



Gordon Henry, Jr.

A SELECTION OF UNPUBLISHED POETRY¹

Gordon Henry is an enrolled member of the White Earth Anishinaabe Nation in Minnesota.

Dr. Henry is also a Professor in the English Department at Michigan State University, where he teaches American Indian Literature, Creative Writing and the Creative Process, in Integrative Arts and Humanities.

He serves as Senior Editor of the American Indian Studies Series (and the series sub-imprint *Mukwa Enewed*) at Michigan State University Press. Under his editorship the AISS has published research and creative work by an array of scholars, working in a variety of disciplines, related to the larger field of American Indian Studies.

Five years ago, while serving as Director of the Native American Institute at Michigan State, he founded, along with Ellen Cushman, the Native American Youth Film Institute. As an offshoot of that project Professor Henry is working with the NAI and the Michigan Inter-Tribal Council, on *Indigistory*, a community-based digital storytelling project.

Gordon is also a published poet and fiction writer. In 1995 he received an American Book Award for his novel *The Light People* and his poetry, fiction and essays have been published extensively, in the U.S. and Europe.

Over twenty years ago, Francis Cree and Louis Cree from Turtle Mountain, North Dakota asked Gordon to work as an Anishinaabe *oshkaabewis*, or ceremonial leader/helper, for the *Niibaagway shimowin* and other Anishinaabe ceremonies. He has participated in, and assisted with, those ceremonial practices for over thirty years.

Almost Decolonized

Among the Almost
Decolonized

You remain one of ten
Brothers of weapons lost

In a land devoured by myths
Of strangers devoted

To regimes of pulverized
Matter fed to abused
Animals fed to men

And women who survive
With ether blasts of particles
Of a remembered better

All tethered to Stone lions
Guarding the entries
To libraries and museums

We must return to
To find ourselves

¹ The poems herein included are published for the first time. We heartily thank Gordon Henry, Jr. for these and also for the other submitted pieces that we decided not to include in the present selection.



After long stretches

In enslavement

True sunrise
Comes over the
The backs of relatives

Cloud elders, the first
Bringer of light running
Morning behind them
Hill people, river people,

ridden
With dreams and
Vague recollections
Of songs for taking
Water into copper
Bowls and containers
Cut from between
The eyes of trees
Petitioned for
forgiveness

As with a language spoken
Only once a day for
Millennia of relations

We now ask
In another language
For the location
Of our weapons,
Our relatives,
With the very
Words keeping
Us bound
Floating just out of
The reach of
Those very places

* * *



Through the Refuge

The roads here hold
More than memory
Can take us to

Horizons packed with
Cloud backed pines
Turns opening to

Waterways
Signs of an ancient flood
Of tears
Overseen by nesting
Eagles now

Another horizon then
Gray clouds rippling
Over Green Lake
Over thin stands of
Round Lake rice
Combed by thin
Brushes of
Western breeze

Then a left turn
Toward the funeral
Past dance grounds
The tribal school
The cemetery
The catholic church

Gathering relatives
Some still fighting
Over possessions
The dead leave

Boxes, letters,
Photographs by
The decades
Absent bodies
A mix of faces,
The living and
the already
Passed

An address book buried
beneath
Legal Instructions on
Belongings for
An Executor



Deeper, grievors, half-sisters
want a few artifacts

The winnowing basket
One of a set
From Otter Tail Pillager
Grandparents

A fistful of jewels from
A city suitor from
Outside the family

One of the men
The dead woman
Married once

During the service
In the survival school
gymnasium
Someone says
We should not speak
Her name now
She's Traveling
Traveling,
She is Traveling
on that big star
road

Someone older
At my side
In the bleachers
Another ex
A Dakota with
An eagle staff

Whispers
"she spoke
Used to speak, fluently
At night
In the language
While dreaming

I didn't understand
But she was smiling
In her sleep
I thought maybe
She was dreaming
Of something like
Love, something like
That."

* * *



Dead GPS

Cold white moon hanging
trees and shadows

You were talking about your
Sister, mother, or brother

Unheard of since you returned
From the iron door asylum

A school for excavation of dreams,
Like those Singers voices beyond touch
At play in a theatre of unwritten
Codes, every gesture, agony
Lost among lost fear lost

replaced with a continuing
Sense of moving between boxes
Vehicles we rename for lost
Relatives surrounded
by names of strangers
And numbers neither ordinal
Or serial

Then auto light
sprays out
coyote on dirt road

Then just us again
Wondering
Where we are

* * *



Departure: A White Clay Soldier

All whispers begin and end
At departures of secrets
And Trust

At the fenceless Cemetery
With a stone pillar
Entryway

We are here now
As Old men of war fire
Off Guns they store
In closets and carry
through
The best stories
Dreams create
Of bravery and hunts

The air then holds
All
every report
Returning from flash
And smoke

To quiet
relatives
Leaving for a feast
Enough to sustain
Them as they too
Must travel home.

As for you
Stone will carry
your name and let
it lie

* * *



Back Before We Returned: To White Clay

My mother shot my father

Took his insulin syringe
Full of bear grease

Drove hummingbird needle
Deep into the Indian Hills
Left subdivision of his
Ass as he slept off tumblers
Of liquored remedy
For another frigid
Minnesota, just this side
Of North Dakota, Biboon
night

The grease ran into him
Filled blood ways with
Thicker than what are
The almost insoluble
Animal insides, slogged
Him down into the deep
Dull hull of the craft
And aged curve of his
Father body

Brought him
To life in a winter where
We heard the sound
Of the music of his
Language dissipate into
the eyes, the moon shone
apertures there

* * *



The Return of the White Clay Brothers

Two night skins
Dark as discarded
sunned Grain
Belt bottles
Both to the wind

Wandering up a two track
In a village of smoking stoves
Burnt remains of machinery
Grass and weeds where
Drivers now dead once steered
Toward lights where the old
Woman still living settles

Children beneath star
Blankets the eyes of each
rapt as if the Story
to be told were standing
beyond the fixed doorway
darkening
outside waiting to enter.

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