He doesn't know about money zipping across the country to his waiting parents, or the weight of hail stones bending

---

Todd Fuller teaches creative writing, literature, and composition at Northern Oklahoma College. His other works about Mose YellowHorse have been or will be published in *Puerto del Sol*, *Quarterly West*, *South Dakota Review*, and *Weber Studies*.

160 acres of wheat crops. He has no way of knowing the extraordinary strength of his fingers, that bowstrings might be a precursor to the red seams of a baseball. When he hears applause it might be like rattles of ancestral music, sounds so clear in the distance they will be hurled ninety-five miles-an-hour into the future.

—Todd Fuller

\* Pawnee Bill, whose real name was Major Gordon W. Lillie, owned and coordinated his wild west show for a few decades and employed hundreds of Indians from all over the continent.

### Picking Moments

He hears a pair of crows outside  
His hotel window. A slight sample  
Of truth. Fragmented voices, half

Recalled. Down on street corners  
Men ignore Prohibition, and truth  
Navigates a teetering gateway. He

Is alone in his room listening for  
Solutions. If he's quiet enough, he  
Remembers. He can begin to untie

Stories caught in his memory. Out  
Beyond the disconnection of 1922,  
Baseball is perfect again.

For now, Mose YellowHorse is 24,  
And that might mean he's waking  
Up at eleven every morning beside

A hangover. It might mean boys  
Are seeking his autograph. Maybe  
He's participating in nightly rituals

Of moonshine & hootchy-kootchy.  
The way it is in each town—slipping  
Sideways into speakeasies two men,

Two women at a time. A password  
Whispered to a pair of shifty eyes.  
A girl who says her grandma is half

Indian. Back in Pawnee, moths are  
Beating themselves against screens.  
A white bead concealed from one

Hand to another.\* Young men slide  
The world through their fingers. On  
The verge of song, a Pawnee woman

Exposes her words to a prayer about  
Seeds twisting like dancers to the sun.  
Maybe a father can mumble a death-

Bed speech that begins *To-mor-row*.  
And sooner or later the need to walk  
Saves every life from its destruction.

—Todd Fuller

\* The white bead is an allusion to the Pawnee hand game, a contest played by young men. In the game, the youths hide a white bead in the hands of a member of their team or war party while a member from an opposing team tries to determine in which hand the bead is hidden. As Gene Weltfish notes in *The Lost Universe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1977), "War songs were sung and in the motioning of the hands of the line in which the bead was hidden, the bead might be transferred by sleight of hand during the guessing" (398). Other Pawnee games also make use of a white bead, which sometimes serves as a symbol of the earth.

**Memorizing Oklahoma:  
A Chant (in 1992) That Includes the Word *First***

These are my first steps into the cemetery,  
And I'm concentrating on the names chiseled  
Into hundreds of granite headstones. None

Of the ghosts of my relatives has called me  
Here. But I'm captivated by names like  
Echo Hawk and Lone Chief. I'm wide-eyed

By the row of twenty cedars that separates  
The Indian dead from the white. And I will  
Pause at some of the graves to consider

The mounted photos of men and women in  
Traditional Pawnee dress: the dead always  
Know when we're looking. They can feel

The weight of our bodies above them.  
And with my first steps into Oklahoma, I'm  
Beginning to wonder if I'll ever find a man

Named YellowHorse. I'm starting to wonder  
If I should retreat to my Toyota, to the road,  
Then two hours north to Kansas, where it's

Easy to forget. I could say *It was just a Sunday  
Drive*. I could tell myself *It was just another  
Cemetery*. But this is one moment when I

Begin to hear the soliloquy of a fast ball  
Dividing the voices of a March wind. This  
Is one time when the momentum of my

Curiosity will not rest. And soon enough  
I'll sit in front of a stone marked *MOSE  
YELLOWHORSE* and repeat the lines

Of his epitaph for years to come: First Full-  
Blood Indian in \ Major Leagues \ Pittsburgh  
Pirates 1921-22. Soon enough palominos

Will begin to charge into my thoughts. I'll  
Give myself the task of memorizing the red  
Seams of a baseball. And I'll begin to dream

At all hours of the day in YellowHorse  
technicolor.

—*Todd Fuller*

## Crossing the Bridge

The hollow moon loomed close  
to the bay of wolves over yellow grain earth.  
Webbed clouds poked  
between the thin leaves of water  
logged trees, light bark peeling  
from moist, moldy flesh, now curved  
and splintered like the cries  
of the naked woman  
gripping her shrinking belly.

The pain of new life numbed  
every nerve in her body.

Her blood watered the strange soil  
near the coast as smoke from the fire  
gave the sky a scarlet hue.

A new cry filled the air,  
a cry of independent strength.

White Wolf's faint, frosty breath mumbled  
"Red Sky" to the baby cradled  
in her father's arms,  
tiny fingers spread,  
reaching toward the flames,  
as a pack of wolves stood watch close by.  
"They have come for her spirit,"  
said an old man,  
covering White Wolf's face  
with a mammoth-hide shawl.  
"She dances with them now."

—Romy Shinn

---

Romy Shinn is a senior English writing and anthropology major at the University of Pittsburgh, Greensburg; she plans on pursuing a master's degree in English upon graduation. Shinn has been published in *Millers Pond*, *Earth's Daughters*, *The Loyalhanna Review*, *The Gentle Survivalist*, *Offerings*, and *Pendulum*, among others. She would like to dedicate these poems to Janice Shank.



