



Title: Millennial Twins: An Essay into Time and Place

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Published by: *ReVision*, Vol. 22, No. 3

Publish date: 1 January 2000

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Millennial Twins

An Essay into Time and Place

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[Published in a slightly different version in ReVision, vol. 22, number 3, pp.29-43.
Use section numbers 1 through 48 for reference.]

1



2

As storyteller I wonder at times what it would be like to be handed a story that has been taken care of across the generations. And now, during these days tinged with millennianism, to take care of it myself, and then to pass it on to the next generations using the best of my memory abilities, and the most beautiful words I have been taught; thus telling a story which has emerged over the generations from a particular place, from observing the beings that live there, from feeding on them and making offerings in exchange; thus taking care of a story that has a certain wholeness, even though it undoubtedly has changed with each storyteller giving his or her best; and even though

such wholeness can at best be transitory only - in the telling at the right moment on the right occasion.

I have not been given such a story.

I have been given storysherds. That is all I have been given to take care of. Storysherds.

The broken pot in the museum becomes "false" when curators add to what they have found during the excavation. Adding the missing pieces would mean dishonoring its maker; but more importantly, it would be dishonoring the history of its breakage. Yet, it is possible to imagine that remaking the pot might not result in such dishonor. For it to be honorable it would have to be done right. Pueblo Indians recycle potsherds by grinding them to powder, making them part of the matrix for a new pot. Or the missing pieces would have to be found, one way or the other. Maybe then the entire pot can be made new. (1)

As caretaker of storysherds I am obliged to honor the sherds at hand, not to add to them willfully by giving in to my desire for wholeness. Wholeness cannot be willed. It takes the kind of imagination that arises from time and place. I will need all my skills. I need the patience of listening and seeing whether wholeness will emerge.

The millennium is not my story, yet I am part of it. My ancestors, for reasons only partly apparent to me, came to deal with their understanding of reality primarily in linear segments and fragments. The count that defines the millennium reflects this. And it is truly but a storysherd. Or a confrontation with the uneven edges of the pot's breakage lines.

I am not of the land where I am writing this, yet I live on it and I am becoming part of it. This is where I have settled. My ancestors are of the European lands; there they and I grew up, yet nothing but storysherds have been passed on to me from those centuries of being in particular places. Taking care of my storysherds may make it possible to re-imagine the stories from which they broke away. In order to do so in a sacred way means caring for the sherds first and foremost; taking the risk of picking up the sherds. In renewing a vessel I not only need to visualize its pattern as whole and complete, but I need to give particular attention to the points of breakage, the patterns of the broken lines. This is my obligation as storyteller. Maybe then, later, I can make *one* story new. And, to be sure, it won't be the story my ancestors handed down to me. But it will.

3

[P30] To make stories of sherds is pre-eminently a modern endeavor, in a sense. Modernity has created so many sherds. The sherds gathered here are largely from twin stories.

So, this is a twin story, in a way.

It is the story of twin pines: The Native American *tuwa*, and its twin, the "*digger*" pine, *pinus sabiniana* of European perception. It is the story of particular movements in our galaxy, and the twin story of the end of the second millennium, and the beginning of the third. It is the story of a pair of twins - one afflicted by blindness, the other paralyzed - in search of their healing ceremony. It is the story of two brothers, one following instructions he has been given while the other one has yet to remember how he was and is to be. There are more twins, more pairings, masculine and feminine, male and female, that appear as I sort the sherds. The twins on the poles, one on each. And then there is Odysseus, and Odysseus Redux, for example. Sherds for a story.

This is also a story about two ways to make words, and to be made by words. Two stories colliding - one aware of the collision, the other barely noticing. One twin out of balance, split off, masculinized. Thus the balance of the other twin is affected. The balance between things is disturbed. Their internal balance is disturbed. For there to be balance the story needs to be made whole. This is a story of imbalance and imposition, and a story of healing imbalance.

These are the storysherds I have found as the millennium ends. I have gathered them in the place where I have settled in order to make sense of time and place. I am seeking for an integrity that can only exist when I am fully present to the movements of time and history as they arise where I sit. When I am fully present to all the beings around me.

4



5

Words are what make us distinctly human. But more than that: in words lie our greatest power; we are most powerful through words. Words describe, they can invoke, deny, remember, identify, disidentify. Words help us see, they guide us in what we rely on as our reality. Not having words is forgetting. When we forget a word or name then the peril of that moment may translate into annoyance or fear.

To tell a story in the proper way, to hear a story told in the proper way - this is very old and sacred business, and it is very good. At that moment when we are drawn into the element of language, we are as

intensely alive as we can be; we create and we are created. ... Our stories explain us, justify us, sustain us, humble us, and forgive us. And sometimes they injure and destroy us. Make no mistake, we are at risk in the presence of words. (Momaday 1997. 169)

Words originate from a matrix of place and time, from landscape, myth, and history. Even our distance from such sources places us and times us. Imagination and creativity thus have ancient ties to realms so much contested in our contemporary understandings. This is a quality of imagination alien to most of the narcissistic and willful acts that are taken for creativity in contemporary dominant culture.

We are at risk in the presence of words. Getting a story wrong can be very dangerous. Getting it right requires all our imagination and creativity. And presence to whence words arise: place and time, landscape and history. Sacred business. Even, and maybe especially, as far as the millennium is concerned. It requires the precision of sacred work as personal imagination is held by the awareness of its sources. Will is in the discipline, the intention of presence, not the willfulness of individual acts.

What I take from this is that making millenarian words without being present to their origins in land and time puts me at risk. I have no intention to do so. This is why I am telling the story in the way I do. This is why the sherds are gathered in this pattern.

6

The millennium is a precisely arbitrary moment, as Gould (1997) extensively and delightfully reminds us. Whichever way we look at it, arbitrariness remains as its most striking feature. As possible celebratory event of the Christian church it should already have been celebrated, given that Jesus was born 4BCE or earlier. Numerically the second millennium concludes only at the end of the year 2000, putting the beginning of the third millennium CE at 2001; this is how past turns of centuries, and even, predominantly, the one millennium of the current count have been celebrated. As arbitrary count, mostly disconnected from Christian eschatological thinking, it seems to deserve the same level of observance and excitement as the odometer of my trusty old car turning from 99,999 to 100,000 miles. Albeit rather brief, it was an exciting moment. And then, of course, this is a very European count. The Hebrew, Moslem, Mayan, Persian, Chinese, and other calendars give numbers for the same date that clearly do not suggest any millennialism.

The associated concept of Y2K, resulting from the same arbitrary count, gives rise to concerns that are, to a certain degree, clearly identifiable as technological and electronic problems. Y2K has become, at least in some circles, associated with apocalyptic thoughts arising from the ever more visible ecocide, relentless economic globalization, and other pathologies of modernity. And it has also given rise to hopes of ending these destructive trends through crisis, collapse. Hopes for the beginning of a phase of balancing and healing.

Interestingly, the millennium (of whichever actual date) and Y2K, are very close to an event that is highly observable and far from arbitrary: Many ancient and indigenous cultures have observed the precession of the equinoxes, maybe for as long as 39,000 years (2). According to various traditions, notably the Mayan, one segment in this cycle is coming to an end (in their case a whole calendar, the so-called Long Count). Of course, popular culture has already celebrated this event well in advance through the musical *Hair* which hailed the coming of the age of Aquarius.

The phenomenon of the precession of the equinoxes occurs because of the wobble of the spinning earth. Every 2,000 years or so a new constellation rises heliacally - right before

sunrise - at the vernal equinox. It is an observable astronomical event, and it is also interpreted within the zodiacal system of Western astrology. The observability of the precession should have given it clear scientific appeal, and thus great preference over an arbitrary count based on the mistakenly calculated birth of a religious prophet. Not so.

Maybe it is the association with astrology that made it suspicious, maybe it was the vastness of scale.

The reasons for this can be found, so it seems, in the unfolding of a story during this past millennium, a story that has increasingly used words separate from landscape, and separate from natural, observable time. This makes it a dangerous story, especially as it is perpetrated across the threshold of the year 2000, and as it is relentlessly enforced through economic globalization at a time that many indigenous traditions regard as particularly charged with potential.

As indigenous traditions have it, how this charge is used will be determined by how the story is told, for ill or for good. Sacred places, such as the ones aboriginally belonging to the people of Cochiti Pueblo in New Mexico can be used for heightened pursuits and celebrations of balance; but they can also be used for the development of nuclear power, as was done on these very lands in Los Alamos. The power is there for use. Good or evil. Standing in line at the post office I watch the red figures frenetically turning on the digital countdown toward the year 2000. The legend above it reads:

TIME IS

RUNNING OUT

TO THE YEAR 2000

This apparent build-up toward some cataclysmic paroxysm, however, is reassuringly resolved by the means available to philately: "Collect the century in stamps" is the punch line under the frenzied counter.



8

There are other punch lines to descriptions of time running out. (3)

The sun turns black, the earth sinks below the sea;
no bright star now shines from the heavens;
flames leap the length of the World Tree
fire strikes against the very sky.

This is one of the potent moments of time change my own Nordic-Germanic traditions have described as *ragnarökur* in the Eddic texts. It is a fateful time for those who reign. *Rök* means fate, line of events; *ragna* from *regin*, to reign. It is conceived of as moment of renewal; it is a transition during which the outcome is experienced as far from certain - even the gods and goddesses lack reassurances and are filled with anxiety. The poetic language of the seeresses in the Eddic texts captures this transition of the turning of an age with no lack of drama as the next description of the same moment shows:

Then wanes the power.
Hands grow numb.
A swoon assails
the white sword-Áse;[guardian spirit Heimdal]
Unconsciousness reigns
on the midnight breath;
Thought fails
in tired beings.

During *Ragnarök* we have *fimbulvetur*, the great winter, the world is set on fire by *Surtr*, the earth sinks into the ocean because of the violent movements of the *Miðgarðr* snake, the sun darkens and is eaten by *Fenrir*, the wolf, the earth shakes, the bridge *Bilröst* collapses, and the world tree *Yggdrasill* trembles - yet does not fall.

The words are just as dramatic in the descriptions of the subsequent renewal, as the

seeress continues to prophecy:

She sees the earth rising again
out of the waters, green once more;

an eagle flies over rushing waterfalls,
hunting for fish from the craggy heights.

Hrafnagaldr Óðins or *Óðin's Prophetic Ravenchant* describes how the new earth *Jórunn* (the previous earth *Iðunn* reborn) sits at the root of the tree, not yet awakened at this momentous time. There is a new sun, *dóttir sólar*, the daughter of the sun (which can also mean a new star, after the old constellation has disappeared at the vernal equinox).

Up rose the gods.
Forth shone the sun.
Northward to Niflheim
night drew away;
Heimdall once more sprang
up upon Bǫfrast, [spirit or rainbow bridge]
Mighty clarion-blower
on the mountains of heaven.

The tree, the *axis mundi*, does not fall during *Ragnarök*. With the *nornir* at its roots, the Norse fateful spirits, women, it continues to stand as the measurer of time and fates.

These descriptors from the Old Norse tradition for the time of great change are not unique in tone or imagery. Presumably this is when a new constellation rises at spring equinox. We can find similar language in the Hopi prophecies or the words the Wintu seeress Flora Jones utters below *buli phuyuq* or *way wan buli*, a mountain so important that it is at times just referred to as *bulit* - that particular peak, meaning: Mt. Shasta (in Northern California). For the Native Americans living around Mt. Shasta it is the central balancing spirit in the universe, not a potential ski resort.

9



10

I glance across my writing table and scan the surrounding hills. They were aboriginally peopled by one of the Wintun tribes, the Nomlaki. The pine trees rising individually,

mostly, above the rest of the chaparral growth intrigue me. Each is a character of its own, each has apparent personality. Different, visibly unique. The perception of such individuality in the plant world commonly takes greater visual skills than I have acquired.

Not so with these pines. Some pines have singular trunks, some have multiple trunks arising from one place like a bunch of flowers held together by raffia. At times a secondary trunk emerges midway to the top. Some trees are grouped in small and very loose stands. Their needle foliage allows me to look through them in many places. Oftentimes they don't grow straight up, but lean downhill, with the top part on occasion appearing parallel to an imaginary level ground. But level ground does not exist amidst these steep hills.

One twin of these stately twin pines is called "digger" pine in much of the literature, since "Digger Indians" utilized their nuts. (3) In the middle of the last century, first the Indians of the Great Basin, then Native Californians were referred to in such manner, since they did not farm, but subsisted on roots, hunted, and collected seeds. They did not seem to measure up, in the eyes of the explorers, to their perceptions of the Plains and Mississippi Valley Indians. This represents one of the multitude of curious denials of the settlers' own practices and history, since they regularly dug for roots along their routes. "What is good for an Indian is beneath notice for a white man," is what many people in the mid-nineteenth century thought. All this notwithstanding the fact that the nut had saved the life of one of the members of the Donner party, for example. There are many ways to write the story of genocide and colonization, plant names seems to be one.

The other twin of these stately pines has many names, for example *towáni* and *sakky*. It comes right behind the acorn in culinary importance, and, among the conifers, it was the most important food-giving plant for the Indians. Where this pine tree grows the Native Californians have their own names for them. Oftentimes the nut has a separate name from the tree, as in Patwin *tuwa*, the tree, and *sanak*, the pinenut. Wintu differentiates the unripe (*xisi*) and ripe pinenut (*chati*) in this fashion. Other Native Californian names are *gapga* (Klamath), *towáni* (Maidu), *sakky* (South Sierra Miwok), and *náyo* (Wappo).

Hinton suggests that the "digger" pine could be renamed Towani pine or Nayo pine.

Names of remembrance, acknowledgment, and presence. Rather than racism.

I manage to crack some of the pinenuts from the hills where I write. They are delicious. I don't know the Nomlaki name for the nut or the tree. They are no longer around to be asked. Yet, they are present, and maybe one day I can hear their answers.

11

Twins are regarded with awe in many cultures. Their special significance has oftentimes the double valence of being potentially dangerous (especially if not treated properly) or beneficial; they were feared and worshipped. The notion that twins come from the union between a mortal and a spirit or god seems widespread. In the Indo-European mythologies they oftentimes seem to be benefactors, healing mortals, protecting people from harm, rescuing seamen, and so on. Some are hero twins, saviors.

Among the Old Norse we find pairs that are not only part of a culture allowing sibling marriage, but that have also a twin air about them. *Fjörgyn* and *Fjörgynn*, *Nerthus* and *Njörður*, *Freyja* and *Freyr*. They also reflect their taste for androgynous qualities, at least in these ancient, *Vanir* layers of Norse mythology. Even in traditions where both twins are of male gender - as in the Diné, the Mayan, the Hopi, the Aztec traditions - each twin

seems to be balanced by the other in terms of qualities; at times they can be meaningfully listed under the heading of feminine and masculine qualities (one tending heavenward, the other earthward; one dark, the other light; one may be good, the other wicked). They need each other for balance and completeness; if one is not present for the task imbalance ensues.

According to Hopi understanding there are serpent brothers or twins - *Pöqanghoya* and *Palöngawhoya* - on each of the poles sending vibrations to each other along the earth's axis. The Twins are instrumental for the rotation and balance of the world.

12



13

The past millennium is rich in historical events. The story is notable for *what* it tells and doesn't tell, what is relegated to its margins or subjected to denial and forgetting. So many events recorded are truly remarkable. As are those that have not become part of the story as it is told. But even more than the history actually recorded by European consciousness it is notable for the *ways* in which it has forged its own story. As the count leading to the upcoming millennium has been shaped by Eurocentered thinking it is fitting to look at the inner workings of this story.

By the year one thousand Christianity dominates Europe. Even the people of such a remote place as Iceland finally convert to Christianity in order to avoid internal and external strife: A *goði* or chieftain in the north of the island conducts one of the traditional ceremonies, an *útiseta*, the Old Norse "sitting out" equivalent of the Native American vision fast or "going on the hill." He comes to the realization that bloodshed would ensue if all of Iceland doesn't convert to Christianity. He offers the carved spirit images of his tradition to the nearby waterfall, subsequently named Goðafoss, and becomes a Christian.

Since the middle of the millennium we find an increasing prevalence of what we now would call ethnic cleansing. The murderous forces, for large parts Christian church dominated, perpetrated genocide not just on indigenous peoples in other countries, but with oftentimes similar vehemence on the holders of indigenous knowledge within their own boundaries, particular through the persecution of women in the form of witchhunts.

Genocide in service of the Eurocentered story is continuing relentlessly planetwide, primarily through the various forms of economic globalization a.k.a. Americanization (the destruction of sustainable economies and the creation of dependency in the name of progress and civilization). While we may be tempted to soften the shock of this process by calling it cultural genocide, it remains genocide as far as the termination of particular cultures and cultural identities are concerned - people are murdered as the indigenous persons they are, even though they may resurrect themselves as persons of Eurocentered minds. Pervasive ecocide and sexism are corollaries to this story.

The dynamics of the story have been discussed in a variety of forms. Marx tried put his finger on these acts of splitting and dissociation through his much criticized theory of commodity exchange. The Native American writer Leslie Marmon Silko evokes it in ruthless poetry, describing the relentless death march of excess and imbalance.

14

Above me in the night sky Venus in the west is almost straight across from Mars, who is a little south of the east. Last night Venus was right above the waxing crescent moon. Tonight she is straight to the right of the moon, west of it. Across these two nights the bright Venus and the growing moon form a beautiful equilateral sky triangle.

15

It is May, 1999, and as I write this essay NATO continues to bomb Kosovo. Ethnic cleansing seems to continue unabated despite all the bombs. Relief for Kosovo seems far away. I nostalgically remember a drive along the Albanian border, and the poverty stricken, albeit unbombed Priština. There is upset in the U.S. about the Serbs' continuing ethnic cleansing. I read an article. The words "... a grand experiment in ethnic cleansing ..." jump out at me.

I am struck by these words.

The paragraph started out as follows:

As a boy Plenty Horses had been sent to Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania, the boarding school founded in 1879 by Richard Henry Pratt, whose obsession was to "kill the Indian and save the man." Carlisle was the model upon which an extensive system of boarding schools for Indians was based. The schools were prisons in effect, where Indian children were exposed to brutalities, sometimes subtle, sometimes not, in the interest of converting them to the white man's way of life. It was a grand experiment in ethnic cleansing and psychological warfare, and it failed. (Momaday 1997, 101-102)

The book does not tell me when the piece was first published; I assume it was probably at least a few years before 1997.

Ethnic cleansing characterizes half the past millennium.

It is so much easier to be righteous about ethnic cleansing elsewhere than to face the continuing history of ethnic cleansing in one's own country.

16



17

Excess or imbalance could also be used as words to indicate the unfolding trends of the past millennium. Some indigenous cultures would call that evil. Traditional people with special spiritual powers are known to be able not just to work for good, but also to work for evil and imbalance. Before awareness of the medieval European witchhunts had a chance to infuse Native American use of the English language, workers of excess and evil were frequently called "witches" in Indian vernacular, thus assuming the Christian, pejorative use of the term. Silko uses the words witch and witchery in this sense, not as dishonor to the large number of European women practicing their indigenous knowledge, but to signify excess and imbalance. In her words: "Witches crawl into skins of dead animals, but they can do nothing but play around with objects and bodies. Living animals are terrified of witches. They smell the death" (1977, 131). The book *Ceremony*, the healing story of a mixed blood Native American, was written before there was any significant reassertion of the positive meaning of the word.

Long time ago in the beginning
there were no white people in this world
there was nothing European.
And this world might have gone on like that
except for one thing:
witchery
This world was already complete
even without white people.
There was everything
including witchery.
Then it happened.
These witch people got together. (...)
They all got together for a contest
the way people have baseball tournaments nowadays
except this was a contest
in dark things. (...)

Finally there was only one
who hadn't shown off charms or powers.
The witch stood in the shadows beyond the fire
and no one ever knew where this witch came from
which tribe
or if it was a woman or a man.
But the important thing was
this witch didn't show off any dark thunder charcoals
or red ant-hill beads.
This one just told them to listen:
"What I have is a story."
At first they all laughed
but this witch said
Okay
go ahead
laugh if you want to
but as I tell the story
it will begin to happen.
Set in motion now
set in motion by our witchery
to work for us.
Caves across the ocean
in caves of dark hills
white skin people
like the belly of a fish
covered with hair.
Then they grow away from the earth
then they grow away from the sun
then they grow away from the plants and animals.
They see no life
When they look
they see only objects.
The world is a dead thing for them
the trees and rivers are not alive
the mountains and stones are not alive.
The deer and bear are objects
They see no life.
They fear
They fear the world.
They destroy what they fear.
They fear themselves.
The wind will blow them across the ocean
thousands of them in giant boats
swarming like larvae
out of a crushed ant hill. (...)
Set in motion now
set in motion
To destroy
To kill
objects to work for us
Performing the witchery
for suffering
for torment
for the still-born
the deformed
the sterile

the dead.
Whirling
whirling
whirling
whirling
set in motion now
set in motion.
So the other witches said
"Okay you win; you take the prize,
but what you said just now -
it isn't so funny
It doesn't sound so good.
We are doing okay without it
we can get along without that kind of thing.
Take it back.
Call that story back."
But the witch just shook its head
at the others in their stinking animal skins, fur and feathers.
It's already turned loose.
It's already coming.
It can't be called back.
(Silko 1977, 132-138)

I find hope in this story. Paradoxically, maybe. Recognizing the deadly smell which I also carry makes healing possible. I am part of a culture of death. Deadly as the prize winning story has been, knowing of it as story gives me the opportunity and challenge to tell it differently, to get it right. To heal my self. To heal myself culturally. To turn the story back on itself.

18

A cooper's hawk circles uttering a singular scream upon completion of each revolution.
Gradually ascending it finally disappears westward and upmountain.

19



20

Driving toward my place of writing retreat I parallel the Sacramento River northward. To the right and left of the interstate are rice paddies; the air is filled with insects and numerous low flying airplanes dispense toxic insecticides. I sneeze frequently as my body reacts to the noxious pollutants entering the car. Before the history of the agricultural abuse of this former vernal lake was possible, something else had to occur. It was the prize winning story making its way across what is now called California.

The banks of the Sacramento river, in its whole course through the valley, were studded with Indian villages, the houses of which in the spring, during the day time were red with the salmon the aborigines were curing.... On our return, late in the summer of 1833, we found the valleys depopulated. From the head of the Sacramento to the great bend and Slough of the San Joaquin, we did not see more than six or eight live Indians, while large numbers of their skulls and dead bodies were to be seen under almost every shade tree, near the water, where the uninhabited village had been converted into graveyards. (E.G.Lewis 1880, 49, quoted from Goldschmidt 1978, 342)

Where I go has aboriginal names that are not recorded on any of the AAA maps I have in my car. *Sunsunu, Noykewel, Nomlaka, Waltoykewel, Waykewel, Memwaylaka. Tehemet* and *Paskenti* seem to be the only Nomlaki names that have survived in the forms of the county name Tehama and the town name Paskenta. Where I go is aboriginal Nomlaki territory. Here is how the prize winning story played itself out among them:

The malaria epidemic of 1833 was the first serious blow Western civilization struck against the Nomlaki. ... There is no evidence of direct contact between Whites and Indians until mid-century ... By 1851 settlers began to request that the Indians be segregated from the White population on a reservation. ... In 1854 ... Thomas J. Henley, established the Nome Lackee Reservation on a tract of 25,000 acres in the foothills of western Tehama County between Elder and Thomes creeks. .. By 1856, with the threat of Indian retaliation dissipated, the settlers became covetous of the "magnificent farm of 25,000 acres" and brought pressure for its abandonment. The Nomlakis and other Sacramento valley Indians were literally herded over the mountain to Round Valley in 1863, the Nome Lackee Reservation having already been taken over by Whites. ... After several years a number of Nomlakis returned to settle in the foothills of their old territory. ...By this time [1930s] there were but three rancherias left ... , with probably no more than a score of households identifying themselves as Nomlaki. (Goldschmidt 1978, 342)

I recap to grasp what I have just read:

1833 Unknown number of Nomlakis killed by malaria epidemic brought in by White settlers.

1850 First direct contact between Nomlaki Indians and Whites.

1851 Segregation of Nomlaki Indians from Whites.

1854 Nome Lackee Reservation established.

1856 Pressures for the termination of Nome Lackee Reservation.

1863 Nomlaki Indians and others herded to Round Valley.

1870s Return of some Nomlaki Indians to their old territory.

1930s Three rancherias with half a dozen Nomlaki households each.

1970s Only scattered descendants are said to survive.

One of the Nomlaki Indians has described the trail of tears to Round Valley, the Nome Cult Reserve, in these words:

They drove them like stock. Indians had to carry their own food. Some of the old people began to give out when they got to the hills. They shot the old people who couldn't make the trip. They would shoot children who were getting tired. (Margolin 1993, 165)

Before any direct contact the 2,000 plus Nomlaki Indians are severely decimated by disease brought in by White settlers. Within fifteen years of direct contact their indigenous culture is effectively destroyed. Eighty years after direct contact and one hundred years after indirect lethal contact only a few households identify themselves as Nomlaki in their traditional territory. This all began to happen a mere century and a half ago. It continues to be the prize winning story.

21



22

Down from where I sit and write I watch the seasonal creek waxing and waning. Every morning the rill flows, ripples, and glitters in the sun. By afternoon I see nothing but a

little wet sand and pebbles in the stream bed across which the tracks of my car tires deepen as I come and go. Butterflies still gather for the remaining moisture.

23

Maybe it is impossible to think of the past millennium without interference of the recency effect. But maybe what has happened during this century is a crystallization of what has built over the previous 900 years, and not merely a perceptual distortion. Summarizing the current century Habermas (1998, 73) has pointed to the

horrifying traits of an age that 'invented' the gas chamber and total war, governmentally administrated genocide and extermination camps, brain washing, the system of government surveillance and panoptic observation of entire populations. This century 'produced' more victims, and resulted in more soldiers killed, more citizens murdered, civilians killed, and minorities expelled, more people tortured, maltreated, starved, and frozen, more political prisoners and refugees than was even imaginable until now. (Transl. J.W.K.)

I notice how I find it increasingly difficult to think about the purported advances Eurocentrism has offered the world. As long as I look at history or the sciences within this story, advances and advantages are visible, despite all the horrors. When I leave the framework of the Eurocentric story even the seemingly most obvious ways in which it has improved on people's lives end up with a question mark. I notice how many advances have come about in order to address ills wrought by the prize winning story itself; to discern what advantages remain when I don't take the story for granted is challenging.

The story was not inevitable. Its continuation is not inevitable.

Human rights, such an obvious and persuasive example resulting from European intellectual traditions. Yet: to what extent were they drafted in order to address human catastrophes precipitated and perpetrated by the Eurocentric traditions themselves? Historically they were developed in response to atrocities perpetrated as a consequence of actions stemming from Eurocentric thinking. Not as result of enlightened thinking or of debates about cultural ethics. Yet, one could not think about the rights of indigenous peoples or genocide as legal concepts without the idea of human rights. And surely they also address imbalances, evil, and excess created by other cultures than those esconced in the European intellectual milieu.

Or the European enlightenment tradition, and so many scientific discoveries. Surely I don't want to toss all of it out as I confront the horrors Eurocentrism has wrought; but just as surely the purported and celebrated advantages seem increasingly relative and questionable.

Is it possible to think about their value from a viewpoint outside of or before the prize winning story? How could I do that? Where and how is a healing standpoint possible that allows me to keep its totalizing tendencies at bay?

24

Raven flies by many times this morning. I am reading stories by a bear. Over the last few days I have begun reading and re-reading all of N. Scott Momaday's works. *House Made of Dawn*. *The Ancient Child*. So often, as in the following quote, he beautifully speaks something I feel, like in this case about the place where I am sitting and writing. Reading the quote I react to his male language. I assume that he uses the male gender because he speaks primarily of himself.

Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe. He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to

wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it. He ought to imagine the creatures there and all the faintest motions of the wind. He ought to recollect the glare of noon and all the colors of the dawn and dusk.

(Momaday 1969, 83)

Momaday's Kiowa name is *Tsoai-ta-lee*, Rock Tree Boy. This is in reference to Devil's Tower in South Dakota, a place sacred to the Kiowas, made famous in the movie *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. According to the Kiowa tale it is a tree stump, scarred by bear claws, tsoai-ta. Momaday is a bear. Much of his writing centers upon bear medicine, including the aspects which are difficult and unmanageable. After reading I drive the thirty-odd miles to town, on my way to the San Francisco Bay Area. After driving for a short while I surprise a bear as I turn around a bend on the dirt road. The bear seems young with beautiful brown fur. It turns and races toward the next bend and plunges down the steep hill. I get out of the car and hear it crashing through the brush. I find the tracks of its galloping and leave offerings in them. A redtail hawk circles above.

25

An old story brings my ancestors and the ancestors from peoples of this land together in a way I would not have dared imagine until more recent years. Diné medicine person Hanson Ashley once told me how his ancestral people went on to a migration west in the long ago, crossing the Bering Strait west, and finally meeting up with the people of the European North. They traded knowledge. Maybe this is why I have always been fascinated by the Diné (Navajo) chantway ceremonies, the Nightway in particular. Maybe it is just the beautiful sandpaintings. A number of Diné friends and colleagues have helped me out many times, and I have been privileged to be invited to parts of their ceremonies. One of the stories describing the origin of the Nightway ceremony and the reasons for its use as remedy against neurological sufferings of various kinds is given in the story of the stricken twins (Matthews 1902). As in most of their ceremonies, sandpaintings form an integral part of the proceedings, helping to place the afflicted person at the place of balance, so that they can be re-created with beauty for a long life. It begins with a statement that I passed by on many of my readings, until its significance finally struck me: *This is a story about song*. This is not the place to recount the intricacies of this story, which cover almost one hundred pages. The plot pertains to the imbalanced use of our brains, or so it seems to me. Briefly: The twins are born as a result of a relationship between a Diné woman and Talking God. On one of their excursions they enter a cave which collapses on them, presumably because of bad medicine or a curse administered by another one of the holy people. As a result, one is paralyzed and the other blinded. Their human relatives reject them after several attempts at healing, and they wander the lands in search of wholeness. Each time they encounter spirits they have to tell the story of their mishap. And each time the holy people claim they cannot help them. It is an arduous story to read, but also a story of perseverance and final success. I read the story of the stricken twins not as my own, but as a story that may help me understand the healing my own culture and cultural roots need. And maybe I can even find help for the healing of the genocidal wounds inflicted upon Native American peoples.



27

Many people regard the Hopi Indians as the keepers of teachings and prophecies that are of particular significance at these times. Traditional Hopi Elders seem to have become more vocal as their original instructions are increasingly in peril of being forgotten by the Hopi people themselves. Notably, the traditionalists staunchly refusing to join the march of European progress on Indian lands are commonly labeled "the hostiles."

Their prophetic stories are recorded in sacred tablets and rock carvings retold and reinterpreted by each generation of keepers and Elders. They give testimony to various migrations and the instructions originally given to the people by their creator. While the

Hopi prophecies do not give a particular time and outcome for the purification and changes they describe, they do contain markers leading many to believe that the time talked about is now.

Central to the prophecies is the return of *Pahana*, the Elder White Brother. This return will begin a time of purification and judgment, *Nuntungk Talöngvaka*, and those who survive will be part of the next world. Survival depends on faithfulness to the original instructions. *Pahana* will be identified by the return of the missing piece of the sacred tablet that this group of migrants took with them on their journey toward the east. The true White Brother has yet to return.

I cannot help but compare the millennial story to those of the Edda, the stricken twins, and the Hopi story of *Pahana*. Thoughts about original instructions, song, seeing, and balancing float through my head. I focus on the root of my annoyance with the millennial frenzy: it is the realization that it is an imperial story, or the continuation and celebration

of an imperial story. It is a violent imposition of humans not just upon observable time cycles, but just as much upon peoples not of Eurocentric minds, upon lands and waters, upon the air. It is thought gone wild, out of control. Time is reduced to a thin line carrying all kinds of claims to universality. Reduced to a singular line claiming to account for everything. It is the masculinized twin gone haywire, in dire need of its feminine counterpart. Inventing the millennium is a truly postmodern event. It reflects the cynical and disconnected side of its thinking in crystallized form. It is a frivolous story.

The count reflects the imposition, it is not a natural count.

The official millennial celebrations are intended to show how far we have come, while, indeed, it is a quantitative measure of the unbounded pathology of the Eurocentric mind. We are tainted by a ghost, the ghost of dissociation and alienation; the other half needs to be reconstituted. The return of the twin. Brother. Sister. The honoring of the feminine.

Inner balance.

In the Diné traditions a person tainted by an enemy, by alien presence is said to be *sa'a naghái*, in a masculine and aggressive mode of being (associated with long life). This is a state of incompleteness, because *bik'e hózhó*, femaleness and happiness, are missing.

Maleness unmediated by femaleness. Masculinization. Both poles are required for harmony and balance (Farella 1984, 170). Internal balance is missing. Rational thought predominates unmediated by other human faculties.

Celebrating the millennium is a reinforcement of linearity, of dissociated thought, of masculinization, of disconnection from natural and observable cycles. Healing the story means balancing ourselves in the holistic stories of place and time. Making whole.

Healing the story means engaging in the proper exchanges, those that create balance rather than rapaciously take. Placing ourselves at the center of creation where we are.

Remembering. Making ourselves present.

28

Returning from the San Francisco Bay Area I drive again on the interstate through rice paddies, orchards, and olive groves. Interspersed are several wildlife refuges. I daydream of Native American names on the signposts. In some bi- or multilingual countries I have found bilingual signs, at least in areas where the minorities are the majority. I remember

the Gaelic and English signs in Eire; and the Sámeigiella and Norwegian signs in Finnmarku in the European Arctic North. I imagine not just seeing the town name Winters on the green sign, but also *Liwai*. Not just Yolo, but also *Churup*. Grimes together with *Palo*. Colusa together with *Til-til*. Paskenta and *Paskenti*. Bilingual signs have probably been a contentious issue in most places where they exist. They seem impossible in California or elsewhere in the U.S. where the memory of residential schools is largely suppressed, and where bilingualism is quickly experienced as a threat to the "white" ideal of what makes an American. So I imagine for the sake of remembrance, for the sake of a different story, for the sake of completion and balance.

29

I return into the hills of Waltoykewel. Easing the car down the hill and across the seasonal creek I notice that my dome tent doesn't quite look the same. In fact, it is rather flat. On the way up I had noticed a tall Towani pine that had fallen across the road, and

an entire roof that had been blown off a house. I wonder whether there had been high winds during my absence.

I walk around the pancake tent and notice scratch marks. Even some of the cement bags that I had used to secure the tent had been torn open. Nearby I now notice bags of steer manure ripped open. I walk toward the building and notice clearly visible bear tracks. Parts of the provisional plastic covering have been torn from its sides, with claws marks and muddy swipes identifying the inspector clearly. I take the tent apart to find two flattened mice. The surviving deer mouse scoots downhill.

30



31

At night I sit outside and listen to the wind. It is because of the pine trees that I can follow the movements of the wind spirit. At times nothing stirs where I am, yet I hear the wind rushing through a pine tree 20 yards away, rustling its needles.

Now I hear the wind way far in the distance on top of the next hill; I follow its course as it descends downhill through the individual pines, touching trees spaced wide apart, stirring a pine over here into a whisper, then one to the right. The wind's breath moves, fingering the needle bunches, brushing them, prompting them to talk, then moves upward toward me, whispering, now moving more toward the left, then toward the right, snaking uphill. Wind brushes my face, and throws my hair into disarray. Wind teaches me about the lay of the land, its movements. Wind spirit.

32

A member of the neighboring Wintu tribe has given beautiful words to the process of learning through intimate relationship with place. The elders "learn the earth's secrets by quietly observing. It is a secret language called knowledge that releases the spirit from

stone and heals by tone of voice and by changing sickness into elements that flow instead of blocking life" (LaPena 1999, 18). This is what it means to follow our original instructions in a particular place and time. "Sacred names, dreams, and visions are images that connect the bearer to the earth; shamans and other tribal healers and visionaries speak the various languages of plants and animals and feel the special dream power to travel backward from familiar times and places" (Vizenor 1981, XVII).

This is what seers, seeresses, healers, shamans, medicine people, and Indian doctors did and do. We are at risk in the presence of words. We are in the presence of awesome power. Getting it right is healing, getting it wrong creates imbalance and excess. To be sure, there isn't a singular way of getting it right. There are many ways of balance. Getting it right means being and acting from time, place, and history, roots. All relations.

Being present.

Words are sacred. Always. Spirit breath. They have power. Always. They create even when we forget their power. Forgetting it often means creating imbalance, since forgetting the sacred breath and wind in words is imbalance.

To be true to a word means being true to its place and time. This is what integrity comes down to. Severing the connection between language and place signifies a lack of integrity. Forgetting or denying or destroying the language of a place is not just murder of people, but it is just as much violence to the plants and animals. Pinkson (1995, 127), based on his initiations into the Huichol tradition, captures this beautifully and accurately:

The original language of the people indigenous to a specific area on Mother Earth's body grows directly out of the land itself. The vibratory essence of the natural forces in a given area grow upward from the bowels of the land and surrounding elements to form the plant life and vegetation of that area. The indigenous people live, eat, and breathe these natural elements. They die back into them and new generations birth back out again in the passage of generations. The land literally teaches them how to live in harmony with it through this ingestion process. They take it into their bodies. It "speaks" to them. Then it comes out of their mouths as language. They speak the vibrations of that land. Their language and creation myths are embodied vehicles for the wisdom of that place. I could now understand why maintaining the original language of indigenous people is important not just to their survival but to all of humanity. Original languages contain within their vibratory structure the operating rules for how to live in their home territory in a harmonious manner. The indigenous language is a *nierica* [gateway, JWK] by which to access the intelligence of place. Lose the language and you lose its vital instructions about right relationship.

It helps to know the language of the people of a place, whether human or animal or plant.

I strain to listen to the beings in Waltoykewel. I do not know the Nomlaki language. I don't have access to its vibratory structure which would tell me how to live in balance in these hills. I yearn to learn the language to honor the ancestors of this place. I don't even know the name for the pine trees around me. All I know is that they were of great importance. Indeed, gathering them was so central, it seems, that there were different terms for the people gathering them, probably in the month of April: I read that *dehke* is an ordinary tree climber, *lala* an expert climber. And then there is *olhehit*, the man, a type of clown it seems, who yells underneath the tree where somebody is loosening the cones on top. But he doesn't just yell, "he chants a long moaning *heeee-e-e-e-e*, which starts loud and gradually dies out, then starts afresh" (Goldschmidt 1951, 410). I want to call them *hee pines*.

Cati, as the neighboring Wintu say, are the obvious and natural trees of life in this area. Eating more pine nuts and studying the Nomlaki language may help me be in greater balance in this place. Bear was important for the Nomlaki. Grizzly bears used to be

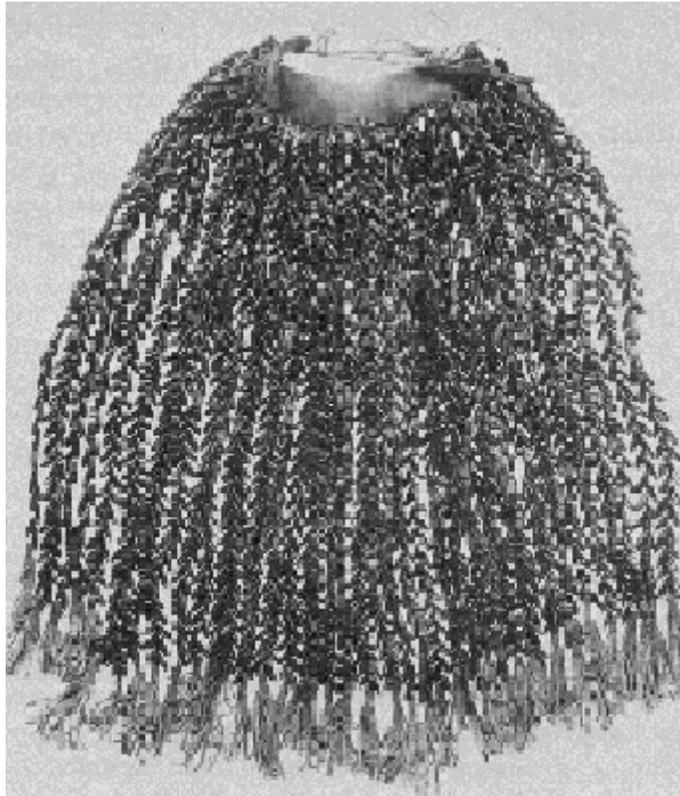
abundant here, before the 1850's. It was common to see forty or more in a single day.

They wrapped the deceased in a bear hide. *Wemal* is their name for bear.

The Wintu have a rich vocabulary related to these grand pine trees (Pitkin 1985); their language is closely related to Nomlaki. There are words not just for the green and the ripe nuts, but there is a specific verb for the removal of the pine nuts. I read *mimiton hudes pel yewca* - they gathered pitch from tree to tree. Then there are terms for pine needles, sugar, pine nuts with beading holes...

And *cati nawus* or *kamilis* - the pine nut skirt worn during dances in the ceremonial lodge.

33



34

The Diné stricken twins continue their wanderings, and they continue to experience nothing but rejection of their requests for healing. Finally the spirits or holy people realize that they have been fathered by one out of the midst of the holy people. So they decide to give them a break, and begin to conduct a healing ceremony for the blind and paralyzed twins. As they are sitting in the sweat lodge they notice how the healing is starting to take effect. They exclaim with joy: "Oh! younger brother, cried one, I see. Oh! elder brother, cried the other, I move my limbs" (Matthews 1902, 244). At this moment of disregard for the instructions given the twins by the holy people the ceremony abruptly ends. Healing does not occur. They are forced to wander again, because now healing is preconditioned on the right offerings, no longer just their blood relationship to the holy people.

It is this moment of breakage that is repeated many times over. Breaking away from sacred origin, spirit kinship. This disastrous moment in the twins' quest strikes me as analogous to what seems to happen so much within the spiritual New Age movement: In search of physical, emotional, and spiritual wholeness seekers wander this planet. And when they find something they publicly exclaim "Eureka!" and publish a book. Oftentimes forgetting about the obligations stories and ceremonies carry, disregarding the instructions for when to speak. Oftentimes forgetting the necessary offerings and exchanges. Indeed, there is a time and place to speak about all this. It needs to be spoken. But it needs to be spoken in wholeness, in balance. With all that has passed in a particular place. With compassionate ruthlessness. Without it beauty so easily turns to nostalgia and kitsch. Wholeness cannot be made up. Elders cannot be made up. Wholeness arises from following all the lines that come together in each of us. No exceptions to be made. No shortcuts.

35

A lizard is stuck in a cut open one gallon plastic container used for nail storage. I hear the scraping noise of its feet. I come to its rescue and take a close look at its very dark markings. Around one of its eyes it has striking pink blotches. The scales shine light turquoise in some places. The lizard disappears across the threshold, to the outside. Half an hour later I walk to my writing table in the shaded area I have created. It is about thirty paces away from the building. I recognize the lizard with the pink blotches. It moves toward some chamise bushes. Just as I turn toward my chair I notice something moving very fast across the flat area. I freeze and see a garter snake darting along at lightning speed. The snake grabs the lizard. It bites the snake's cheek to save its life. Over the next twenty minutes I observe the snake devouring the pink blotched lizard, head first. Slowly the bulge moves further down the snake's body.

36



37

Jenkyns (1998, 4) comments on the difficulty of celebrating the beginning of a new millennium:

The scale of the anniversary, if we are to take it seriously, is of such magnitude that we do not know how to rise to the occasion. Newspapers and magazines may run surveys of the past year, or the past decade, even of the past century. But the past millennium? The idea is somehow absurd. Similarly, hundreds and thousands of people celebrate the arrival of a new year by getting drunk. How do you mark the arrival of a new millennium? Get very very drunk? As an event the millennium is either too large for us to cope with, or too trivial.

Misguided as the scheduled celebrations appear once we leave the precisely arbitrary count and the story from which it arises, I nonetheless like to think that human beings, past and present, were and are capable of thinking in, contemplating, or grasping time intervals of millennial length and even longer. After all, in terms of the 26,000 years long Great Year it is but about half a small year. Rather short in the big picture. Taking such long views seems to be urgently necessary. Grounding them in observable events rather than the runaway of Eurocentric counting seems equally necessary. As Native Americans would put it, we need to enable ourselves to think and vision seven generations forward and backward. And take responsibility within that scheme. Only then will we be able to discuss and discern which of the advantages and purported advances wrought by the European traditions hold up in the light of some larger view.

All stories have a tendency to be self-affirming, but addictive stories have this tendency to a pathological degree. The Eurocentric story of progress and civilization continues to be told. Whatever the adjustments, the structure remains fundamentally the same. It is the story of addiction to progress. Alcoholics Anonymous or Narcotics Anonymous may not be able to help, but they can inspire us to become Eurocentrics or Progressivists Anonymous, or, in the words of Glendinning (1994), we can go into recovery from

Western civilization. Understanding the figment of the millennium for what it is can be a first step.

38

Some days have passed now since I began writing this essay. At sunset the moon is no longer toward the west, but much closer to the south. And she is no longer a crescent, but rapidly approaching fullness. Yesterday at dusk the moon was straight above Mars. Tonight she is straight to the left or east of Mars. Another equilateral triangle in the sky.

Now toward the southeast. 90 degrees.

Bright Venus and bright Mars continue to face each other across the night sky for some hours after sunset. Their relationship is catalyzed by moon, the waxing process of the *normir*, the lines laid out by the spirits of fate. Venus - Mars, Freyja, the great goddess and shaman of the north, and Týr, god of assembly and war, sky god.

39



40

I reflect upon the various twinings that inspired this millennial essay. The "digger" pine and its Indian twin by many names. The blind and the crippled twin. The Hopi and their Elder Brother, the White Man in possession of one of their prophecy tablets. Fjörgyn and Fjörgynn, Nerthus and Njörður, Freyja and Freyr. The Hopi warrior serpent twins on the poles. The precession of the equinoxes and the millennial count. This count, originally, had everything to do with Jesus as appropriated by the churches, by Christianity. In this understanding it is not a digital countdown, and has nothing to do with anticipated Y2K computer problems. Instead, it has everything to do with prophecy as given in the dramatic millennial descriptions of purification in the book of Revelation 20: 1-15. This prophecy was then interpreted within a particular count that had come afterwards.

So much of what makes us think about the millennium has to do with the Christian Church. Since Christianity was essential for the development of contemporary European thinking there is a rightfulness about this. Christian monotheism transcended the wildly varying local spiritual and religious traditions. This abstracting process resulting in universal claims can be seen as an instrumental step in the subsequent development of Eurocentric sciences. From this process originated a prosylotizing, missionizing agenda, as well as a potent relationship with the imperialistic ideology of the Roman Empire through Constantine's conversion. All this prefigured and prepared the abstracting and universalizing claims of the sciences, put to practical use during colonization, and, now, globalization. Jesus as revolutionary Jew fighting for egalitarian politics, practicing open commensality (nondiscriminating food sharing as model for society), and healing (that can be interpreted in terms of shamanic traditions), seems to have been forgotten. On my drives back and forth to Waltoykewel I listen to Homer's *Odyssey*. Horkeimer and Adorno (1944) consider it the foundational text of European civilization, a testament to the dialectics of enlightenment, the rise of one-dimensional rationality. Odysseus is a figure central to the story of European cultures. He embodies the ideals of the male European hero. Strength. Beauty. Cunning. A man of exploits who claims credit for the Trojan horse stratagem while, in fact, others had been so inspired (Graves 1955, 330/1). The citizens of the doomed city are tempted to pull the wooden horse inside through the gates, with their own strength. They do this despite what prophecy had told them. I can think of so many Trojan horses: The horse of the Indo-Europeans; the coke; the refrigerator.; the VCR; video cassettes bringing images of middle class life into remote regions of Mother Earth. European and American culture is spreading everywhere, the progress virus is highly contagious and creates addictions. I think of the Trojan horses of economic development, Americanization as globalization. But I think also of the rise of human rights, the spread of feminism and education. Of course, this is primarily European style education.

And still, 4,000 or so children die every day. 80% of the wealth in the hands of 20% of the world population. Odysseus in the Trojan horse. The coke bottle is the Trojan horse of Americanization. I think about Odysseus' wandering. He sets sail at the millennium, embarks on a journey home at the end of his colonial exploits. Departs from the trophies installed as Hollywood images. I imagine Odysseus Redux traveling to all the places of White Man's conquests. A different journey home. Now it is the end of the colonial enterprise. He gets stranded in various places. Has to collect what he has left behind, the virus. The projections of his own "primitive mentality" onto native peoples. Gathers all the stuff he has left behind. He collects the images of progress. Images of primitivism. Images disparaging others as he disparages his own ancestral roots. Indigenous roots. Odysseus Redux. Odysseus healing.

41

The seasonal creek has now dried up. It only runs underground. No more rill resurfacing periodically during the night. The butterflies still alight on the places holding residual moisture. I read in a German news magazine that corn plants have been genetically altered to carry poison in order to kill insects eating them. The poison is also spread through corn pollen. Thus it is killing monarch butterflies and other insects not eating corn, but living near corn fields. Scientists warn against overreactions to this situation.

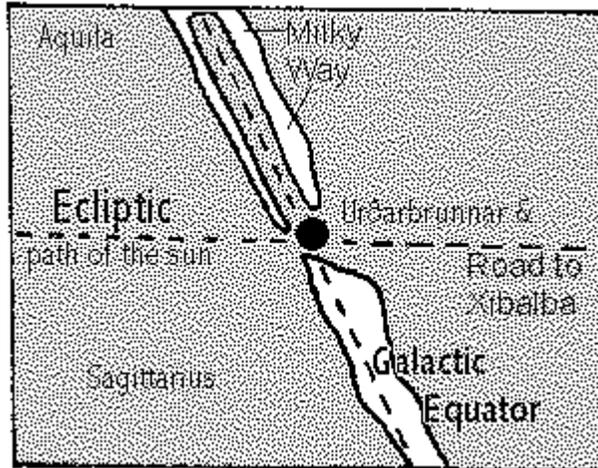
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43

The beginning date of the Mayan Long Count calendar is August 11, 3114BCE. It ends on December 21, 2012CE. (5) A crucial date within the cycle of the precession of the equinoxes. The beginning of a new Great Year. On that day the winter solstice sun conjuncts the crossing point of the galactic equator and the ecliptic. The Mayans called this area the Sacred Tree. This is a very rare event occurring once in several thousands of years. The Mayan calendar takes the precession of the equinoxes into account. It is able to predict this particular astronomical event. This is the moment of creation as described in the *Popul Vuh*. The hero twins *Hunahpu* and *Xbalanque* have to travel down the road of *Xibalba* for the sake of balance and renewal. This dark road is located at that place in the milky way where it has been obscured by interstellar dusk.

This particular area of the sky seems to have similar significance in Old Norse mythology. (6) It is associated with *Urðarbrunnur*, the well of memory, the fount from which the female spirits of fate lift the clay of renewal and fertility. It is located at the root of the tree of life. It is the place where the earth spirit to be reborn, *Jórunn*, appears. The beginning of a new Great Year, the beginning of a new cycle.



44

The story of the stricken twins begins by informing us that "this is a story about song." Singing and visionary seeing are closely related processes. In order for the Norse *völvas* of old to see and speak prophecy, *varðlokkur*, spirit songs, had to be chanted. Song and chant seem important in most every ceremony I know of. Chanted words, syllables, phonemes are the most important ones as they arise most directly from the spirit of place and time. Thus we are at greatest risk in the presence of words thus uttered.

The stricken twin story is about song. The twins are rejected twenty-one times. Each time they have to tell their story. After a number of rejections they are given a healing. And they utter words when silence was called for. They had disregarded the danger they were in. Oblivious to the risk they speak the miracle that is occurring. Through their folly they break the charm. They get sent away while being told that healing now can only occur if they make the appropriate offerings, bring the right gifts. The stricken twins leave. They weep and express their sorrow first in meaningless syllables, then in words. The spirits

take note as they hear the words:

From meadows green where ponds are scattered

From there we come.

Bereft of limbs, one bears another.

From there we come.

Bereft of eyes, one bears another.

From there we come.

By ponds where healing herbs are growing,

From there we come.

With these your limbs you shall recover.

From there we come.

With these your eyes you shall recover.

From there we come.

(Matthews 1902, 245)

The *ye'i*, the spirits or holy people of the Diné, take pity on them, and help them to acquire the necessary offerings. This then, finally, leads to their healing. Twenty-one times the twins have told their stories, wandering all over their native lands. The Nomlaki *olhehit* chants under the pine tree a moaning *heeee-e-e-e-e* as the important nuts are gathered for life. The pine nuts are not simply to be gathered, they are to be spoken to in a sacred manner. Not only because the sizable cones might hit the person

underneath. The person underneath is not hurt because the tree's need for conversation is honored. The *olhehit* knows the chant that nurtures the tree.

The twins told their story twenty-one times before receiving healing. They roamed their native lands from one spirit place to the next, back and forth. How many times will we have to tell the European story until there is healing? Until it is not a "witchery" story?

Until we can turn the story back?

From the perspective of the pine tree and the *ye'i* and the *disir*, the guardian spirits of the Old Norse people, we are traveling as paralyzed and blind people; we no longer know how to move with place, we no longer know how to see time. We have yet to make the right offerings.

I imagine the story of the relationship between the Diné and the European settlers being told, and retold, and retold. Until it is complete, until it has wholeness. I imagine then the sharing of ancestral stories. And I imagine European settlers making offerings to the Diné. It is not that we don't *know* what to do. It is that we don't *do* it.

Indigenous Elders have provided us with instructions that, at least, constitute a beginning point. *Identifying* the place of beginning is simple:

And so it is that when one doesn't know the traditions one has nothing to light one's way. It is as though one lived with a covering on one's eyes, as if one lived being deaf and blind. Yet when one knows the traditions, one has vision to see...all the way to where the land meets the ocean. It's as though one's vision becomes as good as that. (Grey Mustache in Farella 1984, 24)

However, *following* the instructions arising from this beginning place is not simple.

We need to go through the arduous process of telling the story until we get it right. Gathering the storysherds. The story of the millennium is one of imbalance. It is not even right on its own Eurocentric terms. It is a precisely arbitrary moment. To give it power through words is to fuel imbalance and excess. It is getting it wrong. It means putting ourselves at risk. It means furthering the imbalance of masculinization, paying attention to one twin only. Inside and outside.

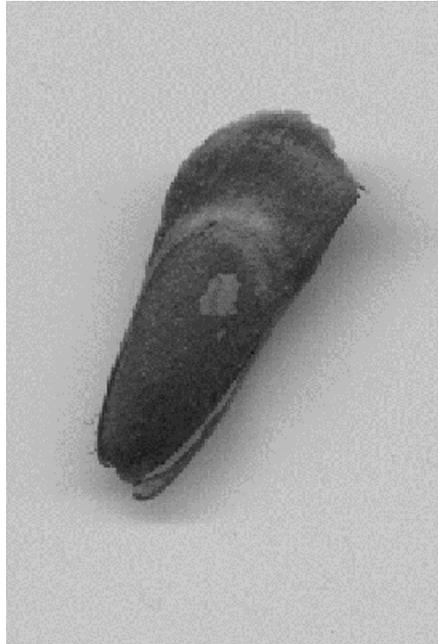
Healing comes on the wind brushing through those twin pines by multiple names - *tuwa*, *gapga*, *towáni*, *sakky*, *náyo*... Listening carefully we may be able to make the stories whole again. Turn the story around. Maybe then, one day, we can chant about excess and imbalance:

Whirling darkness
started its journey
with its witchery
and
its witchery
has returned upon it.
Its witchery
has returned
into its belly.
Its own witchery
has returned
all around it.
Whirling darkness
has come back on itself.
It keeps all its witchery
to itself.
It doesn't open its eyes
with its witchery.

It has stiffened
with the effects of its own witchery.
Its is dead for now.
(Silko 1977, 260-261)

It is not time yet. It is not dead. Excess and imbalance are continuing. There is much healing work to be done.

45



46

The dictum that we need to remember history in order to avoid reproducing it proves insufficient in these millennial times. We need to remember ourselves as natural history, we need to remember ourselves as land, as stars, we need to remember our stories, we need to remember ourselves as plants and as rocks. Such memory can heal us from participation in an arbitrary count foisted upon ourselves and others. It may heal us all the way to the roots of our origins.

And then we may *see*, then we may *hear*, and all our relations may assist us. Our grievous sounds may turn to song, and song may help *see* and *heal*.

It just *may* help us pay attention.

After the fighting, Black Kettle's sister, Mah-wis-sa, implored Custer to leave the Cheyennes in peace. Custer reports that she approached him with a young woman, perhaps seventeen years old, and placed the girl's hands in his. Then she proceeded to speak solemnly in her own language, words which Custer took to be a kind of benediction, with appropriate manners and gestures. When the formalities seemed to come to a close, Mah-wis-sa looked reverently to the skies and at the same time drew her hands slowly down over the faces of Custer and the girl. At this point Custer was moved to ask Romeo, his interpreter, what was going on. Romeo replied that Custer and the young woman had just been married to each other. It is said that Mah-wis-sa told Custer that if he ever again made war on the Cheyennes, he would die. When he was killed at the Little Bighorn, Cheyenne women pierced his eardrums with awls, so that he might hear in the afterlife; he had failed to hear the warning given him at the Washita. (Momaday 1997, 93)

47

I walk into the computer store. On the shelf I see rows of CD-Rom packages entitled *Civilization*. The subtitle reads: *The Will to Power*. It is a strategic game.

48



The major portions of this essay were written during the month of May, 1999.

Footnotes

- (1) The inspiration for the use of the word "storysherd" came from Scarberry-Garcia's (1990) book on N. Scott Momaday; her text also provided some useful contextual information.
- (2) As Finch (1991), following Massey (1907), suggests for the ancient Kemites.
- (3) The four Eddic quotes in this section 8 are from: The first stanza from Terry (1990, 7), the second from Titchenell (1985, 267/8); the third from Terry op. cit., the fourth from Titchenell op. cit.
- (4) Many of the descriptions as well as the quote in section 10 are from Hinton (1994); additional information is based on Heizer (1974) and Pitkin (1985).
- (5) This discussion is based on Freidel, Schele & Parker (1993), Jenkins (1994), and Tedlock (1985).
- (6) The following is based on Jonsson's (1990) interpretation of the Eddic texts.

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