Native American Literature: A Brief Survey

The Native American experience is rich and varied, with a long history of culture and tradition. The United States, which was once home to many different Native American nations, has a complex relationship with its indigenous population. This complex relationship has led to a diverse range of Native American literature, from traditional oral storytelling to modern written works.

There are approximately two million Native American people in the United States today, but their presence is often overlooked. The federal government has a long history of mistreatment and displacement of Native American communities, leading to a lack of recognition and respect for their cultural heritage.

However, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in Native American literature. This is a reflection of the broader movement towards recognizing and celebrating Native American culture and history. Native American literature is often characterized by its use of traditional storytelling techniques, as well as its focus on themes such as identity, history, and the struggle for recognition.

In this brief survey, we will explore some of the most notable works of Native American literature, from traditional storytelling to modern fiction and poetry. We hope that this survey will help to raise awareness of the rich and diverse cultural heritage of Native American peoples.

Discovery America

From the beginning, the situation in the United States was fraught with conflict and struggle. The federal government's policies towards Native American peoples were often ruthless and oppressive, leading to a steady decline in Native American populations and cultures.

In the 19th century, the federal government began to implement policies aimed at assimilating Native American peoples into American culture. These policies included the establishment of boarding schools, which were designed to separate children from their families and force them to adopt American ways of life.

However, despite these efforts, Native American peoples continued to resist assimilation. They fought for their rights and their culture, and their resistance helped to shape the course of American history.

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Introduction

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Rupert's Fray

Nothing But the Truth

A Mythology of Native American Literature

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What is the nature of modern American poetry?

Modern American poetry is characterized by a departure from the established forms and conventions of poetry.

The modernist movement, which began in the early 20th century, rejected the traditional forms and rhyme schemes of poetry, and instead focused on exploring new forms and techniques.

One of the defining characteristics of modern American poetry is its emphasis on the subjective experience of the poet. This is often expressed through the use of free verse, a form of poetry that does not follow the traditional rules of meter and rhyme.

Modern American poets often explore themes such as individuality, identity, and the complexities of modern life. They use a variety of techniques, including symbolism, alliteration, and metaphor, to create a unique and powerful voice.

Some of the most well-known modern American poets include Walt Whitman, Emily Dickinson, T.S. Eliot, and e.e. cummings. Their work has had a significant influence on the development of poetry in the United States and around the world.
Climate of Change: Police Emergence

It's time to talk about police and how they are impacting our communities, particularly in minority neighborhoods. The police have always been a part of our society, but in recent years, the way they operate has changed significantly. Police departments across the US have been facing criticism for the use of excessive force, racial profiling, and systemic corruption. These issues have led to increased tensions between law enforcement and the public, particularly in communities of color.

One of the key issues at play is the increase in police shootings and the lack of accountability for those shootings. The recent high-profile cases of police brutality have brought national attention to these issues, and calls for reform have grown louder. Many people believe that the police system needs to be restructured to better serve the communities it is meant to protect.

It's important to remember that police reform is not a new concept. It has been a topic of discussion for decades, but it has gained renewed momentum in recent years. Many experts believe that systemic changes are needed to address the root causes of police misconduct and to build trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve.

As we move forward, it's crucial to listen to the voices of those most affected by police actions. We must work towards creating a safer and more just society for everyone.
their slings and litters" as if they were divine Red Cross workers or refugees from "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot." Does Ray, a being between two worlds (as his name "Twobears" suggests), take refuge in some form of Christianity? The last stanza reads like a hallucination. The poem does not present a conclusion; it simply presents a situation. But the most powerful entity in the poem is the turtle.

Time and time again in Native American poetry we find a picture of raw existence side by side with a refusal to cave in, often with hints of renewal through connection with tradition. In Erdrich's "I Was Sleeping Where the Black Oaks Move," the relentless water that has been dammed (cause of much lost Indian land), uproots the trees with their nests of herons. ("Nests" is a loaded cultural word. We recall Black Elk: "Our tepees were round like the nests of birds, and they were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children."32) The forest is pulled through the spillway, and trees surface singly. The scene is fully presented realistically, yet the tenor is almost allegorical. The nation's hoop is broken; we are "below the reservation," after "the long removal." ("Removal" is as loaded a word for Indians as "holocaust" is for Jews.) Grandpa explains: herons are ghosts of people unable to rest. But there is a way back, symbolized by the dream, with its full Native American implication of a creative source:

Sometimes now, we dream our way back to the heron dance.
Their long wings are bending the air
into circles through which they fall.
They rise again in shifting wheels.
How long must we live in the broken figures
their necks make, narrowing the sky?

The fall is really part of the full wing-beat and they rise again. The process is cyclical, circular. The poem ends, not with a question but a statement, almost an exclamation. This part of the circle has to be endured; it is as if it is necessary to live in the broken figures for a time, in the narrowing. As Yeats said, only that which has been broken can be whole.

Voices of the Past: The Oral Tradition

The oral tradition of speech is vital to Native American poets. In the anthology and elsewhere, poets write of how they were told what to do and how to be—told stories and legends. Time and again in the anthology one finds the presence of living voices, the commitment to orality in the nonoral medium of print, a form "locked in space, inanimate."34 To be sure, Native American poets are aware of the emphasis in the poetry of the 50s and 60s on "breath"—one recalls the Black Mountain School, and in particular Charles Olson's important essay "Projective Verse" (1960), as well as the Beat poets, Allen Ginsberg especially. But the human voice in these pages—

Reverencing Tradition: Ancestors and Myth

Parents play a major part in Native American poetry, in the passing on of tradition; Momaday has noted in House Made of Dawn, the oral tradition is always but one generation from extinction.39 None of the poets surpasses Simon Ortiz in parent-reverence. We see his father in the poem "A Story of How a Wall Stands," a poem about the oral tradition itself, and in his essay "Song, Poetry, and Language—Expression and Perception," where he gives a full and loving portrait of his father, the "thousand year old man," keeper of ancient traditions.40 Paula Gunn Allen has described how her mother constantly told her stories, "and in these stories she told me who I was, who I was supposed to be, whom I came from, and who would follow me."41

Grandparents play a large part, perhaps because they are felt to be closer to sources. Simon Ortiz was told by his grandfather, medicine man and elder of the kiva, "how we must sacredly concern ourselves with the people and the holy earth."42 He remembers how his words "were about how we must regard ourselves and others with compassion and love."43 This belief permeates Ortiz's work. "My grandfather represented for me a link to the past that is important for me to hold in my memory because it is not only memory but knowledge that substantiates my present existence,"44 Ortiz writes.

"He and the grandmothers and grandfathers before him thought about us as they lived, confirmed in their belief of a continuing life, and they brought our present beings into existence by the beliefs they held. The consciousness of that belief is what informs my present concerns with language, poetry and fiction."45 Such a statement holds true for many Native American writers. Meaningful and continuous contact with the past is a source of great strength.
Balancing Life: A Journey towards Wholeness

The meandering, the wandering, the winding path of life — it's all about balance. Life is a journey, and it's crucial to maintain a sense of balance and harmony. We often look for fulfillment and happiness in external factors, but the true path to contentment lies within. By focusing on personal growth, emotional well-being, and spiritual connection, we can create a more balanced and fulfilling life.

In this journey, it's important to recognize and appreciate the beauty in everyday moments. Taking time to pause, breathe, and connect with nature can bring a sense of peace and tranquility. Engaging in physical activities, such as yoga or meditation, can also help cultivate a sense of inner peace.

Balancing life is about finding the right equilibrium between work and personal life, between the need to achieve and the desire to relax. It's about maintaining a healthy balance between our obligations and our desires. By living a balanced life, we can enjoy a greater sense of well-being and fulfillment.

The road to wholeness is a thoughtful and deliberate journey. It requires self-awareness, self-compassion, and the willingness to make changes when needed. By embracing this journey, we can move towards a more balanced and harmonious life.
The American Indian Experience: Reclamation Policy in the 1950s

1. Introduction, 1932.
3. The American Indian Experience: Reclamation Policy in the 1950s.

NOTES

- For a more complete discussion of the American Indian Experience, see the section "Chains of History" in the book "The American Indian Experience: Reclamation Policy in the 1950s."


