

POEMS

BY

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# THE STRUCTURAL STUDY OF MYTH

*for Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett*

the thief became the rabbi  
in that old story  
others would say he was his father  
all along    the way the moon  
reflected in the water  
is the water  
maybe the master gonif come to earth  
old Trickster brother Jesus  
didn't us Jews tell stories of his magic  
"because we are like him"  
the Crow Indian had said about Coyote  
hitting the nail at last

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# From A SENECA JOURNAL

"Dreamers"

*for David Antin*

1

that couple sitting  
in splendor of old houses  
Albert Jones & his wife Geneva  
were old before my time  
he was the last of the Seneca diviners  
died 1968  
the year we first stayed in Salamanca  
with the power to know dreams  
"their single divinity" wrote Fremin (S.J.) 1650  
as we say "divine"  
the deva in us  
like a devil  
or a divus (deus)  
when these old woods were rich with gods  
people called powers  
they would appear in words  
our language hides them  
even now  
the action of the poem brings them to light  
dear David  
not in the business man's  
imagination  
but asking  
"who is Beaver?"  
forces them out of the one mind  
to surface in our tongues  
in mything  
mouthing the grains of language  
as David that sounds like deva  
means beloved  
thus every Indian once had a name

2

"devils" the Jesuits said  
or "dreams"  
but were barred from the dying man's room  
who sat dreaming singing  
surrounded by bells knives needles scissors blankets coats  
caps wampum belts beads awls

“the thousand objects of his dreams”  
was careful not to kill a desire  
in sleep  
he knew he wanted to eat  
dog’s flesh or man’s  
that his father’s hatchet had vanished  
something forever secret  
waited in him  
the 13th virgin in the love feast  
always out of reach  
therefore they fed him like babe or woman  
the dark diviner at his side  
wept still over riddles—  
beads & pumpkins—  
& the man screamed rolling in the fire  
cut his own fingers off with seashells  
once aimed a blow at some poor girl’s head  
but stopped (said) “I am satisfied  
“my dream  
“requires nothing further  
like the vision as a boy he saw  
an old man “of rare beauty”  
who held out bear meat in right hand  
human in left  
ate of the bear & was a hunter  
came back ordered gifts  
“10 dogs  
“10 porcelain beads from each cabin  
“a collar (belt of wampum) 10 rows wide  
“4 measures of sunflower seeds  
& sat 10 hours by scorching flame  
singing his death song  
so the Jesuit wrote  
“all their cabins they have filld with dreams

3

was it the moon she saw  
like the moon in Poland that old mother  
once lighted up our minds  
that the Iroquois woman dreamed of  
had walked out from her cabin  
baby daughter in her arms  
“old moon’s dropped down to earth  
(she says)

" 's become a woman  
"like myself but holds  
"another babe  
"as if I've walked into a mirror  
& the moon stands  
blood red  
(says)  
"I am thy dominant  
"seigneur  
"fat with my moon glow  
"grant thee the power to name gifts  
"maybe tobacco flashy beads  
"robe of red squirrel fur  
"to thee be given  
"see they proclaim dream feasts in my name  
"so much I love thee  
"I would thee be like me  
"like fire  
"wholly  
"to live in color of  
"mine fire  
now is herself  
Red Lady  
dresses all up in red  
her feathers cap belt shoes all red  
she's even smearing her body red  
encircles each protuberance  
red of her labia  
so fine  
's her brain turned upside down  
now she will walk bare foot through  
200 fires  
squawk her old woman song  
grown red with love  
stretches her pink tongue to touch  
"her last desire"

4

"turned upside down"  
this is the ceremony at last  
there is nothing  
before it greater than  
the woman at the rim of her own dream  
sees a new world below

the air expands  
blows against  
her legs  
its fingers open the dull labia  
suddenly aglow  
& burning  
red with a new promise  
the world-child takes root in her  
will be a daughter  
she be the grandmother to what  
is good & bad  
walks now in the new  
world below her head  
like crossing the back of an old turtle  
on your hands  
in a country where everyone wears feathers  
where skin's like glass  
opens a window in her breast    say  
from which an Indian  
tired from his "show"  
stares out  
shines at you  
a gold tooth  
& a terrible top hat  
with flags

5

I didn't see the red woman  
but wrote of her  
the poem breaks free from the mind  
it's crazy  
that I can still turn to a friend & say  
"I wish they'd stop with this religion"  
what's sacred anyway?  
a man has a dream & calls it a demon  
meaning something beneath his mind  
—an obscene gesture—  
like those early Christians tickling  
each other's palms  
were saying  
"come up & fuck me  
"eat my semen brother  
"suck up thy sister's menses  
"is that what makes the moon turn red?

in moon glow  
's color of the earth & blood  
(some say) Red Adam  
stands in the center of his garden  
like a god  
or guardian  
now hard & red  
the visible appears  
his daughter bursts out of his side  
"a woman (sez the red man)  
"I will soon be out of touch with  
"my own blood      the fountain  
"lies inside me  
"how will I become conscious of my heart  
"so much less the world's slow  
"pulse  
"except in dreaming  
"the images can cross  
"each other  
"become a single image  
"cross of light  
"when she wakes in her own blood  
"& testifies  
"hot with conception  
"the presence of their world

## From A SENECA JOURNAL

“Midwinter”

A man who was a crow was traveling. He didn't know where he had come from or which way he was going. As he moved along he kept on thinking: “How did I come to be alive? Where did I come from? Where am I going?”



THE FACES (1)

blew ashes thru  
my hair

THE FACES (2)

whose big mask  
cools it down

THE FACES (3)

with hanging little  
balls of medicine

THE FACES (4)

had gambled for  
the earth

\* false faces; medicine masks

## BEAR DANCE

snort

snort

berries

## BUFFALO DANCE

sniff

sniff

mush