This is a poem of anger . . . .

All of us are "Indian" now

The treaty not made is the only one

which might never be broken

It promises waste, it promises death

for as long as the rivers run

for as long as the grass shall grow

Joseph Bruchac, "Wahsah Zeh (War Dance) -- As Long as the Grass" [11]

Simon Ortiz is an Acoma Pueblo writer who incorporates his experiences working in the New Mexico uranium mines and mills in the early 1950s into his art, explicitly advocating resistance to economic and ecological exploitation. He prefaces one extensive work: "The following story and poem narratives speak for the sake of the People and for the sake of the land. Hanoh eh haaze kuutseniah -- the People's fightback is critical." [12] In the opening poem, "It Was That Indian," Ortiz ironically observes a number of paradoxes and hypocrisies: the basing of nuclear development projects in Indian lands; the ironies of a development that sometimes bring boom, sometimes unprecedented ruination, and the various ways that the neo-colonial culture manipulates the image of the Indian to its own ends. Here, he tells us of "Martinez," the Navajo man who "discovered uranium / west of Grants." Soon after:

Tourist magazines did a couple spreads

on him, photographed him in kodak color,

and the Chamber of Commerce celebrated
that Navajo man
...
The city fathers named
a city park after him
and some even wanted to put up a statue
of Martinez but others said
that was going too far for just an Indian
even if he was the one who started that area
into a boom

Well, later on,
when some folks began to complain
about chemical poisons flowing into the streams
from the processing mills, carwrecks on Highway 53,
lack of housing in Grants,
cave-ins at Section 33,
non-union support,
high cost of living,
an uranium radiation causing cancer,
they -- the Chamber of Commerce -- pointed out
that it was Martinez
that Navajo Indian from over by Bluewater

who discovered uranium,

it says so in this here brochure,

he found that green stone over by Haystack

out behind his hogan

it was that Indian who started that boom. [13]

Of course, as Ortiz later notes, the popular story that Martinez had "discovered" uranium ably served racism by reiterating "the idea of the Indian bringing his own fate upon his head." [14] The non-touristic stories that he tells point out that the government located the laboratory in Los Alamos, tested in Alamogordo, and allowed uranium to be found on Navajo and Laguna lands because these areas were most vulnerable to capitalist/military exploitation. As Ortiz concludes: "No, it was not that Navajo man who discovered uranium. It was the U.S. government and the economic and military interests which would make enormous profits and hold the world at frightened bay which made that discovery in a colonized area." [15]

Some of the New Mexico Pueblos, notably Santo Domingo, have refused to allow uranium mining on or near their land. In 1979, The Pueblo Council of Santo Domingo issued a statement outlining its concerns: "The Indian way of thinking about land is different than the non-Indian's. We believe that all things on this earth are sacred, and all things have as much right to exist as man himself. The non-Indian world is out of balance with nature -- it is always trying to destroy it. We oppose this way of life." [16]

In a number of her essays, most notably "Everything Is a Human Being," novelist, poet, and essayist Alice Walker (of African, Native American, and European descent) continually references Native American philosophy as providing the most sensible, passionate, and historically compelling

basis for contemporary ecological consciousness. She uses the Oglala Sioux word for the white man, Wasichu, "he who takes the fat," to designate those who, in the name (tradition) of the so-called "fathers" of this country, perpetuate a tradition of defiling and disrespecting the land and other life forms, and contrasts the Wasichu worldview with the Native American:

> The new way to exist on the Earth may well be the ancient way of the steadfast lovers of this particular land. No one has better appreciated Earth than the Native American. Whereas to the Wasichus only the white male attains full human status, everything to he Indian was a relative. Everything was a human being. [17]

"Everything to the Indian was a relative": so might read a primal theory of relativity. Walker asks her readers to realize that "even tiny insects in the South American jungle know how to make plastic, for instance; they have simply chosen not to cover the Earth with it." [18] Perhaps too, it is because these beings choose more beautiful and efficient means to accomplish their tasks. Roberta Hill Whiteman (Oneida) reminds us that "spiders near your door / joined all the reddening blades of grass / without oil, hasp or uranium." [29]

This principle governing the equal sacredness of all life continues to inform contemporary Native nuclear writings, including the poems of Diane Glancy (Cherokee), Ralph Salisbury (Cherokee), Awiakta (Cherokee), and Terri Meyette (Yaqui). [20] Meyette's "Celebration 1982" scorns Western valuations, as she surveys the wreckage from a "harmless" underground nuclear weapons test:

> They say no one died.
> Tiny desert flower

micro beetle bug

are they not life

. . . .

They say no one died

Nevada desert

1000 miles into her bowels

earth melted.

radiation, radiation, radiation,

radiation.

oozed into blood

of Shoshone and Paiute.

The bomb lasted minutes

the intent lasts generations

in the womb of Creation, herself.

They say no one died.

Closing their eye,

they dismissed death

dismissed life

became blinded

by white flash

their God.

Meyette's recognition of the divine yearnings which poured into the development of atomic weaponry is astute. J. Robert Oppenheimer, widely known as the "Father of the Bomb," code named

the first test site "Trinity." Different derivations for the name have been suggested, including the threesome of nuclear sites (Los Alamos, Hanford, and Oak Ridge) operating during World War II, and the Hindu trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. However, the most commonly accepted one is that Oppenheimer was recalling a John Donne poem invoking the three-personed god of the Christian tradition. Whatever the derivation, the nickname was one of the first of countless images which continue to associate nuclear power with religious tradition in the popular arts and oral tradition as well as elite literature and philosophy. [21]

Ironically, any damage to the "Womb of Creation" is denied by another set of metaphors central to the language of nuclear invention -- that of male birth. In this oft told tale, the all-male group of atomic scientists "gives birth" to sons/bombs. For example, at Los Alamos, the scientists took bets among themselves as to whether they would ultimately have a "boy" or a "girl," that is a success or a dud. A success it was and the bomb dropped on Hiroshima was nicknamed "Little Boy." Subsequently, the American Baby Association named Oppenheimer "Father of the Year" for 1945. [22]

Scholars of nuclear culture rightly direct attention to the ways that these metaphors reveal the underlying phallocentrism of the nuclear project as well as its divinization of weapons of mass murder. [23] Taking this lead, we might also might be cognizant of the greater meanings contained in another metaphorical image employed in 1942 to describe the success of the Italian physicist Enrico Fermi and his Chicago lab in producing the first self-sustaining fission chain reaction. One scientist from the team, Arthur Compton,immediately called in the news to another colleague, James Conant: "Jim, you'll be interested to know that the Italian navigator has just landed in the new world." Conant replied: "Is that so? Were the natives friendly?" [24] The controlled splitting of the atom is thus explicitly linked to the "discovery," that is, exploitation, domination, and

remains. Humans desecrate only themselves. The Earth is inviolate.[69]

Nuclear Poetry

> I hold to the traditional Indian views on language, that words have power, that words become entities. When I write I keep in mind that it is a form of power and salvation that is for the planet. If it is good and enters the world, perhaps it will counteract the destruction that seems to be getting so close to us. I think of language and poems, even fiction, as prayers and small ceremonies.
>
> Linda Hogan (Chickasaw)[70]

As we have seen, many writers link some aspect of atomic power with a feature of their tribe's spiritual tradition.[71] One of the most arresting of these is the "emblem" that Awiakta tells us she has "created for my life and work -- the sacred white deer of the Cherokee, leaping in the heart of an atom."[72] In 1977, Awiakta visited the Oak Ridge Museum of Science and Energy:

> I was looking at an immense translucent blue model of the atom. Inside it, tiny lights, representing electrons, whirl in orbit. As I watched this, my state of consciousness slowly altered, and suddenly I saw Little Deer leaping in the heart of the atom . . . At this moment the words of Neils Bohr, the great Danish physicist (and poetry-lover), came to me (he was the first to apply the quantum theory successfully to the problem of atomic structure): "When it comes to atoms, language can only be used as in poetry. The poet, too, is not nearly so concerned with describing facts as with creating images and mental connections." This was my spontaneous understanding of how the world of traditional

Native American thought and the world of scientific thought meet deep in the mystery. [73]

As she explained in a conversation with me (April 7, 1991): "Little Deer is a spirit of reverence for the sacred circle of life. He embodies the principle of never taking without giving back. He is a protean symbol, reminding us of the spirit that is always on the move, always circling." This emblem asks us to remember that just as the hunter always had to "pray words of pardon" for the life that was given, lest he be pursued by Little Deer who "swiftly pains and cripples his bones so he never can hunt again,"[74] so too must contemporary culture ensure reverence for the atom, or else suffer retribution.

Awiakta abhors the dualisms that constrain "circling," arguing that a holistic approach must be adopted in order that productive harmony be restored with the atom: "Long before I learned the / universal turn of atoms, I heard / the spirit's song that bind us / all as one. And no more / could I follow any rule / that split my soul." [75] She further illustrates her point by telling a story of two gatherings at the site of the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant in California. The first was an anti-nuclear protest as three thousand:

> women and men protested the activation of a nuclear power plant so near an earthquake fault. That protest was effective, but it says much about the dominant, non-holistic mode of American thought that an article about the second group was buried in the middle of a San Francisco newspaper. After the 3000 had left Diablo Canyon to wind and silence, a band of about 80 Chumash Indians came to the site of the power plant. They raised a wood-sculpted totem and sat in a circle around it for a day-long prayer vigil. Jonathan Swift Turtle, a Mewok medicine man, said that the Indians did not

oppose nuclear technology but objected to the plant's being built atop a sacred Chumash burial site, as well as near an earthquake fault. He said he hoped the vigil would bring about "a moment of harmony between the pro- and anti-nuclear factions." [76]

The "deadliest fission," then, is the one that channels reality into false dichotomies (such as pro- and anti-nuclear) and, correspondingly, that splits "the atom from the sacred"[77] by negating and neglecting the poetic meaning of the atom. Awiakta writes that in her childhood she understood the atom as "a presence beautiful, mysterious, dangerous . . . like the mountain." Even as a young girl, though, she sensed that the atom had gone "awry," and turned away from it without knowing why. Later, as an adult, she realized that her disaffection was due to "the way they spoke of it. They'd split the nucleus in those days -- neat, precise, controlled -- and described it in heavy, concrete prose"; to her, the atom had lost its "poetry." [78] The language was soulless because the venture itself demanded soullessness, objectivity and objectification, making the world into a "dead thing," trying to penetrate/split the very heart of matter/mother.

Awiakta's disdain for the ontological vacuum of standard nuclear language is shared by many other thinkers, the most perceptive of these including Carol Cohn, Glenn Hook, and Robert J. Lifton. [79] All would vehemently agree with Linda Hogan in understanding words to be "forms of power"; their focus, though, is on the everyday "nukespeak" or "technostrategic speak" that, in Hook's words, is used "consciously or unconsciously in the structuring of nuclear reality . . . making nuclear weapons easier to live with."[80] Such terminology orders identification with wielders of weaponry (not those who are targeted) and is awash with emotionless and sanitized euphemisms (e.g., "collateral damage" instead of "massacre). By uttering the dominant culture's nukespeak, these critics argue, we learn, participate in, and ultimately acquiesce or surrender to that world view.

What distinguishes Native American theorists-artists, specifically in the field of nuclear theory, is a movement beyond the critique of nukespeak to become active poets of the atom. All of the authors discussed here are concerned with language and story as ceremonial forms of power. They invent images, metaphors, poems, and stories that articulate and foment rage and resistance, upend standard modes of perception, explain, convey, and practice reverence, and ritually act to shift the spiritual/psychic, and hence the material, (im)balance of power in the nuclear age.