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"TO PUT THE SUN BACK IN THE SKY:" NURTURING KINSHIP TIES AND RECOVERING THE ANCESTORS IN D'ARCY MCNICKLE'S *WIND FROM AN ENEMY SKY*

Native American cultures have always devoted a great deal of attention to the memory of the ancestors and the importance such memory assumes in perpetuating a specific tribal identity across different generations. This may seem to be quite an obvious statement, given the frequency with which such phrases or notions as 'respect for the ancestors,' 'ancestral wisdom,' 'ancestral worship,' 'legacy of the ancestors,' and so on have come up in serious and less serious accounts of American Indian cultural traditions—ranging from biographies to collections of myths and folktales. This notion, however, has also become easy prey to oversimplifications and misappropriations on the part of non-Indian subjects, especially with respect to the complex mechanisms of knowledge production oriented toward a Western audience fascinated with 'remote' or 'exotic' cultures. In American fiction and popular culture, all of this can be seen in the persistence of stereotypes like that of the old Indian shaman, and in the popularity of narrative schemes where the discovery of Indian ancestry or the proximity to Indian elders provide a (usually white or mixed-blood) character with a regenerative, even mystical experience that grants a privileged access to the secrets of life.[2] What has often been missing in these accounts is an evaluation of the way the memory of the ancestors has been made alive, meaningful, and relevant within American Indian communities. In other words, what has been too often overlooked is the variety and complexity through which the connection with the ancestors manifests itself within Native communities, as well as the 'places' (to be intended both in a physical and figurative sense) in which this connection takes place. As a literary scholar, not specifically trained in anthropology or ethnology, I chose to develop this line of inquiry within the field of Native American literature, by focusing in particular on the novel *Wind from an Enemy Sky* (published posthumously in 1978) by Salish-Cree author D'Arcy McNickle. Limiting my analysis to one single work entails two important considerations. First, given the extreme variety of Native American cultures across the North American continent, I do not purport to extend my arguments to any American Indian tribal context other than that McNickle referred to. Second, I believe much of what I am going to argue about McNickle's novel has a number of implications that may hold true to different American Indian cultures across North America. Such apparently contradictory claims can coexist by virtue of the fact that, even though in *Wind* McNickle was clearly writing about one of the Northwestern tribes (Salish/Flathead) he knew very well—having been born and raised in it—, yet he chose to avoid any reference to a specific tribal affiliation, as if to translate on a pan-tribal level the relevance of the issues at stake. After all, despite the wide variety of their tribal origins, McNickle and countless Indian writers before and after him have been struggling on a common ground in their act of writing about and reflecting upon a shared history of colonization and genocide, but also one of resistance and survival.

Before moving on to analyze the theme of the ancestors in McNickle's novel, I would like to venture into a brief digression with the purpose of contrasting his vision of Native American kinship relationships with the way some of his non-Indian contemporaries elaborated upon the idea of 'Indian ancestors.' Differently from a later generation of American Indian writers (that of N. Scott Momaday, Leslie M. Silko, James Welch in the

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[2] Emblematic in this respect is the controversial novel *The Education of Little Tree* (1976) by Forrest Carter (pseudonym of Asa Earl Carter). The book was later revealed to be a literary hoax, and its author was discovered to have been a member of the Ku Klux Klan and a supporter of right-wing segregationist politician George Wallace.

late 1960s and 1970s), McNickle's literary career spanned over a period when the survival of tribal cultures was severely threatened by a plethora of federal policies that attempted to assimilate the Indian into American society, and aimed to erase the reality of Indian tribalism altogether.[3] This is proved by the fact that, in the first decades of the 20th century, the Native American population across the US was dwindling in numbers and amounted approximately to 250,000 units, only to grow significantly in the second half of the century (Moore 175). Yet, while the existence of a vital Indian tribalism seemed to be fatally endangered, and the political and cultural autonomy of indigenous people continually denied, in the white American imagination of the 1920s and 1930s the Indian constituted a persistent image of national identity and was appropriated as a powerful signifier of 'American' cultural authenticity. Let us think, for instance, of the particular kind of American Modernism "on native grounds," which was characterized, among other things, by a deep commitment "to the nativist project of racializing the American" (Michaels 13).[4] This nativist modernism was sponsored by such writers as D.H. Lawrence and William Carlos Williams. Differently from other crucial figures like T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Lawrence and Williams did not turn to the ruins of old European culture to engage the modernist predicament but instead found in the simplicity and 'primitiveness' of American culture and its geography a way to respond to their own sense of cultural anxiety. In his *Studies in Classic American Literature*, Lawrence elaborated the notion, central to his work, of a "Spirit of Place" that constituted the truly American character, and saw it as deriving from the heritage of its aboriginal inhabitants. Despite that, however, he famously stated that "the Red Man is dead" (40) and now inhabited, demon-like, the unconscious part of the American psyche, rather than the real life of the nation. Quite curiously, when he came to America, Lawrence eagerly looked for a direct contact with America's aboriginal people in their most *living* cultural manifestations, as his involvement in ritual practices and ceremonies at Taos Pueblo (New Mexico) attested.

The white-centered discourse on the Indian as ghostly or vanishing presence has become the object of a great body of scholarship that I will not venture to discuss here.[5] Suffice it to say that if such rhetorical elaboration had functioned in the 19th century as a prelude to removal (Bergland 4), in the first half of the 20th century it engendered a sort of primitivist nostalgia that informed much of American culture. It is highly revealing that some of the most prominent American literary voices of those decades inscribed images of Indian ancestors within their fictional universe. Among them is Ernest Hemingway, who in the Nick Adams stories extensively featured Indian themes and characters. The principal geographical background of these stories are the Michigan backwoods where Hemingway spent many of his boyhood summers and got acquainted with the Ojibway families living in the area. As one of his earliest fictional selves, Nick Adams represented for Hemingway a nostalgic and irretrievable state of being in a world whose idyllic and primitive

[3] Crucial among these policies was the 1887 General Allotment Act, also known as the Dawes Act, by which Indian land (previously held in a communal form) was divided into 40 to 80-acre lots and assigned to individual Indians who could then be granted US citizenship after a 25-year trust period. The surplus land was then made available to white settlement. The main effect of the Dawes Act was an extreme fragmentation of Indian tribal lands, together with a loss of more than 90 million acres which passed from Indian into white ownership.

[4] Of course, this is not to be confused with that kind of 'ethnic' modernism that only in recent decades has been addressed as a serious cultural phenomenon and often discussed in contrast with the modernist writings of more 'canonical' (invariably male and white) authors. Studies like those by Alicia Kent and Rita Keresztesi, for instance, have made it possible to speak of a Native American or Jewish American modernism—in addition to the more obvious and longer-established African American version. D'Arcy McNickle, together with other writers like John Joseph Mathews (Osage) and Zitkala-Sa (Dakota), is considered to be the most representative author in this trend, though rarely discussed in exclusive relation to it.

[5] Apart from Leslie Fiedler's classic, and somewhat dated, *The Return of the Vanishing American* (1968), worth mentioning are Brian W. Dippie's *The Vanishing American: White Attitudes and US-Indian Policy* (1991) and Renée Bergland's *The National Uncanny: Indian Ghosts and American Subjects* (2000). In particular, Bergland's study offers the best account, to date, of that phenomenon of 'Indian spectralization' which contributed to the formation of a national subjectivity in American letters: "Native American ghosts haunt American literature because the American nation is compelled to return again and again to an encounter that makes it both sorry and happy, a defiled grave upon which it must continually rebuild the American subject" (22).

character placed it in a remote and quasi-mythical dimension. In stories such as "Now I Lay Me," "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife," "Big Two-Hearted River," Hemingway invoked Indian ancestors for Nick's father, Doctor Adams, in an attempt "to place [him] within a paternal genealogy linking Indians, father, and son" (Schedler 55). Probably as a result of his biographical experience, since his father had always been deeply fascinated with things Indian, Hemingway seemed to feel the urge of building up an Indian persona for himself through an imagined "tribal genealogy." As Christopher Schedler convincingly argued, "Hemingway's identification with Indians can be seen not only as an attempt to choose his own personal ancestors, […] but as an attempt to critique and renew his culture. [His] construction of Indian ancestors in the Nick Adams stories can then be seen as the paradigmatic model for the author's lifelong quest for 'tribal fathers'" (Schedler 57-58). What should not escape our attention, however, is that in Hemingway's Nick Adams stories the Indians *as a people* have already been dispossessed and disempowered: they persist merely as traces of a haunting past, inhabiting the environment under inanimate and animate life forms.[6]

Another important writer of the first half of the century who featured Indian ancestors in his fiction is of course William Faulkner. As the background for most of his novels and short-stories, the fictional geography of Yoknapatawpha County in Mississippi is a multiethnic universe whose origins date back to the period when the Chickasaw Indians were the sole inhabitants of the land. In order to anchor his mythology of the Deep South to an aboriginal past, Faulkner grounded the fictional history of Yoknapatawpha in pre-modern Indian history, though candidly admitting that he did not rely on any particular historical source to conceive of his Indians, but that he simply "made them up" (qtd in Weaver 57). In this respect, the most paradigmatic Indian character is that of Ikkemotubbe, who appears in the appendix to *The Sound and the Fury* as the first entry in the genealogy of the Compson family. Here he is described as a "dispossessed American king" and "a man of wit and imagination," who "granted out of his vast lost domain a solid square mile of virgin north Mississippi […] to the grandson of a Scottish refugee […] in partial return for the right to proceed in peace, by whatever means he and his people saw fit, afoot or ahorse provided they were Chickasaw horses, to the wild western land presently to be called Oklahoma" (329). Through Ikkemotubbe, Faulkner sets forth a truly Indian ancestor that could be claimed by all of its succeeding generations of white occupants, and qualifies the world of Yoknapatawpha as deeply rooted in the land and in the indigenous past. At the same time, however, and most crucially, he naturalizes the act of land acquisition as if it were a willing concession made by an 'Indian monarch' to a 'white refugee' on equal terms. In this way, he erases a whole history of violent colonization and dispossession of Indian land in the South that initiated with the Spanish and the French in the 17th century and would culminate in the Jacksonian policy of Indian Removal in the 1830s.

Ultimately, and probably in more explicit terms than one finds in Hemingway, Faulkner's Indian ancestors are already dead and vanished from the very moment they are conceived as such. In the same passage from *The Sound and the Fury* quoted above, Ikkemotubbe is said to have anglicized his French appellation of "Du Homme" into "Doom": as Jace Weaver put it, "the signification is unmistakable. Ikkemotubbe, like the other absent members of his people, is doomed, foreordained to vanish in the face of Amer-European civilization and its inexorable logic" (59). The use of the very term 'ancestor' is somewhat problematic, since the kind of Indian genealogy Faulkner is tracing has to do more with a transmission of 'land spirit' (to echo D.H. Lawrence's formulation) than with direct blood lineage. It is true that, as happens in stories like "Big Woods" or "A Justice," we are presented with living descendants of Indian forebears, but in most cases they resemble, in Weaver's terms, "mixed-blood simulacra as remainders of [their ancestors'] presence past" (62). In Faulkner's narrative present, it is primarily through toponymy that Indians signal their past existence and, less frequently, through the land-based values and beliefs some of his non-Indian characters display. Though to different extent, the examples of Hemingway and Faulkner testify to the validity of David Moore's claim that "America is built on a tautology: Indians must have disappeared because we're here now; we're

[6] In his analysis of "Big Two-Hearted River," for example, Philip Melling showed how Hemingway was able to submerge under the textual surface of the story a whole discourse on Indianness and the Indian martial ethos. Melling also argued that in such thematic inscription there was an "explicit recognition of the political failure to empower the Native American together with an exploration of what happens when the Indian is relegated to a peripheral role in the life of the nation "(63n3).

here now because Indians must have disappeared. The cyclic reasoning of this racist formulation overlooks the facts of Indian presence and American pluralism" (11). Even though their fiction frequently acknowledged that pluralism, at least with respect to American racial diversity, the specific inscription of Indians in their works evoked a narrative of absence rather than one of presence.

Concluding our digression with the example of Faulkner, we cannot overlook the fact that some of the most prominent Native American writers of the late-20th century admired and/or showed their indebtedness to him.[7] However, this has to be most likely attributed to Faulkner's profound sensitivity for and fascination with the land and the way this shaped the life and moral character of its inhabitants, rather than to his representation of derelict Indian and mixed-blood subjects. In fact, if there is a single statement that holds true for the whole of American Indian writing, it is that there has seldom been any trace of that rhetoric of victimry and vanishing previously underscored.[8] Native American literature has offered countless examples of the way Indian cultures have conceived of their genealogical relationships and related to the memory of their forebears to signal their continuing presence and vitality on the American continent. Especially during periods of deep trouble and/or impending crisis resulting from US colonialist policies, Native authors have repeatedly stressed the importance of recovering a connection with the past in order to restore a sense of cultural continuity that could benefit the present life of the community as well as that of the individual. Throughout the five centuries of Indian-white relationships in the US, there has hardly been a moment when the survival of Indian communities and individuals has not been endangered. Without making easy simplifications, one can also affirm that in American Indian literature the ancestors have almost always been imagined as a living presence, rather than as a nostalgic recollection from an irretrievable past. Talking about the ancestors in works by Native authors means talking about the configuration of kinship structures, how these link together past, present and future generations and how they help the (usually younger) protagonists overcome a difficult situation. Therefore, connecting with the ancestors does not equate with a generic wish for having the past turned into present again, or for simply restoring tribal usages and traditions that the painful processes of colonization, modernization and forced assimilation to Anglo-American values have inexorably swept away. This act of recovery corresponds to a gnoseological and cultural strategy to cope with the inevitability of change in a more responsible way, in respect to the continuity of tribal identity and in obedience to the idea of tribal sovereignty.[9] In novels like Momaday's *House Made of Dawn*, Silko's *Ceremony* and Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, the memory of the ancestors (understood as memories recollected both by and about them) plays a crucial role in the process of ritual healing undertaken by the young protagonists who have undergone trauma, alienation, physical and mental distress.[10] Through the act of storytelling, the elders establish a living connection with the mythical narrations of a given tribal culture, which in turn provide a source of communal or individual regeneration in the face of new historical or cultural challenges. In these and many other works by Native authors, one also realizes that the presence of the forebears, either living or dead, is made tangible and concrete in the way it is embodied in the natural world, or, better, in that complex bond weaving together people, land and stories. Thus, there has to be an effort on the part of the reader to appraise the *place* occupied by the ancestors, the way in which their memory

[7] Among the most well-known are N. Scott Momaday, Leslie M. Silko, and in particular Louise Erdrich, whose novel cycle starting with *Love Medicine* (1984) has many points of contact with Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha saga (see Weaver 53-57) .

[8] I deliberately used the term 'victimry' instead of the more common 'victimization,' borrowing it from Gerald Vizenor's set of neologisms which appear throughout both his fiction and critical writing. Frequently employed in the field of Native American Studies, they provide a new vocabulary to understand Native-centered acts of survival (renamed by Vizenor as 'survivance') in opposition to the colonial language of tragedy and victimization imposed on American Indians.

[9] Identity and sovereignty have always been inseparable key concepts within the different subfields of American Indian Studies. Now more than ever, there seem to be endless attempts at re-defining and re-formulating them in the discussion of Native American cultural and especially literary expressions. For an up-to-date, text-adherent and fascinating sample of that, I would recommend Moore's study, which discusses identity and sovereignty along with other fundamental notions such as community, authenticity and irony.

[10] For a comparative analysis of this theme in Momaday's *House Made of Dawn* and Welch's *Winter in the Blood*, see my essay "La memoria degli antenati nella letteratura nativo-americana contemporanea" (in Italian), especially pages 166-181.

becomes spatialized, rather than simply evoked across temporal distances: this is something which has often to be understood in quite different terms from those of Euro-American culture. For all of these reasons, D'Arcy McNickle's novel *Wind from an Enemy Sky* constitutes an appropriate subject of inquiry.

The third and last novel by D'Arcy McNickle, following *The Surrounded* (1936) and *Runner in the Sun* (1954), *Wind from an Enemy Sky* was published posthumously in 1978 but it actually had been started in the late 1930s. Starting with an early draft titled "The Indian Agent," McNickle kept adding to it and revised the manuscript over a span of forty years, until his death in 1977.[11] Along with a troubled editorial history, the long process of revision signals a deep and tenacious engagement with what its author apparently deemed as a very relevant story. Moreover, it suggests that McNickle could bring into the final text a five-decade-long experience as novelist, anthropologist, activist, cultural mediator—in a word, as a Native American person deeply engaged with Indian issues. At the center of the story are the Little Elk People, a fictitious Indian tribe which is nonetheless an easily recognizable stand-in for a band of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai tribes in Montana, where McNickle grew in. Most of the events are seen through the eyes of Antoine, a young member of the tribe who has just come back from a boarding school in Oregon, where he had been forcefully taken, and can now rejoin the tribe under the guide and protection of his grandfather Bull. Years before, Bull and his elder brother Henry Jim had caused a rupture within the tribe as a result of the latter's more favorable attitude toward the adoption of a white lifestyle, in contrast to Bull's more traditionalist, proudly anti-assimilationist stance. In an act of defiance, Henry Jim had also been responsible for the cession of the precious Feather Boy bundle to a white missionary. Such parcel consisted of a lot of sacred tribal objects whose loss had caused much agitation and unrest within the tribe, further increased by the construction of a water dam within the boundaries of the reservation.[12] In one of the opening chapters, as his death is quickly approaching, Henry Jim visits Bull's camp and offers to reconcile with his brother and his own people, stating his personal commitment to the endeavor to bring back the Feather Boy bundle. To this purpose, he aims to ask for the support of Toby Rafferty, the seemingly tolerant and unprejudiced white agent of the Little Elk reservation. However, things get quite complicated once a maintenance worker at the dam is killed by one of Bull's nephews using the old chief's gun. At the same time, Rafferty learns from Adam Pell, engineer of the dam project and main sponsor of an Americana museum in New York, that the bundle he himself had once gotten from the missionary was inadvertently destroyed and cannot possibly be returned to the Little Elk tribe. Events reach a tragic climax at the novel's conclusion, where Antoine, together with old vision-seeker Two Sleeps and Bull's wife Veronica, witness the final confrontation among Rafferty, Pell, Bull and his younger brother Louise. Notwithstanding the agent's advice to the contrary, Pell reveals to the Indians the fate of the bundle, and offers to replace it with another religious symbol (a Peruvian statue of the Virgin Mary). In a burst of anger, Bull shoots Pell and Rafferty but is killed, in his turn, by the tribal policeman Sun Child.

The situation within the Little Elk community is representative of what many Native American reservations had to undergo in the years following the Allotment Act (1887), when Indian people witnessed a progressive diminishing of communally-held tribal land and an erosion of traditional tribal power that went together with it. In that period, the federal government's oppressive policies toward forced assimilation of Native tribes were at their most acute, and took place at a variety of social and cultural places.[13] Antoine's elder relatives, Bull

[11] Interestingly for the purpose of literary periodization, the temporal arch delimiting the composition of his last novel makes McNickle a sort of bridging figure between an early phase of Indian literature and the later, to use Kenneth Lincoln's fortunate expression, "Native American Renaissance" years of Momaday, Welch, and Silko.

[12] Both the dam and the sacred bundle episodes seem to come from McNickle's experience of similar issues in real life. Shortly before starting to work on the novel, McNickle unsuccessfully attempted to submit an article dealing with the controversy over the construction of a dam by the Rocky Mountain Power Company on the Salish reservation. Moreover, in 1937-1938, as a government representative he took part in the negotiations to return a sacred buffalo medicine horn to a band of the Gros Ventre tribe of North Dakota who had journeyed to Washington, D.C., in order to reclaim their sacred object (Owens 80).

[13] In addition to the Allotment Act, worth mentioning is the terrible impact that boarding schools had on Indian children and families. In the notorious formulation of Richard Louis Pratt, founder of Carlisle Indian School in

and Henry Jim, represent the two poles across the range of possibilities available to Indian people in their cultural confrontation with white culture: the former has chosen to live in the mountains and to act as an intransigent guardian of traditional lifestyles, whereas the latter has moved down into the valley and adopted the white ways in a number of activities, from farming to housing. The events leading up to the narrative seem to exemplify, through the brothers' enmity, an irresolvable tension between the opposing forces of change and tradition, a fracture which is further exacerbated by the killing of the white engineer at the dam. However, the most crucial Indian-centered issue on the present level of the narrative is Henry Jim's attempt at achieving reconciliation within the Little Elk community. Contrary to his lifestyle so far, his endeavor now seems to lean decidedly toward "the ancient ways to power and knowledge" (Purdy 111), and is dramatized primarily through the events regarding the recovery of the sacred bundle. The bundle clearly symbolizes the continuance of traditional tribal culture and therefore becomes valuable for the whole community rather than merely for the individuals engaged in its search. But, as was the case with McNickle's first novel *The Surrounded*, the dynamics of cultural confrontation between the white and the Indian world unfolds toward a tragic outcome in the novel's ending. That seems to discourage any optimistic reading of the conclusion, and in fact any hope for reconciliation is ultimately shattered long before the final shootout, when we learn that the sacred bundle has been reduced to dust.[14] What remains valuable and still redeemable, however, is the process through which the entire Little Elk tribe has put aside personal interests to pursue a common goal, and the cultural energy that has been mobilized in such struggle for continuance and survival. Here, I will argue that such mobilization has much to do with the ancestors' vital heritage embodied in the land and in the stories, which is then to be transmitted to the young Antoine, the final repository of his people's plight as a future tribal leader. By accompanying and educating the young protagonist throughout the story, the elder characters like Bull, Henry Jim or Two Sleeps function as ancestral figures, and provide a network of relationships which reinforce Antoine's sense of belonging in a tribal community and alert him to the need of cultural resilience.

In a way, Antoine seems to anticipate the later figures of Abel, Tayo and the unnamed narrator in the previously cited novels by Momaday, Silko and Welch respectively. He has just come back from a traumatic experience, the forced four-year stay in a boarding school in Oregon, and he needs to reconnect with his own tribal community looking for new familial ties, since both his parents are dead. In particular, his mother Celeste died out of the despair and mental derangement that the sudden abduction of his eight-year son by government officials had caused her. As we learn in the opening chapter of the novel, it is through his grandfather Bull that Antoine has begun to reunite with his people. Moreover, his reintegration is sanctioned during an important ceremonial practice, the midsummer's dance Antoine has decided to take part in: during the fourth and last night of the ceremony, when the dancing goes on till dawn despite the white government's restrictions, the boy is literally sustained by the hand of his grandfather and invited to follow his steps, an act of recognition that causes in Antoine a "great excitement burning inside" (4). A similar quasi-epiphanic moment occurs a few days later when Bull and his grandson ride to the upper country to look at the newly-built dam which has stopped the water from flowing down the mountain slope. Antoine had been told this was a sacred "place of power, […] and it was important that he begin to understand the proper way to behave" (4-5). In the boy's self-admoniton "to keep his thoughts good" we may infer that this area was

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Pennsylvania, the objective of government education was "to kill the Indian and save the man," and thus to operate a forceful assimilation of the younger generations into mainstream American society. Overall, the boarding school experience resulted in a loss of tribal language, culture, identity, and in the breaking up of Indian families which contributed to the dispersion of Indian communities throughout the late 19th and 20th centuries.

[14] Much of the critical debate about the novel has centered on a pessimistic vs. optimistic evaluation of the story, especially in light of the tragic and bloody ending. For Louis Owens, the novel ultimately registers the failure in communication between the white and Indian worlds, the inability to listen and understand across the cultural divide, and the tragic consequences such failure had on the future of Indian people. At the other side of the critical spectrum, John Purdy rejects Owens' fatalistic reading and focuses more on "the text's tribal point of view" (113), which—primarily by means of the journey motif and the process of education undergone by Antoine—insists upon the durability of Indian culture and the maintenance of their traditions. Though not directly engaging in a general assessment of the novel's message, my evaluation leans more toward Purdy's perspective.

probably an ancient burial ground, a suggestion reinforced by McNickle's description of the gravel and sand in the dry stream as similar to "bleached bones" (2). Similarly aware of these things and even more concerned about the sacrilegious profanation of the landscape, Bull is furious about the white men who "killed the water" (3) and in a gesture of powerless rage he shoots at the concrete wall, "a terrible thing to witness" to the eyes of young Antoine, not used to such fits of rage from his grandfather.

As the scene at the dam makes clear, Antoine learns from his grandfather's authority and strength as a tribal leader as much as he does from the display of the old man's weaknesses and manifested concerns. In this sense, Bull is a fascinating character because his role as protector and guide to Antoine runs parallel to his capacity to reflect upon his shortcomings and strive to make up for his mistakes. Bull has much to reproach to himself, starting from the quarrel with his brother Henry Jim that literally split up the tribe, to his negligence when he let Antoine be captured and taken to the boarding school by the government agents. In chapter 17, as he and Antoine are riding toward the Little Elk Agency to meet the white agent, he regrets the fact that he was not the first to take the initial step toward reconciling with his brother, and that he just stood waiting:

> People of long ago would have said he played poorly his part of the younger brother. It was not intended that the elder brother should shame himself by coming first to admit a fault; what was expected, rather, was that he would provide the feast to show that all was forgiven—after his younger kinsman took the fault to himself. A proper world was so ordered.
> […]
> Because he had waited and had not taken the first step, it fell on him all at once. He could remember times when, if he had acted differently, the trouble might have ended. Times when he might have sent word. When he might have talked in council. When he might have gone himself, taking his kinsmen, and stayed to visit. Two Sleeps had come from a vigil in the mountains on many occasions to tell how he had dreamed and how peace would be restored: Bull remembered those times, how he accused the old holy man of meddling, and how afterward in anger he went himself to the mountains and had no vision of his own. (129-130)

As he admits his failing to stand by traditional customs, Bull indirectly acknowledges the goodness of those norms and their importance for the well-being of his people in a "proper world." At the same time, however, by listing a long series of might-haves, Bull is employing the language of remorse, and his grief is heightened by the awareness that his faults come to bear upon the youngest generation: "Bull knew that a hurt had come to the boy, because his own elders had quarreled. The very kinsmen who were to guide him and make him into a strong man. He would find a way to take away the hurt" (130). The use of the interior monologue here and elsewhere suggests the urgency of Bull's feeling of responsibility toward his grandson and his people. He realizes that both he and his fathers before him were too slow to understand the threat posed by white intrusion into the land. As Bull evokes his childhood years spent with his good-spirited father Enemy Horse, he remembers how laughter, instead of anger or fear, was the most common reaction to the coming of these strange people from the east. In particular, he recalls the night he spent at the house of a couple of schoolteachers, who had come to his father's camp in order to have the chief's son enrolled as the first Indian pupil in their newly established school. The experience is described in very humorous terms, with young Bull running back to the camp half-naked only to find his father laughing "like a coyote" (135).[15] Bull's memories alert us to the complexity of white-Indian cultural clash, and to the misunderstandings that accompanied the first encounters between the two cultures. Moreover, on a more personal level, they directly relate to Antoine's later, much more traumatic experience at the boarding school, which is a tragic re-staging of Bull's previous (mis)adventure. In his troubled reflections, Bull reveals an urge to tell his grandson about the old days, and explain to him why his elders at first were not afraid of white people. And yet, his angry thoughts prevent him from imagining other possible ways of understanding between the two cultures

[15] Quite significantly in a work dominated by serious and often bleak tones, humorous moments are nonetheless present in *Wind* and are almost always voiced by the older characters (Louis, Iron Child, Two Sleeps): most of the time, it is a self-teasing humor, whose "reductive function" serves to personalize and humanize the characters, in contrast to the tragically heroic stereotype of the stoic Indian (Moore 357-358).

that would not amount to violent confrontation. Throughout the novel, Bull is bound by a "shell of hardness" (106) that will inexorably lead him to a tragic end, but such failure on his part will prove an invaluable lesson for Antoine (Purdy 126-127).

What is crucial in McNickle's portrayal of Bull's father-like relationship to Antoine is certainly the value of and respect for tribal knowledge the former feels invested to bestow onto the latter before tragedy breaks loose within the Little Elk community—something which will be apparent in Bull's telling of the Feather Boy story that will be discussed later. But such teaching is no easy task. The observance of traditional tribal culture is precisely what set aside Bull, and the people living with him, from his older brother Henry Jim and his followers. Henry Jim's first apparition at Bull's camp resembles that of a ghost conjured up by the spirits, and everybody seems to be deeply troubled by his sudden visit. By choosing to adopt the "new path" of white lifeways and giving out the Feather Boy bundle to a white missionary many years before, Henry Jim initiated a quarrel with his brother Bull that caused the tribe to split up, and therefore seems to be mostly accountable for his people's continuing sufferance. But the ensuing conversation among the tribal elders, which is punctuated by Antoine's silent comments, is less oriented toward digging up the past wounds than toward nurturing a hope for future reconciliation. Bull starts to think that his brother must have suffered, too, and finally embraces Jim's invitation to pull close together for the return of the sacred bundle. His brother's conciliatory gesture makes him realize that a "good feeling" between them needs to be sustained and passed on: "when McNickle's Bull tries to protect that 'good feeling,' he is striving to affirm generational connections between his grandson and a physical and conceptual space peopled with ancestors" (Moore 40). What had started as a confrontation between anger (Bull) and regret (Henry Jim) ends up as a manifestation of communal power and resistance against the specter of cultural annihilation—in other words, as an affirmation of tribal sovereignty.

Like Bull, Henry Jim acts as an ancestral figure in the novel, because through his gestures in life and death he epitomizes the resilience and continuance of Indian culture vis-a-vis the inevitability of cultural change. This is made clear by a later sequence in which most of the tribal members are gathered at Henry Jim's place even as he is about to die. Much to Antoine's and the reader's surprise, Henry Jim has moved from his house, where he had been living for years following the white ways, into a traditional tepee. The sense of uneasiness that accompanies Antoine's first glimpse of Henry Jim's house is soon replaced by one of familiarity and mutual recognition. As he lies wrapped in a blanket, Henry Jim reaches out for Antoine's hand, and addresses the boy with solemn words: "You will be a strong man, [i]t is here in your hand. Even now your strength passes to me, as it will pass to your people when the time comes" (116). Though not explicitly declared, the exchange is of course of a mutual nature: Antoine passes some of his strength to the dying great-uncle even as the latter nourishes the boy with a higher wisdom. Henry Jim's act of choosing a tepee instead of a European-styled house as his death bed is extremely crucial on a larger cultural plan.[16] It signals the resilience of tribal culture and identity in the face of hostile forces that aim to dispose of Indians, and suggests a return to a more intimate relationship with the land as the ground where the Little Elk people can nurture themselves. Through his death, moreover, Henry Jim brings to completion a process of self-sacrifice that had been manifest since his return among the Little Elk community: in order to reconcile with his people, not only has he disavowed the lifestyle he followed for decades, but he has humbly lowered himself in front of his brother too—as suggested by Bull's previously quoted monologue about brotherly duties. Sacrificing the individual for the survival of the community is, again, an affirmation of tribal sovereignty. David Moore has well summarized this complex dynamics by observing that "sacrifice in McNickle's fiction is about the generations. In recognition of ancestors and future children who seem to be elsewhere but who are present in an animate earth and sky, such sacrifice maintains the sovereignty of the people by giving up whatever is required, even life" (81).

Henry Jim is the character who tries the hardest to bridge the gap between generations, by means of his personal commitment to the retrieval of the Feather Boy bundle. To that purpose, he believes he can trust

[16] Besides that, while he is lying on his death-bed, Henry Jim is unable to employ the English language he had always used at home, and in uttering the last words to his kinsmen he resorts to the Salish language.

the Indian agent, Toby Rafferty, and personally seeks his support, thereby initiating a form of intercultural dialogue and mediation. With Henry Jim's death, however, the effort has to be taken up by the other tribal elders, who remain nonetheless quite suspicious of the government official, despite Rafferty's good intentions. In the resolution of such troublesome impasse, a crucial role is played by Two Sleeps, the oldest man in the tribe, held in great respect by all tribal leaders, who sometimes refer to him as "Grandfather." Despite the fact that he has no direct kinship ties to Antoine nor to any other tribal member, Two Sleeps is one of McNickle's most interesting creations because of the way he connects with the natural world and because he has access to a superior form of knowledge. Almost blind, and frequently thought to be half-asleep whenever he is addressed for advice, Two Sleeps is in fact "a diviner by dreams, a holy man" (12). Antoine learns that he once belonged to another tribe, and that he had been welcomed into the Little Elk group after wandering half-naked across the mountains for days. His power and authority are made clear from the very beginning of the novel, when he anticipates the imminent arrival of Henry Jim at Bull's camp, and then convinces the chief to trust the sincerity of his elder brother's plea for reconcilement. Most importantly, Two Sleeps seems to be the only one to foresee the impending tragedy luring over the Little Elk tribe, and tries hard to prevent it through his vision-seeking power. In chapter 24, we come across a lyrically-phrased description of Two Sleeps' journey into the mountains, which he undertakes to get a message of hope for his people by praying and dreaming. The ride into the snow-clad mountains becomes a mystical experience, as the old man re-lives, in the cold of the nights, the long-past events leading to his fortuitous arrival among the Little Elk people:

> A man by himself was nothing, a shout in the wind. But men together, each acting for each other and as one—even a strong wind from an enemy sky had to respect their power.
> This night he was acting for those who took him in as a kinsman—nothing else would prevail, not even death. (197)

As Henry Jim had done before, but now arguably in a more powerful way, Two Sleeps articulates his sense of responsibility toward the community: such effort does not simply come out of an act of gratitude toward his 'kinsmen,' but is rooted in his duty as a vision-seeker who has seen and experienced many things beyond the reach of his people. His enlarged vision derives from his ability to connect with the land and decipher its hidden messages:

> To be born was not enough. To live in the world was not enough. […] One had to reach. That was what a man had to do. It pulled him along. He had to reach with his mind into all things, the things that grew from small beginnings and the things that stayed firmly placed and enduring. He had to know more and more, until he himself dissolved and became part of everything else—and then he would know certainly. Reaching with his mind was part of that, a kind of dissolving into the mist that was at once the small seed from which the pine tree would grow and the mountain that endured forever. And a man was there, in the middle, reaching to become part of it. That was something of what it was like to be in the world. (197-198)

In order for the tribe to take control of its own destiny, Two Sleeps feels he has to share with his people the meaning of his visions. However, in a later scene, when Bull and the other tribal leaders question him about his dreaming journey, Two Sleeps weeps "like a child in grief" (219), and is unable to articulate a word. This is a sign of the impending tragedy he has foreseen in the mountains, but it also indicates the pain that goes together with knowing too much: "'I wanted to know everything, to be inside of everything—I thought. But my brothers, that is a terrible thing to want. My heart is already dead'" (220). In this extremely poignant scene, McNickle presents us with the sufferance of an elder who has to bear the painful burden of his visionary powers, and prefers to keep silent rather than reveal the painful truth, i.e. the destruction of the Feather Boy bundle.[17] In the end, as he is about to witness the mortal shootings immediately ensuing from that revelation, he regrets the fact that Bull "will hear it from a stranger" (246), and not from him. For Antoine standing close

[17] As previously mentioned in reference to the use of humor in the novel, such characterization is also a way for McNickle to turn away from the traditional stereotype of the undisturbed, stoic Indian shaman.

by the old man, this is again another powerful lesson about the importance of translating individual experience into a communal plan of mutual sustenance and understanding.

As has been outlined so far, the elder characters in the story (Bull, Henry Jim and Two Sleeps) take on the role of both literal and metaphorical ancestors to the young protagonist Antoine, since they contribute to his process of education and self-understanding by means of their accomplishments *and* their shortcomings. McNickle places much emphasis on the way Antoine responds to the actions, narrations, thoughts of his elder kinsmen. His alternate feelings of curiosity, fear, and wonder toward them almost always develop into a cognitive experience by which Antoine realizes the value of tribal culture, the importance of staying together in the face of external danger, and the necessity of adopting modes of action and thought that may warrant the survival of the community along with the continuance of tribal identity. Much of that is laid out during the sequence in which Antoine hears from Bull the story of the Feather Boy bundle, the sacred object whose recovery can give the Little Elk tribe harmony and strength after years of internecine conflict. The telling takes place quite later in the novel, in chapter 25. Here the narrator describes the winter as "a time for storytelling, for remembering what the old people used to say" (199) but at the same time points out that, after Henry Jim's death and Two Sleeps' ominous vision in the mountains, that particular winter was also one "of uncertainty, of waiting" (202). Bull has spent it thinking about the time when Antoine was kidnapped as a child, and about the harsh accusations his daughter Celeste (Antoine's mother) had charged him with. Despite his constant vicinity to Antoine, Bull is unable to work upon that trauma through any direct reference to it. But as the winter now draws to a close, the old chief appears to be more willing to engage in storytelling with his grandson. He senses that it is time for Antoine to learn "where [the] people came from and how it was in the beginning" (203). Through the Feather Boy legend, Bull discloses a piece of sacred knowledge that will help his successor lead the tribe onto the right path throughout difficult times, since "a people needed young ones who would put the sun back in the sky" (204).

The story of Feather Boy has meaningful implications for the present circumstances of the Little Elk tribe. Through Bull's narration, we learn that Feather Boy is actually Thunderbird, son of the Sun and guardian of his father's shield and arrows. Curious to visit the earth people, he turns into a downy feather and flies down into the camp, soon to realize that people are hungry and in need of support. Assuming the shape of an unusually big baby born to a young woman in the tribe, Thunderbird starts inquiring among the people about what they need most. Being continually marginalized because of his strange appearance, with nobody talking to him except his own mother, he nonetheless realizes that what people are most eager for is obviously food. Thus, he decides to set out on a journey, and flies southward in order to collect various kinds of seeds that will bear edible fruit—corn, beans, potatoes, melons—, together with some tobacco seeds. But on his way back, he decides to drop all of the seeds and keep just what he holds to be the most precious gift, the tobacco, since the smoke of its burning leaves will go up in the air to gratify his father, the Sun, who will then provide the people with everything they need, from edible plants to game. Before leaving the camp and flying back to the sky, Feather Boy gives his mother a bundle containing "all the good things of life," including his "own body" (208): as long as the people keep it, they will be strong and in harmony with each other. If one reads it retrospectively, the Feather Boy story is crucial to understand the sense of cultural helplessness experienced by the Little Elk people with the loss of the sacred bundle, and it certainly provides a better appreciation of the communal effort invested for its return. But the significance of its telling goes beyond that. Most importantly, the story functions as a paradigm of cultural endurance and survival that extends its validity from a mythical past into the present circumstances. McNickle carefully ties its telling with a question that resonates in Antoine's, Bull's and the other leaders' minds: "'What is to happen to us'?" (203). In other words, the story is meaningful not simply as a specimen of tribal lore that retraces the tribe's origins back to a mythical past, but as a source of cultural identity which illuminates the path to be followed toward the future. It is a living thing, perpetuating a power of its own in the act of storytelling. Sharing traits with Henry Jim, Two Sleeps, Bull, and even Antoine, Feather Boy can be seen as a sort of mythical ancestor to the young protagonist: in the same way that the mythical Thunderbird is appointed with the task of revitalizing a suffering and downcast community, Antoine has likewise to inherit the work initiated by his elders and bring it forward for the sake of the whole community. The conclusion is undoubtedly bleak, since it stages the death of almost every adult agent in the novel and proclaims the destruction of the sacred medicine bundle. Yet, it

is extremely significant that those who remain to make a new start from the ashes of hopelessness and destruction are the oldest and the youngest character. Though no longer recoverable in its materiality after its destruction in the museum, the bundle can only be reconstituted by means of a renewed solidarity among generations, to be achieved through the respect of kinship ties, the land and the stories.

As a final note to what has been said so far, the Feather Boy bundle serves to illustrate the conflicting epistemologies of white and Indian cultures in relation to the issues of memorialization and preservation of the human past. For the white characters, the bundle remains essentially a cultural artifact that can be collected and displayed among other innumerable specimens of 'primitive' lore, so as to save it from the inexorable erosion of time. Pell's attempt to substitute it with another sacred symbol "calls to mind the large-scale commodification of culture found in galleries and museums throughout the Western world" (Owens 87), a process that deprived non-western people like Native Americans of most of their material culture. For the Little Elk tribe the bundle is instead a constant reminder of collective endurance, a symbol of their rootedness in the land, and a tangible embodiment of their mythical universe. Once removed from its living context, it loses any sacred power and thus can no longer contribute to sustain the people's struggle for survival. This is especially crucial in light of the fact that, with the transmission of the bundle, the ancestors from the past can perpetuate their commitment to the common good and transmit it to the succeeding generations. With its destruction, all that seems to be left to the Little Elk people is a shattered world, full of sadness and despair. However, despite the tragic conclusion, it must be noted that the whole novel is built from the very beginning on the absence of the bundle, and dramatizes the mobilization of human resources and relationships for its difficult recovery. From this perspective, the narrative trajectory of *Wind from an Enemy Sky* can be read as an attempt to reconstitute a bond among a divided people in order to provide them with a renewed sense of tribal identity and communal strength. After all, the Feather Boy bundle is inseparable from the story attached to it, which will never perish as long as there are new individuals who have grasped its secret and are willing to pass on its enduring significance for the sake of the entire community.

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