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button robe' are preferable. 'Blankets' implies bedding'' (p. 7). I tend to agree with the Book Builders of K'san. Western concepts, when applied indiscriminately, without sensitivity and appreciation of the art form of native peoples can do great violence and harm where there should otherwise be immense beauty and wisdom.

*Robes of Power* will fill your mind with just such knowledge and wisdom and protect the Northwest culture and its many children from the ravages of cruel science and money-hungry religions. The real power, as Plains Indian mythology and cosmology teaches, is in the object and not the individual. We are merely the intermediary between the object and the Creator, nothing more, nothing less. It takes great humility and wisdom to know and understand this.

Alfred Young Man  
The University of Lethbridge

**Is Summer This Bear.** By Maurice Kenny. Saranac Lake, N.Y.: The Chauncy Press. 1985. 52 pp. \$6.95 Paper.

The title of this latest body of poems by Mohawk poet, Maurice Kenny, challenges the ground of our perceptions and the assumptions on which they are built by a radical disjointing of syntax. The exclusion of the expected question mark displaces the functional intent of the phrase and negates the dialogical or discursive field in which this usage might be expected to occur. This displacement and negation of the acceptable received paradigm of syntactic structure is further emphasized by a reversal in the ordering of the phrase, both grammatically and logically, by placing the general quality or class (summer) in the subject place, and the particular (bear) in the object place. Without attempting to go into the development of precise possibilities as to Kenny's hidden counter-linguistic paradigm and the meanings that may be inherent there, it is, nevertheless, important to note that, like the zen koan, the question has no particular "correct" answer, but asserts its value in the challenge it places to conventional and prosaic perception, to "received wisdom."

Among the questions that this verbal formulation, *Is Summer This Bear*, raises are the relation of sign to object and of object to

object on, in, and through the linguistic formation of metaphor. "Bear" might be seen as a concrete emblem for the quality "summer," which is a cognitive abstraction. In context of the native Mohawk ecological ground, the sighting of the (first) bear may be linked in tribal lore to the approach of summer. As well, Kenny is aware that "writing" is a sign, an artifact, as well as a predictive or prophetic medium. The monolithic uninflected five beat phrase is aware of its own vanished "season," and/or its uncertain futurity. The absence of the inflective question mark also posits an awareness of the vanishing context or reality or pertinency of this kind of question to even those tribal peoples yet inhabiting the ancestral homelands, living in increasingly acculturated adaptation to the dominant culture. The question is perhaps an anticipatory epitaph for the living contextuality in which it might carry import, make sense; "bear" on an aural level carries the notion of "bare" in the sense of stripped, vacant, empty.

These are crucially important questions and suggestions, and Kenny's is a voice of grace and power in placing them before us. He by no means becomes lost in abstractions, the didactic aestheticism of de-construction or any killing formalism. His work is deeply grounded in the living word, the oral tradition, the line as breath, the clean quick cut. Unlike celebrated acrobats of the etiolated and obscure such as Ashbery and Merrill, Kenny makes plain sense. His poems, read aloud to a mixed audience of adults and children from a variety of cultural backgrounds, would please and inform all hearers through their acutely rendered observations of the natural world, and of people in transit between it and city spaces. That is to say that the apparent simplicity of the surface of the text is conveyed by a naturalist's eye and ear and hand.

Even such unfathomable and idiosyncratic actions evident in the opening of "12 Moons," the first poem, are apprehensible through the plainness of Kenny's diction:

Midnight. Winds tossed my wisdom-  
tooth to wolverine and darkness,  
sumac. It was not returned as  
promised,  
strong and sharp.

Again I go . . .

Kenny's control of cadence has the sureness and ease of a master. Beneath the simply rendered action, the rhythm of his voice carries his identity, its strength, its suppleness. Each of the lines begins on a stressed syllable. This vigorous attack, on a technical level, mirrors the surprise and stress of the poet's experience. The poet, aware of the dangerous artificiality of a merely "literary" rhetoric, qualifies "darkness" with the parenthetical "sumac," stopping the line dead after the first foot, grounding it in the concrete, pausing to take in the "surround" of this whimsical, terrifying, numinous experience. Three unstressed syllables (a tribrach) follow and then the upswinging rhythm resumes with dactyl and trochee, finally modulating in the cretic ('x') of "strong and sharp."

This voice is not only aware that the fantastic is made real through a plainness of style and an apparent simplicity, a legacy of the oral tradition of which it is an inheritor, but is also fully conversant with the vocabulary of Anglo/American prosodics. In joining these different traditions in a subtle and powerful voice, Mr. Kenny proves himself, again, a master of each, and a harbinger, perhaps, of a cosmopolitan sensibility which will no longer ghettoize Native American writers but offer them the places of honor they so richly deserve in the Academy, the University, but most importantly on our shelves and in our hands. Kenny, Cardiff, Whiteman, Ortiz, Trudell, et al. are writers by vocation and necessity. And if the winds take their wisdom and leave it unreturned . . . so. As Kenny concludes "12 Moons," " . . . I shall smoke/in leaves gone dry in summer."

Prior to this conclusion in which the poet persists waiting vision in a dry season, he goes "with his myths to fisher." As the myths arose from the interplay of man with the cosmos, in a sense they are severed from it now, a commentary detached from its "text" (the earth) and which "text" is threatened with attenuation and extinction. This reversal, which grants the symbol (the myth/the poem) primacy, completion and continuance over the thing itself (the cosmos/the earth) is a prophetic and tragic irony foreshadowed in the title of the collection.

Kenny, however, leaves these issues implicit in the interstices of his work, with the exception of "Gone Fishing." This poem, dealing with the phenomenon of industrial pollution, while angry, is not essentially "political." The circumstance which gives rise to this decimation of the wild is not in Kenny's view

"Whitey" or Capitalism or the like. It is rather and more profoundly "the hook of your mind, imagination/allows this to fall . . ." With some wisdom, Kenny, while stimulating our imagination with his certain craft, gently asserts our complicity through and in the organ of our engagement, a complicity which, the poem suggests, is also the poet's own.

Characteristic of all his work, most particularly in the first section, "Listening for the Elders," is the merging of the poet's voice with that of the particular wilderness creature which is most usually the poems' focus. This is not a clumsiness, a blurring, a failure of diction, but a calculated and precise effect which, one might hazard, ultimately stems from the ethnoscience of the hunt. The hunt, in its traditional context, was/is not merely the getting of meat, but a sacred meeting, a mutual informing of spirit, of essence.

This process, call it empathy, communion, stems from the traditional recognition of the unity of all beings in their contingency upon earth and sky, the cosmos, emblematically conceived of as grandmother and spirit/wind. Thus, in a poem like "Racoon," the traditional world view provides a ground from which the poet "enters in" the being of the perceived with "the hook of mind, imagination." This imagination, whose vehicle is the modulating voice of the poet, is a way of knowing, a metaphor for the transformative power of the nature of being itself.

On the level of technique this may be seen as a shifting mean within a controlled and deliberate field of ambiguity. Here is the opening of "Racoon:"

The mountain hold my winter blood  
my shadow in its calm  
The white pine, or was it tamarack,  
splintered, however, my proof  
Is the silver hair embedded in the bark

The "problem" of whose voice is being cast here is suggested later in the poem, but is never definitively resolved. "My" could as easily refer, in the context of the opening section, to the poet as observer or to the racoon as observer of itself. The third repetition of a phrase introduced by the personal pronoun in the possessive form, rather than clarifying, makes an answer an even more elusive possibility. "My proof" can either refer to the

poet/hunter as perceiving the clue of the silver hair, or, on the other hand, refer to the racoon's awareness of the sign he leaves in his wake. The body of the extended poem which follows hovers between and embodies both of these choices.

Again, we are subtly induced to consider the nature of language itself. The hair in the bark as a sign, a truncation of being which in recognition opens out the cosmos, which creates the cosmos.

The final poem of this sequence, an aspect of this collection's nature that I can no more than mention here, "Handing the Baton," is wrought in a more traditional, less private voice. Using the image of the runner, Kenny celebrates the dreadful agon of a traditional people's survival. Its nobility is without posture or rhetoric and is ripe with an almost impossible belief and hope.

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**A Papago Traveler. The Memories of James McCarthy.** By James McCarthy. Tucson: Sun Tracks and The University of Arizona Press, 1985. 200 pp. \$22.50 Cloth.

"He saw the townlands and learned the minds of many distant men," as Homer describes the journey of Odysseus, and as James McCarthy details his own adventures focusing upon almost a century of reservation life, soldiering, traveling, faith healing, and family experiences.

Most stories about Native Americans are "as told to" accounts, but not so with this Papago Indian's eye witness narration as a global explorer whose zest for "learning the minds of many distant men" took him to combat in Europe during World War I, to walk the Great Wall of China, to serve with the military in the Philippines, to travel to Alaska on a windjammer, and to work among the Yakima Indians of the Pacific Northwest.

James McCarthy, born in 1895 on the Papago Reservation near Tucson, Arizona, began recording his autobiography in the 1960s, and was befriended by John G. Westover, a military historian interested in publishing these soldier stories. A warm friendship developed between the two men, leading to Westover's editing of this first published account of a Papago's