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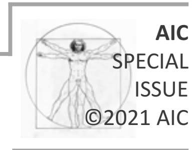

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Indigeneity and Cultural Memory in Wendy Rose's *Bone Dance*

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Celebrated Hopi and Miwok poet Wendy Rose (born in 1948) studied Anthropology and has defined herself as a feminist writer from the beginning of her literary career. In her work, Rose explores her Indigenous identity, while affirming the American Indian continuance on the territory of the United States. This essay traces illustrations of cultural memory in Wendy Rose's *Bone Dance*, a collection of poems published in 1994. Examining poems selected from eight different volumes featured in the collection, I argue that, in representing Indigeneity and engaging cultural memory, Rose prioritizes Native women's experience, objects to the commodification of human remains, rewrites historical events such as the Wounded Knee Massacre, proposes dialogues with tribal ancestors, and continues the traditional practices of singing, dancing, praying and storytelling. The goal of this essay is also to make Rose's work better known in Europe.

Including selections from eight books of poetry, Wendy Rose's *Bone Dance. New and Selected Poems 1965-1993* is the twenty-seventh volume published by the University of Arizona Press in the Sun Tracks Series in 1994. Advertised as a major anthology of Rose's work, the collection illustrates some of the poet's life-long preoccupations with themes such as Indigeneity and cultural memory. A Hopi and Miwok poet, Rose was trained as an anthropologist. In an interview with Joseph Bruchac in 1987, Rose spoke about her approach to anthropology, confessing her anger with the prejudices at the heart of this field: "anthropology is part of a European-derived institution run by the white male power structure" (259). As the poet testifies repeatedly, her struggle against mainstream perceptions of and acts of violence against Indigenous people is interwoven with her struggle against patriarchy. These two political objectives that straddle both American Indian Studies and feminism are defining for her poetic work, as she explains:

> I am a feminist because I am currently living in a society with a particular European-derived history and social structure that is incompatible with my thoughts and feelings about being a woman. Equally incompatible are my thoughts and feelings about what I read and hear by white feminists. I think that the feminism of white women is very different from mine and they do not tend to acknowledge and respect that difference. I am an Indian feminist and that gives me a different perspective from white feminists. (Hunter, 1983: 80)

Rose addresses the specificities of Indigenous women's history and considers that voices like hers should be listened to. Indeed, many Indigenous women writers attempt to clarify their approach to feminism. Among them, Laura Tohe (Diné) argues that early feminist discourse ignored

issues important to Indigenous communities. In the essay "There Is No Word for Feminism in My Language," she demonstrates an awareness of the need to educate the mainstream audiences. She explains Native women's roles as "leaders for the family and the tribe" in matrilineal cultures (103), pointing to Indigenous women's strength and endurance in the face of colonialism. Like Tohe, Rose emphasizes women's responsibilities and rights in Indigenous communities throughout her work.

In *Bone Dance*, Rose recalls certain past experiences of both individual and collective significance, demonstrating that cultural memory is a central concern in her poetry. Marianne Hirsch and Valerie Smith's work on feminism and cultural memory prove useful in their indebtedness to Paul Connerton's definition of cultural memory as an "act of transfer," "an act in the present by which individuals and groups constitute their identities by recalling a shared past on the basis of common, and therefore often contested, norms, conventions and practices" (2002: 5). Hirsch and Smith underline the complexity of the transactions involved, explaining that cultural memory is always connected to the distribution of power: "What we know about the past, and thus our understanding of the present, is shaped by the voices that speak to us out of history; relative degrees of power and powerlessness, privilege and disenfranchisement, determine the spaces where witnesses and testimony may be heard or ignored" (2002: 12). Indeed, women's literary productions recover women's experiences and voices in an attempt to reshape current perspectives on identity. Moreover, in her summary of previous views on cultural memory, Anne Whitehead argues that "cultural memory typically depends upon a specialized practice for its transmission, so that there are designated bearers of memory" (132). This essay will attempt to show how Rose becomes such a bearer of memory through her poetry.

As an Indigenous woman writer, Rose insists on a gendered approach to decolonization. She resorts to storytelling and tribal knowledge to rewrite the past, and thus make the Native point of view known. In her exploration of Indigenous identity through poetry, Rose incorporates references to American Indian practices, which inform her sense of Indigeneity. She invites the mainstream readership in the United States to acknowledge Indigenous presence and to revise stereotypical images of Indigeneity. Moreover, in Rose's revisionist work, the effort to give voice to those forced into the margin parallels the effort to make readers aware of the mechanisms that created historical and cultural amnesia. In her collection *Bone Dance*, Rose prioritizes Native women's experience, objects to the commodification of human remains, rewrites historical events such as the Wounded Knee Massacre, proposes dialogues with tribal ancestors, and centers her work on the traditional practices of singing, dancing, praying and storytelling. By highlighting key features of Rose's work, this analysis also revives interest in her poetry among readers of American Indian literature in Europe.

As a poet, Rose re-captures, re-writes and re-connects Indigenous women's experiences attempting to redefine of what it means to be an Indigenous woman in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century. From the earliest volume represented in the collection, *Hopi Roadrunner Dancing* (1973), the poet discloses her interest in exploring Hopi culture as she embarks on a search for Indigenous identity and discovers ways to express it visually. In "Lab Genesis," which could be read as a testament of her convictions, the speaker insists: "there will be / no archeology / to my bones"[3] (Rose, 1994: 6). This desire to be left alone after death expresses criticism of the practice of unearthing human remains for research or museum

[3]All quotations are from Wendy Rose, *Bone Dance. New and Selected Poems 1965-1993* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1994) and hereafter cited in the text.

storage.[4] This is a trope Rose returns to in her future volumes, where she makes further statements against the collection and appropriation of Native remains by outsiders. The poet objects to this practice by reminding readers that death is just a form of "new knowledge," strongly connected to life:

life is dying
each moment
learning to live
each moment
in & out
like bird breath. (6)

A strong defense of Indigenous survival, despite the encroachments of colonialism, "learning to live each moment" also expresses the individual's embrace of life. Beyond the political connotation of her reflections, the poem also invites readers to contemplate metaphysical questions, both in this and other poems.

Continuing her investigation of Indigenous presence in the United States, her second volume, *Long Division: A Tribal History* (1976), takes a hard look at the past in order to understand the present. In the poem that bears this volume's title, the question "Who are we and do we still live?" (9) structures the entire poem. The fight to resist erasure continues throughout the volume, as the speaker announces:

we struggle until our blood
has spread off our bodies
and frayed the sunset edges.
It's our blood that gives you
those southwestern skies. (9)

Confident in Indigenous resilience and capacity to preserve cultural identity and traditions, the speaker also points to the history of conflict, often marked by bloodshed, which the territory she inhabits has known. By using "we" and "our," she expresses a collective point of view, showing how individual and communal perceptions are woven together. The persistence of such memories connected to battles between the Indigenous nations and the European colonizers tints the sunset. Once the reddish colors of the twilight were associated with the blood lost long ago; all subsequent sunsets remind survivors of the loss the nation suffered, and represent an occasion for grieving and mourning. At the same time, the memory of the previous generations' sacrifices determines contemporary Indigenous people to move forward toward healing and thriving, which they owe their ancestors.

Part of the continuum of self-definitions that form Rose's poetry, "Vanishing Point: Urban Indian" contains a series of statements "It is I." The poem contains simultaneously life-affirming statements, "It is I who had to search", and meditations on death, "It is I who die / bearing cracked turquoise & making noise / so as to protect your fragile immortality // O

[4] Rose's volume of poetry was published before the passing of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act / NAGPRA (1990), a law which has advanced the dialogue between museums and tribal nations.

medicine ones" (10). Robin Riley Fast sees the role of this voice as "protective, heroic, ironic, or all three simultaneously" (1999: 58). The speaker takes upon herself a valiant mission for the sake of her people, in her attempt to shield them from harm, even if that mission might be self-destructive. Turquoise signifies her tribal nation in the southwest[5]; the speaker refers to its energy and life-saving properties. More importantly, in this poem Rose represents urban American Indians who have maintained their connections with their nations even after they were forced by the Relocation Act of 1956 to live in faraway urban settings:

> It is I in the cities, in the bars,
> In the dustless reaches of cold eyes
> who vanishes, who leans underbalanced
>
> into nothing; it is I
> without learning, I without song
> who dies & cries the death-time. (10)

The speaker alludes to the sense of disconnect and the alienation of Indigenous people in the city, giving a poetic form to what many Natives reported about relocation. According to historian Peter Iverson, "Testimony from urban migrants attested to a great variety in their experiences. […] More than a few found life traumatic" (1998: 134). The need for preserving one's cultural identity resonates in Rose's lines, supported by historical evidence, as Iverson suggests:

> Through Indian centers, churches, and associations, urban Indians often discovered not only that they were not alone, but that they could gain counsel and camaraderie. The racism and discrimination they encountered sometimes inspired greater solidarity, greater understanding of common multitribal identity as Indians […]. (1998: 135)

The development of a Pan-Indian approach proves helpful for urban American Indians in certain circumstances, but the return to one's Indigenous culture has stronger healing effects, Rose suggests.

Re-membering is also essential in another inspired self-portrait in the title poem of *Lost Copper* (1980), a volume which received a Pulitzer Prize nomination and attention from literary critics. In this poem, the speaker emerges from the earth as she seems "to grow from the ground that bears" (15) her. Depicting a strong connection to the earth, the speaker also points to gestures that unite humans with the animal kingdom:

> Like a summer-nude horse I roll on my back
> and fishtail my hips from side to side;
> then on my belly, my navel gone home,
> I scrape my cheek and teeth and ride. (15)

[5]A reference to the productive turquoise mine, Los Cerrillos, and the use of the stone for jewelry by one of the Pueblo tribes in New Mexico appears in Marcia Keegan, *Pueblo People: Ancient Traditions, Modern Lives* (197-8). Turquoise has been iconic for Native American tribes in the southwest for centuries.

This enactment has intrigued Helen Jakoski, who remarks: "Such communion with the earth is actually a rite undertaken by some tribal peoples to emphasize and reconstitute their relationship to the earth through the specific site of their birth" (1997: 261). Indeed, the emergence and self-recognition of this "squash-brown daughter" at the center of the poem is a memorable image for the entire volume since this identification with one's site of birth reinforces the persona's self-definition as a Native woman.

In the next poem in *Lost Copper*, in a conversation with her Hopi ancestors, the speaker strives to keep their songs alive (16). As she continues the traditions of singing and storytelling, she becomes her ancestors' carrier of Hopi traditions. She receives the task to "sing and weep" (16) for her predecessors and she successfully does so through her writing. Poetry-making is consistent with tribal oral traditions, as P. Jane Hafen maintains: "nearly all contemporary American Indian writers incorporate orality in their works" (2002: 235); Hafen also acknowledges that their strategies differ greatly. Throughout her work, Rose identifies her own ways of reproducing orality, such as presenting her poems as songs and stories coming from tribal repositories of memory. Moreover, she speaks not only for her Hopi relatives, but also for other Indigenous nations across the United States.

Emphasizing the Native perspective on the past, Rose chooses to revisit a historical event connected to a nation different from hers, but relevant for the process of decolonization. Further in the volume *Lost Copper*, in one of her most anthologized poems, "I Expect My Skin and My Blood to Ripen," the speaker gives voice to a Lakota woman who lost her life during the Wounded Knee Massacre of 1890, "when US cavalry gunned down 150 Indians including women and children: another 100 or more died escaping in the snow" (Porter, 2005: 54). Recent accounts of the event discuss it in the context of the genocide inflicted upon Native Americans in the nineteenth century by the federal U.S. government: "The Seventh Cavalry's attack on a group of unarmed and starving Lakota refugees attempting to reach Pine Ridge to accept reservation incarceration in the frozen days of December 1890 symbolizes the end of Indigenous armed resistance in the United States" (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2015: 155). The emphasis on the idea that the refugees posed no threat (since they were unarmed) is essential in defining the event as a massacre and not a battle. Creative writers and historians alike remember the Wounded Knee site from an alternative perspective to the colonial one, thus revising previous depictions of this historical event in settler histories of the United States.

In "Herbs of Healing: American Values in American Indian Literature," Osage writer Carter Revard discusses Rose's poem as poetry of protest. When analyzing Rose's choice of including an excerpt from a sales catalog that advertised artifacts taken from the Wounded Knee site, Revard suggests that the poet appeals to her readers "to have some remaining belief that what we call Art is linked in some way to the ethical and spiritual aspects of life, not solely to the monetary" (2003: 180). Forcing readers to see how inappropriate it is to sell objects connected to a site of Indigenous massacre is one of the major goals of the poem.[6] By reframing the rendition of the episode and allowing a Native woman to give her own testimony about the brutal army attack at Wounded Knee, Rose brings the Native perspective on historical events to the forefront. The Lakota woman in the poem details her experience, producing a striking and incriminating indictment. Her statements disclose the lack of

[6]An emphasis on the unethical practice of collecting Native artifacts is offered in my contribution to *Migration, Diaspora, Exile: Narratives of Affiliation and Escape*, edited by Daniel Stein, Cathy C. Waegner, Geoffroy de Laforcade and Page R. Laws (64).

humanity of those who stripped the deceased of their clothing, jewelry and footwear, desecrating the frozen bodies in the process:

> I expected my skin and my blood
> to ripen, not to be ripped from my bones;
> like fallen fruit I am peeled, tasted,
> discarded. My seeds open
> and have no future. (18)

These lines are a powerful way of bearing witness and inviting contemporary readers to learn or remember the atrocities that occurred in 1890. The comparison between a dead woman's body and a piece of fruit that is abused and consumed impresses even the coldest of readers, and the reference to seeds points to reproduction and childbirth. The poem alludes to the much more painful and unforgivable crime, that of tearing babies away from their mothers and forcing them to witness their departure:

> It was my own baby
> whose cradleboard I held—
> would've put her in my mouth like a snake
> if I could, would've turned her into a bush
> or rock if there'd been magic enough. (19)

The excruciating pain encapsulated in these lines renders not only the despair of one mother who finds herself incapable of protecting her children, but it is also a larger reference to the history of crimes against Indigenous communities. Rose's poem is an homage to Indigenous mothers who continue to carry such memories and wounds in their collective memory and artistic expression.

Preoccupied with commemorating the Wounded Knee Massacre, Rose returns to this episode in the poem "December," included in a 1993 volume, *Going to War with All My Relations*. Here the poet imagines the collective voices of the dead uttering their song to the living. The lines "we became the stones / that bruised your feet" (82) are followed by the explanation that the harm caused by these stones remind readers of the babies sacrificed at Wounded Knee. Advancing such a vision is a powerful call for preventing history from repeating itself. A cautionary note is heard louder than a revengeful wail. According to Dean Rader, Rose's "December" centers on an important lesson: "the landscape wears its history of bloodshed just as the surviving generations of the massacre wear theirs" (2003: 135). A survivor, Rose constantly negotiates between conflicting pressures: pain and hope, despair and joy, rage and confidence in the future. These negotiations shape her poetry.

At times poetry writing turns into a mourning and healing exercise. Facing the past and exposing the painful truth are necessary for both the individual and the community because unburdening oneself through language has therapeutic effects, a step toward forgiveness and reconciliation. The poem "Three Thousand Dollar Death Song" offers a similar indictment, another accusation directed at anthropology and museum practices that disrespect human

remains.[7] This poem starts from a museum invoice that puts a price ($ 3,000) on nineteen American Indian skeletons. In Karen Tongson-McCall's essay on Rose's poetry, which devotes a section of the analysis to the poem "The Value of Memory" (1996: 21-26), the critic starts from the following premise about the poetic assumption in the text: "Culture and human life are commodified, in essence dehumanized, in order to be controlled and colonized" (1996: 21). Turning bones into commodities becomes the central issue the poem addresses with rage and sorrow. By exposing the cruelty of such practices and the context that made them possible, Rose attempts to adjust behaviors, to convince her readers to take action against such manifestations of colonization. In this poem, cultural memory is as a key theme:

> What price the pits
> where our bones share
> a single bit of memory,
> how one century has turned
> our dead into specimens,
> our history into dust,
> our survivors into clowns. (21)

In a few lines, Rose captures three main tenets of Indigenous activism: respect for Native human remains and artifacts, rewriting history so that it credits Native perspectives, and self-determination and sovereignty for survivors.[8] Imagining the dead walking out of the museum, "Watch our bones rise" (21), is an act of empowering the living, a call to fight for a just treatment of their ancestors' remains. This fight for justice for the dead is connected to the fight for justice for the living, which has implications for the continuing struggle for independence, autonomy, and decolonization. The past, the present and the future are interconnected; a fight for a sustainable future for the next generations is unavoidable.

A further decolonizing act in Rose's poetry is linked to exposing white shamanism, a form of cultural appropriation. The "white shamans" are the poets of Euro-American descent who "assume the persona of the shaman, usually in the guise of an American Indian medicine man" (Hobson, *apud* Rose, 1998: 296). The poem "For the White Poets Who Would Be Indian" speaks against those who appropriate American Indian culture in their writing, perpetuating the exploitation of Indigenous knowledge. Rose's indictment reveals her critique settler self-interest and ignorance of current Indigenous struggles: "You think of us only / when your voice / wants for roots" (22). The problem of "temporary tourism" (22), or appropriating American Indian identity temporarily, when it is convenient, is at the center of both the poem and in Rose's essay, where she also calls them "culture vultures" (1998: 303). Such practices, distorting Indigenous history and misrepresenting contemporary issues, have damaging effects for Native communities. Rose warns against the dangers of white shamanism as she guards cultural memory and ensures American Indian continuance on the territory of the Unites States.

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[7]Similarly, "Notes on a Conspiracy" in *Going to War with All My Relations* expresses rage and sorrow, this time in connection to the exhibition of 44 skulls by the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (Rose, 1994: 86-7).

[8]According to Kidwell and Velie, "Tribal sovereignty is a basic concept for Native American Studies, and the unique, fiduciary responsibility that the United States has toward Indian tribes is an essential aspect of political identity for Indian people in the United States today" (2005: 61-2).

The same issue of continuance is central to a volume with a playful title: *What Happened When the Hopi Hit New York* (1982). This collection is also a form of spiritual cartography, as the poems track a journey from Alaska to Chicago, Iowa City, New Orleans, Vermont, New Hampshire and Connecticut, with New York as the final destination. The movement West to East marks a conscious effort to present decolonizing visions of the American continent by taking the opposite direction to colonization. The speaker assumes the position of observer, recording patiently the specificity of each place. A statement at a writers' gathering captures Rose's self-positioning: "I maintain / without willing it / an Indian invisibility" (37). Keenly aware of the settler ignorance of Indigenous presence, the speaker comments on how she can easily avoid being seen. She learns to turn a disadvantage, that of being ignored, into an asset, that of becoming an observer. Poem titles such as "Searching for Indians in New Orleans" or "Subway Graffiti: An Anthropologist's Impressions" suggest similarities to Simon Ortiz's *A Good Journey* (1977), where he is also "interested in acknowledging the American Indian presence around the continent and in reasserting survival" (Martanovschi, 2009: 112). In the latter poem (43-47), Rose compares graffiti on subway walls to petroglyphs: "The slippery cliff walls / tell of war, of prayer, / of hunts long over" (44). Rose teaches her readers about petroglyphs and graffiti, alternative means of recording history, valuable repositories of cultural memory.

Engaging different forms of representation and cultures is central to the volume *The Halfbreed Chronicles* (1985). Here Rose references other Indigenous groups to strengthen her sense of self. As Sheila Hassell Hughes explains, the poet comprises a multitude of affinities:

> Her political commitments clearly align her with indigenous movements worldwide, but her negotiation of ethnicity complicates matters to some degree. In subversion of both white and Native demands for "authentic" Indianness—as original artifact and/or tribal representative—the poet chooses instead to act out integrity as an ongoing spiritual and political practice of integrating diverse elements. (2004: 17)

Consistent with her urge to integrate incongruent elements with her political and empathic approach, Rose proposes another memorable dramatic monologue in "Julia." Here, the poet gives voice to Julia Pastrana, "a Mexican Indian who had had been born with facial deformities" (60) in the nineteenth century. According to Rose's explanation in the epigraph to the poem, this circus performer, advertised as "The World's Ugliest Woman," died a few days after giving birth to a son who had lived only briefly. The husband-manager exploited her even after her death by having "Julia and her infant boy stuffed, mounted and put on display together in a glass case" (60). The speaker's wailing plea centers the poem: "O my husband / tell me again / this is only a dream" (62). Risen from the dead, Julia speaks, addressing her oppressor—whom she did not see for what he was—and the world. The poem breaks the silence in which this woman had been thrown by inimical circumstances and ultimately death. The poem is a personal testimony as much as it is a denunciation of societal practices that permit a (diseased) woman's body to be objectified and taken advantage of both in life and death. Indeed, the poem has been interpreted as "a complex and powerful statement, fusing compassion for the disinherited with outrage at the public commodification of private tragedy" (Jaskoski, 1997: 263). By insisting that Julia Pastrana was still on display in the 1970s, Rose forces readers to think of the all pervasive forms of colonization and misogyny that have

shaped hetero-patriarchal settler culture's memory and have survived into the twentieth century. The poet urges readers to take action against similar social ills.

Further proof of Rose's propensity for empathy comes with *What the Mohawk Made the Hopi Say* (1993), a volume she wrote in collaboration with Mohawk poet Maurice Kenny (1929-2016), who was also deeply concerned with representations of Indigeneity. In this volume, poetry is interwoven with travel writing, as the two traveling and writing partners explore the Eastern area of the United States: Rose (Hopi) as a guest and Kenny (Mohawk) as a host. The poem "Reminder" returns to the image of bones to further suggest the living beings' connection to the dead:

> Why must you tell me
> my bones are not alone,
> that there are so many
> songs in the ground? (66)

Tribally-based cultural memory stays alive as present-day travelers feel close to the dead, but whose songs live on. Moreover, the poem invites readers to make connections between the tribal nations in the East and the tribal nations in the West, between individuals and groups, between the present and the past, emphasizing the idea of interconnectedness central to Indigenous worldviews. As the texts in *What the Mohawk Made the Hopi Say* introduce Eastern place names and references to discoveries facilitated by her guide, the Western traveler is fascinated with everything she sees and comes to understand. "Six Nations Museum" suggests a ritual of initiation into traditions of the East, which the Hopi poet celebrates with a sense of wonder and respect: "Is this what you mean / by the Eastern Door" (70). Openness to learning permeates the collection. Rose offers a model of intercultural understanding based on mutual respect and empathy, as the Hopi and Mohawk poets illustrate. This model contrasts the type of disrespectful and aggressive colonial approach that Europeans adopted upon arrival.

The preoccupation with European heritage recurs throughout her work. Investigating the poet's European ancestry is at the heart of *Going to War with All My Relations* (1993), which contains autobiographical poems. The poem "Margaret Neumann" is dedicated to her mother's German great-grandmother.[9] Fully aware of the contradictions implied in her mixed heritage, Rose dwells on them openly:

> If you are a part of me
> I am also that crazy acorn
> Within your throat
> around which pioneer stories
> rattle and squirm. (79)

The contemporary female speaker contemplates the discomfort that she imagines her ancestor felt in dealing with Indigenous people because of the European prejudices against them in the

[9] This poem introduces the collection *Itch Like Crazy* (2002), where Rose persists in her efforts of exploring her family's history.

nineteenth century. The poet contemplates both the persistence of Indigeneity and the dissolution of Europeanness in the following lines:

> If I am the tongue made indigenous
> by all the men you would love,
> I am also the ghost
> of the pioneer's future. (79)

When the speaker insists on the role of memory and heritage, Rose ponders on the cultural elements defining the Neumanns before their transatlantic journey. The poem suggests that the German people themselves are the product of various waves of colonization, which could trigger empathy toward Indigenous people in North America:

> Do you remember
> the sacred signs
> painted in the startling blue,
> spirits that mumbled
> in the German Black Forest?
> Do you remember the tribes
> that so loved their land
> before the roll
> of Roman wheels? (80)

A meditation on the vagaries of fortunes and empires, the poem invites readers to reconsider their understanding of American history by taking a closer look at European colonial history. Roman rule arrived on the territory of the Germanic tribes with the same impudence that marked the colonizers' arrival in North America. Rose suggests that the story of the colonizer and the colonized is always the same, irrespective of geographical location.

Concluding the volume *Bone Dance*, the selection from *Now Poof She Is Gone* features poems published in 1994. In the title poem, the speaker envisions ways of disappearance, such as the dissolution of a dandelion. The poem "Is It Crazy to Want to Unravel" captures further imaginative paths toward nothingness:

> I could evaporate or liquefy
> or become dust or turn sideways
> before a funhouse mirror
> to become a needle
> becoming nothing. (94)

All these instances that lead to the inexorable end of "now / poof she is gone" (95) are reflections on the experience of invisibility. On the one hand, it is a highly individual preoccupation with Rose's own self-perception and struggles; on the other hand, it could be read as a rumination on the settler culture's dwelling on the fabricated concept of the vanishing Indian. The poem has both a self-oriented dimension and a nation-oriented one, illustrating Rose's constant balancing of individual and collective preoccupations.

Confirming the constant search for self-definition in Rose's work, the poem "Forty, Trembling" proposes one more such memorable reflection on how the speaker sees herself: "She is not of this world / and no one rides / to the rescue" (99). The sense that one has an extraordinary destiny that she has to fulfill fuses into a sense of helplessness. The speaker finds solace in communicating and looking for support beyond this world. Re-emphasizing one's need to keep returning to a dialogue with one's ancestors, "Plutonium Vespers" is written as a prayer addressed to grandparents. The speaker honors her ancestors with an offering:

> Grand mother
> Grand father
>
> Take this offering
> Of flesh, this color
> and this color, take
> all the memories,
> take the pain,
> take it and shake it. (104)

The speaker asks the ancestors for mercy for an entire series of present realities, such as "great bombs onto earth," an image that captures the use of nuclear weapons in WWII, as well as the threat of an atomic disaster in the present. Rose's vision, in its appeal to tribal ancestors, and to restoring order and peace, follows Hopi worldviews. According to Louis A. Hieb, "For the Hopi, all forms of prayer offering are understood to be prestations requiring reciprocity between the two realms. Prayer offerings in any form are operations of exchange. They are relational but, more important, they make obligatory and compensative requirements of the spirits of the other world" (1979: 580). At the height of her poetic career in 1994, Rose was torn between the need to continue to engage with cultural memory and the impulse to just leave this heavy load behind and walk away from the pain. For several more years the poet chose to continue her work, with a sense of responsibility for her community.

As this essay has demonstrated, Wendy Rose stands out as a notable American Indian woman writer whose poetry helps map her search for identity, her experience as a Hopi woman, her questioning of the past, her courage to expose acts of injustice, her perseverance in bearing witness, her capacity to integrate disjunctive elements of history, her focus on healing, and her overflowing creativity. By choosing to concentrate on Indigeneity and cultural memory in Rose's *Bone Dance*, this essay has offered a new reading of the poet's work and legacy through an emphasis on Rose's merits as one of the best "designated bearers of memory" (Whitehead, 2009: 132).

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