

## WEAVING THE HISTORY OF DESPAIR, RESISTANCE, AND HOPE: ACOMA POET SIMON ORTIZ WRITES ENVIROMENTAL JUSTICE

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In traditional Native education, the environment was the textbook and animals the teachers. The seasons became the calendar. The people's needs were the clock they worked by, and their senses and imaginations were their tools of survival.

-- Jace Weaver, "Notes from a Miner's Canary," Defending Mother Earth.

And so you tell stories

You tell stories about your People's birth and their growing.

You tell stories about your children's birth and their growing.

You tell the stories of their struggles. You tell that kind of history, and you pray and be humble.

With strength, it will continue that way. That is the only way. That is the only way.

--Simon J. Ortiz, Woven Stone.

George E. Tinker, Osage/Cherokee scholar of crosscultural ministries, states that Native Americans, "who have the deepest cultural connection to American soil" are among those most deeply affected by the modern, industrial, technological devastation of the land. He further emphasizes that it is a painful truth that ecological devastation, "while it eventually affects the well-being of everyone, initially and most particularly affects American Indians and people of color on this continent" (153). With a cultural tradition that respects the natural world and the interconnectedness of the ecosystem, Native American peoples regard this planet as a living organism that nurtures and cultivates all living forms. Colonized by the Europeans and imposed upon by the dominant industrial culture that advocates dualism and segregates man/woman, human/non-human, white/non-white, Native Americans face culture-cide and genocide. In order to fight "against becoming invisible" (Ortiz 30), Native Americans tell their side of stories so that they can present points of view that reflect their cultural values in a language that the dominant society recognizes. Although they cannot change the past, Native American writers undertake the mission of changing how the history is told to future generations because they are witnesses to history itself. They write to offer what historian Ronald Takaki says "a different mirror" of history that "can guide the living and also help us recognize who we have been and hence are," and to "provide collective self-knowledge" that enables us to see ourselves and each other in our common past (16).

Cherokee theologian Jace Weaver comments that "[e]nvironmental destruction is simply one manifestation of the colonialism and racism that have marked Indian/White relations since the arrival of Columbus in 1492" (3). When Europeans arrived in the New World, they considered it a new discovery of wilderness, while the North American continent was actually well populated. At that time, the land was teeming with wildlife and "clothed in a green robe of forests, unbroken grasslands, and useful desert plants" (Hughes 2). Since the Native American way of life is to live with nature, not against it, they did not leave the land untouched, but "unspoiled." In fact, as historian Donald Hughes notes, it was so unspoiled that the Europeans

considered it as wilderness. With this kind of different attitude towards the land, the Native and Europeans cultivated different landscapes around them, and their contact profiled the contrast between their cultures and worldviews. In many ways, most Native tribes interpret life from a different perspective and set of values that are often at odds with the European culture. As Kenneth Lincoln succinctly summarizes, "[t]ribal life centers on a common blood, a shared and inherited body of tradition, a communal place, a mutual past and present" (93), while European civilization emphasizes more individual development. The visions of life, concepts about time, ideas of community and individual, and especially attitudes towards the land and the environment present the sharpest contrasts between these civilizations.

Christian system of belief creates a hierarchical order that placed human beings on the top of other life forms on earth; it also reinforced a hierarchical order among human societies, with the white male privileged with social, economic, and moral advantages above women and nonwhites. It further justified a rationale for Europeans to take control and utilize the earth's resources as part of the responsibility of being human and to "civilize" the non-white races as the unarguable burden of the white civilization. It detached humans from the rest of the natural world, and the white race from and above the other races. Further, with the scientific and industrial revolution of the seventeenth century, Europeans, heavily influenced by dualism and logocentrism, ceased to see the earth as an organic living system and viewed it as a commodity and an object of exploitation, excluding nature from human culture, non-white from European civilization. Exploitation then became natural and feasible.

While the Europeans were obsessed with the concept of hierarchy and material wealth through exploitation, the Native Americans regarded the earth as a nurturing mother who supplied the needs of all living forms. Native Americans do not place humans on the top of other living forms; instead, all forms of life, including rocks, mountains, and rivers, are part of the ecosystem, which is a carefully balanced whole. If humans have any significant role in this system, it is to maintain the intricate balance. Native Americans, therefore, "regarded things innature as spiritual beings," and they do not bend nature to human will; rather, they subordinate "the human will to natural rhythms" (Hughes 16). As John Collier, head of the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1930's, wrote that Native American belief "realizes man as a co-partner in a living universe--man and nature intimately co-operant and mutually dependent" (qtd. in Vecsey 50). In general, the Native Americans and their life style and living philosophy were "integral parts of an ecological niche" (Jacobs 49).

From here, I want to usher the discussion into the poetic world of the Acoma poet Simon Ortiz, whose work, *Woven Stone* (1992), reflects the characteristics of storytelling, retells myths of creation, and records stories of survival. In this collection of poetry, Ortiz writes environmental injustices, racism and cultural genocide, that are caused by social, racial, and gender oppressions. Ortiz's poetic works are encompassing. Joni A. Clarke comments that in Ortiz's poetry we can "find ancient stories which tell of his tribe's emergence from the earth into this world, historical stories which tell of his tribe's revolt against Spanish conquistadors in 1640, and contemporary stories of his people's resistance to the colonization of the Four Corners area by multi-national uranium and coal mining corporations" (59).

We can easily see the link between environmental injustice and racism demonstrated in Ortiz's poetry. As Ortiz himself states, for Native Americans, the strength to strive to gain control of their lives and destiny, as well as the "basic belief in one's culture, language, image, community, heritage," in effect, comes from fighting racism – racism that has been derived from the colonial days and ideology. Racism devalues Native American cultures, within which their

care and belief in the ecological balance suffer the most because their cultures rely heavily on the balance of the ecosystem. Environmental problems, caused especially by the dominant industrial culture, therefore, have been a social, economic, and cultural crisis for Native Americans.

For Ortiz, who sees himself as a "child of colonialism" (11), "[s]tories, poems, histories did not come out of thin air. . . . They came from the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of [his] people, from their voices" (18). It is from this kind of collective experience and memories that many Native American authors write in order to reclaim their cultural heritage and their vision of history, including the myth of creation. Woven Stone, this collection of Ortiz's three previously published volumes of poetry, leads us into a Native world of oral tradition, struggles, love, and continuance. Ortiz also states in one of his poems that the main theme of his poetry is "to recognize / the relationship I share with everything" ("Many Farms Notes" 68). The words "share" and "with" indicate the Native American cultural heritage in him that respects all existent forms; this sharing also indicates his situated relationship with history that marks the development of the Native American communities. There are three sections to the book: "Going for the Rain," "A Good Journey," and "Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land." Each section deals with a stage of struggle and growth that records the painful costs of survival.

The first section, "Going for the Rain," is divided into four parts: "The Preparation," "Leaving," "Returning," and "The Rain Falls." It begins with a "Prologue," launching a song, a prayer that spiritually and physically prepares for his journey, seeking life "with beauty and meaning." He finds the life with beauty and meaning by returning "to the strength that his selfhood is, his home, people, his language, the knowledge of who he is" (38). Ortiz's journey as a poet starts from finding the root of his being – his home and community – before he can make life meaningful and beautiful. The significance of this prayer lies in the spirit of seeking beauty of meaning rather than animosity; that is recognizing who he is and his connection to the community; and the land enables him, in the coming poems, to unpack the metaphors that mountains and rivers hold, but that have been long ignored by the dominant culture.

The prayer is immediately followed by his own creation story, "According to Coyote," a trickster figure that establishes the narrator's relationship with the past through a mythic figure in the oral tradition. From this point on, the poet assumes the position of storytelling that continues his cultural heritage. After the story of creation comes the creation itself: the forming of a child. The first thing that the narrating father instructs his child is to follow "ancient trails / to help us return" before he can "point / out [the child's] place on the earth" (42-43). The "ancient trails" situate the young Native American generation, geographically, culturally, and gopsychically.

With these simple but straightforward lines, the narrator sets the tone for the rest of the first part which focuses on familial relationships and humans' relationship with the earth. One of the "Four Poems for a Child Son," "WHAT MY UNCLE TONY TOLD MY SISTER AND ME," relates a familial tradition by addressing a family lesson:

Respect your mother and father.  
 Respect your brothers and sisters.  
 Respect your uncles and aunts.  
 Respect your land, and the beginning.  
 Respect what is taught you.  
 Respect what you are named.

Respect the gods.  
 Respect yourself.  
 Everything that is around you  
 is part of you. (47)

These verses nurture a Native American communal sense that bonds humans and the natural world. The position of an uncle who tells the familial lesson also demonstrates that the Native American families extend beyond core family members. The family extends, and the elders of the family are respected.

The second part, "Leaving," is composed of poems describing the landscape of various places the poet travels. The movement from one place to the other cannot be read as the senseless wandering of the rootless; instead, different journeys described in this section trace a spiritual orientation that bears a deep connection and identification with the land.

"Old Hills" portrays a young Crow man, who has grown up in Los Angeles, who tries to capture with a camera the desert hills that are "older than all of the millennium's sign painters." By capturing the landscape with a camera, the young man views only fragments of landscape, not a whole that balances itself within the cosmos. Here the landscape outlives human existence and demonstrates the enduring patience of the earth: "[t]he rocks and cacti tolerate us/very quietly." By using the city boy, the poem metaphorically profiles a contrast between the wisdom of the earth and her impatient children growing up in cities and alienated from her:

they probably laugh  
 softly at us with the subtle chuckle  
 of ancient humor that our jubilant youth  
 knows not yet to recognize and share. (69)

The youthful impatience and ignorance is endured by the silence of the hills. "Not yet," nevertheless, also indicates hope that will come later: the wisdom of the earth might be learned later by the youth. The they/we dichotomy presented here subverts the Anglo tradition of I/other, that "we" is always on the privileged side. "They" (the hills and the sands) encompasses, not oppresses, "we," lovingly and patiently.

The traveler's relationship with the land and his Native American relatives is also well depicted in "Travels in the South." Dislocated, disoriented, and mistreated in cities, the narrator finds himself at the end of this poem greeting a squirrel and a red bird in a national park, asking them: "Brother, how are you?" This attempt to establish a familial relationship with the animal world situates the narrator in his cultural tradition. The animals, however, refuse to take the crumbs from his hand. Reflecting on his own experience with the people in the cities, the narrator comments that "I didn't blame them" (75). His being a Native American and his negative experience with the whites is reflected in the animals' mistrust of humans, especially the whites. Like the Native Americans, animals are constantly scared and threatened by the advancing civilization. Here the narrator sees himself and the animals as one family of, in Joy Harjo's words, a dispossessed people. This kind of inclusiveness of the animal world in the human community regarding them as brothers and friends shows the dehomocentric and heterarchical nature of the Native civilization. Similar communal values are also largely portrayed in other poems such as "Brothers and Friends," in the second section.

The next poem, "Relocation," echoes the feelings of a dispossessed people in which the narrator is "lonely for hills" (76). This poem denounces the relocation movement administrated by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the 1950's when the U.S. government tried to move the

Native Americans from the reservations to the cities so that they could be fully assimilated. With a poem like "Relocation" in which a Native's bitter experience in the city is portrayed, Ortiz blurs the borderline between personal and political, past and future, individual and community.

After describing various journeys into different big cities, such as New York and Atlanta, the traveler is ready to return home – the land – like a river flowing to its destined home, the center of the earth, in "A Patience Poem for the Child That Is Me"

Be patient child,  
 be patient, quiet.  
 The rivers run into the center of the earth  
 and around  
 revolve all things  
 and flow  
 into the center.  
 Be patient, child,  
 quiet. (90)

Words used in the previous poems, such as "patience," "quiet," and "child," gather at the end of "Leaving," symbolizing the end of a journey and the return to the center of consciousness which is the earth. The repetitive phrase, "be patient," slows down the movement of the rhythm and flows into the quietness of the earth described in "Old Hills": quietness and patience. This image of the earth as the center of our being remains as Ortiz's living philosophy and appears in many poems of the second section, such as "Between Albuquerque and Santa Fe."

Returning, however, does not promise peace. The third part opens with "The Wisconsin Horse," which describes how the narrator's home environment has been gradually invaded by construction. The invasion of development, industrialism, and tourism into Native communities are also seen in "Washyuma Motor Hotel," which relates how the ancient spirits of the people had been buried " [b]eneath the cement foundations / of the motel" (97). Due to the construction and buildings, the landscape that was familiar to the Native Americans had been ruined. America, represented by big cities such as San Diego, starts to part with the land, and becomes a place that Native Americans want to flee from: "Keep to the hills / and avoid America / if you can" ("East of San Diego" 111). Here, America signifies the negative outcome of modernization that kills the spirit of the earth.

The only salvation that Ortiz's traveler finds in the cities lies in his connectedness to the earth: it is when he holds on to a fragment of the earth center (a warm stone) that he knows it is his "redemption" (110). Ortiz's splitting of the American landscape into hills and cities reflects his own split psyche that seeks reconciliation and redemption, between Native and Anglo civilizations and the different landscapes cultivated by these two cultures. He finds comfort in the fundamentals: a stone, the element for both industrial construction and natural landscape. The stone becomes a signifier whose meaning depends on the interpretation of the writer: same as history.

From a personal redemption extends a community that shares in the fourth part, "The Rain Falls," which begins with "Earth Woman," with whom he shares the acknowledgement that "I am only one part / among many parts" of "the solid earth" ("Spreading Wings on Wind" 121-22). This kind of humbling oneself as part of the whole reflects again the dehomocentric cultural value inherited in the Native American philosophy. The final poem of

the section, "It doesn't End, Of Course," denotes the collective destiny of all parts of the earth because "in all" grows skies and earth, and soothes "the aches of all years" (147). The whole section begins with an individual "I" and ends with a collective "all," and a personal journey is fulfilled because it stops at the place where the earth and sky merge and continue.

While the second section, "A Good Journey," echoes themes portrayed in the first one, it also contains longer narrative lines and puts emphasis on the Mother Earth image and humans' relationship with her. Ortiz, incorporating the Native American oral tradition, often shifts styles between prose and poetry in this section in order to

translate that [immediate and intimate] power of [spoken words] into printed words. . . . [and] to show that the narrative style and technique of oral tradition could be expressed as written narrative that it would have the same participatory force and validity as words spoken and listened to. (151)

Ortiz's intention of translating oral into written narrative demonstrates the adaptability of the Native cultures. By incorporating narrative elements of storytelling, he also involves his reader in the process of regenerating his tradition and culture as well as sharing the histories he narrates. Ortiz also employs more repetition in this section. The repetition resembles the process of ceremonies that reinforces the messages intended.

Many mythic figures, such as Coyote, Crow, and Grandmother Spider, prevalent in Native American cultures, are brought back to life by the poetic narrative. Advocating the traditional mythic figures in poetry written in English is a subversive force for Native American writers because they challenge the traditional literary content. They also educate the dominant class about Native American cultures because these mythic figures represent the supernatural reality in Native American civilization. The trickster figure Coyote, for instance, appearing as a central figure in many of Ortiz's poems, is, in Allen's words, "half creator, half fool," and is taken up by many contemporary Native American writers "as a metaphor of all the foolishness and the anger that have characterized American Indian life in the centuries since invasion." He is also a mythic figure that stands as a "metaphor for continuance" (Sacred 158). As Allen states, "[w]hat are called 'myths' in the white world, and thought of as primitive spiritual stories that articulate psychological realities, are in the native world the accounts of actual interchanges" (Grandmothers 6). Using animals such as Coyote or wolves in modern poetry written in English announces the writers' tribal identity and reality inherited from oral tradition.

Another important issue is the criticism of the industrial landscape, in contrast with the natural landscape, and how the industrial landscape has negatively influenced the Native's lives. The poem "A San Diego Journey: January-February 1973," recording a plane trip from San Diego to Los Angeles, describes well the contrast of landscapes. When the plane takes off, the narrator gains an encompassing view of the red earth, rich with color and timeless mesa cliffs and canyons. From above, he finds the "cardinal points" of his Acoma (Native) life, which are "the mountains, the radiance coming / from those sacred points, gathering / into the center." Earth is the center of his horizon, his life. As the plane enters the Los Angeles area, the landscape changes immediately into the product of industrial civilization: "the countless houses, / row after row, veiled by tinted smog." The narrator feels apprehension. He is disorientated and lost, especially after he lands on the ground, into the "American labyrinths" – a tunnel he can neither see through nor find the familiar landscape such as plateau. With this sense of disorientation, the narrator states that "I am emptied / of any substance. America has finally caught me. / I meld into the walls of that tunnel / and become the silent burial. There are no echoes" (167). This statement apprehends the result of assimilation--being assimilated into

American mainstream society. "No echoes" indicates lack of hope due to the loss of the natural landscape, where mountains and rivers echo and hold meanings and where nature does not exist only in fragmented images on TV.

The poem, "A San Diego Journey," however, does not end with the apprehension of assimilation; it continues with "SURVIVAL THIS WAY." The strength of survival lies in the action of natural phenomena ("it rains;" "Mountain and canyons and plants / grow") and the individual "I" working towards community "we" (we "traveled," "loved," "taught," and most importantly, "survive") (167-68). Survival is their act of resistance against assimilation, rather than letting their cultures die and exist only in museums.

The way of survival, henceforth, depends on one's reliance on the earth--a lesson the narrator passes on to his children. As the section progresses, the narrator's tone grows more certain about the power and wisdom in his ancestors' stories and their connectedness to the earth which is often characterized in the mythic figure "Grandmother Spider." The anxiety of estrangement and normlessness described in "Toward Spider Spring" of "Going for the Rain," in which the narrator and his family are looking for a right place to start all over and end up getting lost, is gradually overcome by finding their familiar and tribal tradition in stories. In "A Note for My Child," for instance, a child is born and blessed by Grandmother Spider, who weaves things and threads fragments together to "make life to wear" (195). The new born child, further, is compared with "that cliff at sunrise," waiting for the ancestors to come (back), singing and dancing. Through this comparison, the newly born is framed as one with the landscape and becomes part of it.

With the birth of a new life, "Earth and Rain, The Plants & Sun" appear in the next poem, which reasserts that

The dancing prayers.  
It shall not end,  
son, it will not end,  
this love.

Again and again,  
the earth is new again.  
They come, listen, listen.

The repetitive word "listen" addresses not only the son, but the reader as well. This simple linguistic device assists the reader in his/her participation in listening to the songs, prayers, and stories.

In addition to drawing his reader into the act of participation, Ortiz often educates his reader about his ancestral connection to the Mother Earth by using an image that molds together the earth and a female figure, especially a dark or Indian woman. A good example is found in "Woman, This Indian Woman," in which his longing for the mountains, crow, and creek resembles a lover's yearning for his beloved woman. This poem also narrates the creation of a new generation which is conceived by the Earth/Indian woman and the son. With a different creation story, a subversive act against assimilation is again seen.

Born to the earth and the sun, the Native Americans, however, are deprived of their own home, the earth. "A Designated National Park" starts with a sarcastic tone: "This morning, / I have to buy a permit to get back home" (235). As a natural landscape is altered to a cityscape, the Native Americans are forced to drift into the industrial culture and face cultural genocide. Their cultures, to the Anglo society and most of the Native Americans themselves, exist

fragmentedly and nostalgically only in museums, where one needs to press a button "For a glimpse into the lives / of these people who lived here" and to "SEE MUSEUM FOR MORE INFORMATION" (236). The Native Americans are undoubtedly dispossessed and their cultures exist statically on display as something exotic and remote, anything but present and real.

As his critique of industrialism grows stronger, Ortiz, by securing his role with the land and its history through storytelling, places his poetry at the heart of his people's struggle in the poem "The State's claim that it seeks in no way to deprive Indians of their rightful share of water, but only to define that share, falls on deaf ears." This poem depicts well how the Native American communities have been gradually and aggressively invaded by industrial culture, under the name of development, through railroads, electric lines, gas lines, highways, phone companies, and cable TV. With those "developments," Native communities are desensitized and alienated again from the land to which that they are attached. With these invasions, Native people suffer from severe injustices, as described in the last poem of this section, "I Will Tell You Now," a poem which mixes poetry and prose. The prose part narrates the stories of people suffering from social oppression:

"I don't like the fact that one Fall a family was killed by a train at the crossing into the village because the AT&SFRY railroad never bothered to protect you when they laid their tracks through your land" (282).

Deprived and unprotected, Native Americans suffer genocide. The injustices and oppression portrayed in the second section are even more vividly documented in the third section: "Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land."

Tracing the history of rebellion back to the Pueblo Revolt against Spanish oppression in 1680, the third section, originally published in 1980, records how the destructive uranium industry has influenced the Southwest Native Pueblos, Navajos, Apaches, and Lagunas. This section differs from the previous two in tone and style. Its voice is a mixture of personal experience and a shared history of a Native community specifically situated in northwest New Mexico. Stylistically, it continues the hybrid form by blurring the boundaries between poetry and prose. The prose part of the section straightforwardly chronicles the history of the mine development in the Navajo communities in New Mexico.

Treated as cheap labor by corporate mining companies, the Native Americans were turned against their own values and heritages by whites with capitalism and the detrimental effects of alcohol infused into their culture, which was endorsed by the U.S. government. Exploited by industrial capitalism, they underwent social, economical, environmental, and political injustices.

The third section, witnessing historical injustices, describes the industrial invasion of the outsiders into the Native communities: beginning with the construction of the railroads, along with the logging industry in the 1920s and 30s, which ran through Navajo people's land, taking and polluting their water:

My mother said the people  
drank  
from the nearby river  
when she was a girl.  
But when I was a boy,  
we used it only for washing clothes.  
We could not drink it. (343)



Land was taken away by the whites supported by a "ruthless, monopolistic U.S. empire" (348), and was regarded by the U.S. government as "the commodity used to raise capital" (349). Before the land was stolen by the "Mericanos," Native Americans always knew how to deal with the earth in their own way, even during barren times. Industrialism, however, deprived them of their living substance, their land, and forced them to participate in industrial production.

With the pollution of water and land, the Native American life is severely disturbed. In the first poem, "It Was That Indian," the section after a prefatory prayer depicts the discovery of uranium in 1953 by an "Indian" named Martinez and how it helped the "boom" of the town, grants, and the "progress" of the west side of New Mexico. Martinez was honored as a heroic figure at the beginning because his discovery initiated economic progress for the whites. Along with the development of uranium mines came progress that soon brought destructive by-products of industrialization: "chemical poisons flowing into the streams / from the processing mills . . . I and uranium radiation causing cancer." Martinez then became the center of blame because "It was that Indian who started the boom" (296). It is not, however, the Navajo man that discovered the uranium, Ortiz protests: "It was the U.S. government and economic and military interests which would make enormous profits and hold the world at frightened bay which made that discovery in a colonized territory" (354). It is capitalism and racism that materialized the mines.

Racism is also powerfully portrayed in simple verses in "It Was That Indian": when some people wanted to put up a statue of Martinez, "others said / that was going too far for *just an Indian*" (295; emphasis added). Because of racism, the Native Americans have no chance to gain equal opportunity in economic growth, when they are forced into a state of economic reliance by the mining companies. Without protection from a union and with a lack of education, the Native Americans remain "at the bottom" (297-98), without any chance of a promotion that would help to sustain basic living needs. Racism also manifests itself in the hierarchal mindset of the whites, embodied in the persona, Herb, in "The First Hard Core," when Herb comments to the narrator that

We white people got our niggers  
to look down on.  
Mexicans here got you Indians  
to look down on.  
And you all got Navajos'  
to look down on,  
but who the hell Navajos  
got to look down on?

A social hierarchy inherited from the colonial racist mindset clearly dominates the social formation of class. The Native Americans, as denoted in this poem, also inherited the hierarchical system into their cultures. With this kind of classism, Native American's life is especially threatened: "I mean being Indian wasn't the safest / thing to be in town" (327).

Native American life is disrupted further by military force which fences off Native people's sacred place, the Coso Hot Springs, in the poem "That's the Place Indians Talk About." Living close to the land, the Native Americans keep talking, singing, and praying about the Hot Springs which animate "the moving power" that nurtures its People. In this sacred place, "the voice," "the earth," and "the People" are merged together as a whole. Even though the government attempts to ward the Native Americans off the Hot springs, they never give up their hope to retrieve and care for the land taken from them.

The most humane and feasible way to free the Native Americans, Ortiz suggests, is to take back the land and care for it with the Native's ecologically balanced way. With corporations and mining companies' exploitation, the land becomes infertile. The way to bring the land back to its natural state is through great care, planning, compassion, and love, as one would with a young plant. And only when the Anglo Americans learn the reciprocal relationships between races, between humans and the land, can life go on:

But America must give back.

This is the only way the land will regenerate.

This is the only way the People will be freed

...

With great care and planning,  
with compassion and love,  
you will grow, you will go on, and you will plant again  
and the plant will grow.

...

That's what the People say. That's what the land says.

...

If we don't do that,  
life will continue to be exploited,  
the land will be used up  
and the People will remain colonized and powerless. . . . ("Returning It Back,  
You Will Go On" 331)

The land and the (Native) People are saying the same thing about the continuance of life because they understand the reciprocal relationships among themselves.

The relationship of reciprocity is what Anglo American culture needs to learn from the Native Americans. At the beginning of the poem, " We Have Been Told Many Things but We Know This to Be True," "The land" and "The people" are placed on the same line, right next to each other; each exists independently, but next to the other, with the land prior to the people:

The land. The people.

They are in relation to each other.

We are in a family with each other.

The land has worked with us.

And the people have worked with it. (324)

The people here do not have to be limited to the Native Americans. The poem, inclusively referring to all people, stresses the common destiny of human beings. The preposition "with" indicates the intimate but equal relationship between people and the land. This interdependence means continuity of life. In Ortiz's poetic world, and most of the Native American's philosophy, humans' role in the universe is participatory, responsive, and responsible. In order to maintain the basic level of survival, Ortiz also calls for strength to fight back because "[o]nly when we are not afraid to fight against the destroyers, thieves, liars, exploiters who profit handsomely off the land and people will we know what love and compassion are" (363). The way Ortiz chooses to fight back is to write in order to re-establish his Native American identity and let the dominant class hear his people's voice.

Ortiz's vision for Native Americans is to love, respect, and be responsible to oneself and others for the purpose of continuance, which is more than survival and saving the Native Americans. He does not present a historical injustice without a solution. He moves towards

commitment and hope for the future. In his poetry, we find the plea for respect for the land, love for all people, and hope for continuance. Continuance, explains Ortiz in his preface to Woven Stone and in poems, means that in order for the United States to survive, it needs to "truly know and accept its indigenous reality." It is through Native American writers' "poetry, prose, and other written works that evoke love, respect, and responsibility, [that] Native Americans may be able to help the United States of America to go beyond survival" (32-33). It is through the recognition and dismantling of the exploitative colonial mindset and its detrimental effects especially on the Native Americans that the U.S. can hope to prosper and to build an environmentally just society.

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