



Gordon Henry, Jr.

## A SELECTION OF UNPUBLISHED POETRY<sup>1</sup>

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

---

<sup>1</sup> 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 disipate 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.

\* \* \*