

The Fork-in-the-Road Indian Poetry Store

PHILLIP CARROLL MORGAN is an enrolled Choctaw/Chickasaw bi-lingual poet who has enjoyed a 25-year artistic collaboration with his painter-sculptor wife, Kate Arnott Morgan. This collaboration has seen the birth of three children, as well as the production of *The Fork-in-the-Road Indian Poetry Store*, which won the 2002 Native Writers Circle of the Americas First Book Award for Poetry. He has worked as a newspaper editor, business executive, building tradesman, guitar player, and rancher. He is currently a PhD student in Native Literature at the University of Oklahoma.

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PHILLIP CARROLL MORGAN



CAMBRIDGE

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IN MEMORY OF RAYMOND WADE MORGAN

my father luak, who held on to his chickasaw nation land, our home, despite the dawes commission, two world wars, the great depression, a period of alcoholism, three marriages and two divorces.

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perhaps a bit of fishes' fin
perhaps a bit of fish is I

—GEORGE VALODIN OLIVER, 1974

We, your grandparents still live,
our darts, our weapons are still powerful,
with them we brought glory to our people.

—AXAYAYCATL

POET AND LORD OF TENOCHTITLAN, 1474

Part I. Facing East

Having the need to pray
I come to the water's edge
where dawn light spreads out
over the riverbank
like a blessing of hands.
An undertow of grief
lost in fragments of dreams
broken on rocks
carries me calmly
into the eddy.
I face the east
and breathe gently to the sun.

— *Geary Hobson*

Construction

words are crude materials
to build things with

do you

agree

strongly agree

mildly disagree

strongly disagree

Council Fire

i am looking at the chairs
empty of the friends
that shared my fire friday night
traces of their vigor
and clear images
of their being
linger here still

the elegant egalitarian
african the gentle attentive
ojibway the choctaw philosopher
the laughing scotsman
with bach and chopin
floating in his head
the cosmopolitan women
guarding their mysteries
with grace and intelligence
the american boys
exhibiting their fresh knowledge
of the interdependence
of all things the insightful swede
and the sociable eastern europeans
the affectionate knitting fusion
of young oklahomans
the kashmiri princess joking
with the gregarious muslim
and talkative jew
the *chilaki toba* (adopted cherokee)
who knew the names of flowering trees
and the beautiful native girl
who has forgotten her tribe

it started as a bonfire
in the newest firepit in the natural circle

of old leather-leaved oaks and mammoth hackberries
when the wood burned down
provided by the overburdened shade tree
wind and lightning had struck and split
we cooked over the coals shared
fragrant smoky food
and drank fancy beer

i see their faces illuminated
by the flames in the black night
i hear their voices in songs the memories
of their smiles are my money i spend it
more freely now i make regular donations
to my favorite charity the Human Unity Club

a young doe emerged from the woods
as i gazed at the chairs
around my firepit this morning
and saw my friends gracious
vistas around the fire
she strolled inside the perimeter
of my grass sampling
the leaves of young trees
she will remain in these woods for
their protection during this
bright aqua blue-skied day
with its okra blossom clouds
i studied her for a few minutes
as i sat down with my pen and journal
before the first word touched paper
she reminded me
that we can live together in peace
if we find value in it

flag of mercy

i am sorry for the white flash
of american anger
and pungent grind
of arabesque will
in hiroshima nagasaki new york
let's rid the world of evil we said

readers i say to you that i hate hate
against white

spangled terrors under any banner
or olive blouses

listeners know that i do not cry for
that fulfilled outcry would result in

perfect blind justice for myself or my nations
my own instantaneous end

worshippers know that my vitreous tears
for floral peace and perfect provender

are sincere when i pray
to stop starvation of my neighbors

know that my god hears
and does not welcome hatred of any

your fervent prayers
luminous element of creation

mothers fathers brothers sisters
preferences practices quirks or beliefs

know your browns blacks whites
create no discrepancy for me

haters know that i do not hate you
to those who look like you

and do not metaphorize your crimes
your passionate agendas your flags

do not inflame me
all our blazing emotions

know that mercy encompasses
and extinguishes our differences

people we are infant lambs
seeking nourishment and protection

in the same human flock
staring at the same stars

in the same black night
under cadenced moon

growing in the same sad garden
under sanguine sun

Closer to the Moon

the farm kids and i
decided to drive to the college town
for pizza supper tonight
my idea

an interview with the poet laureate
replayed on npr

ignoring back pain
i'm flying through humid luxuriant countryside
in a japanese car
grinding up visions of tall grass prairie
while he makes perfunctory statements
about religion reads poetry about death
with no imagery
bland blank verse
alludes to the white house guest list
the lack of intellectualism in washington

i didn't want to hear it again
flipped the channel to rock n roll
noticed cattle grazing upward
on the big green hill
i call the regional divide
the highest point between washita
and south canadian river drainages
an orange clay road
cuts a mile long "s"
up the mountainette
orange cutting green
vanilla cutting chocolate

is he colorblind? josie asked
about the man wearing a bright green
plaid shirt an orange plaid sportscoat
and butterscotch colored slacks
at the campus corner pizza parlor
he was bewhiskered middle-aged
i answered think again by raising my eyebrows
does he think he's cool?
asked josie probing deeper incredulously
he is cool i replied there's a difference
after the farm kids
finished competition at the pizzeria
(with the university silhouetted in the background)
to see whose eyes crossed deepest
and after strolling down the strasa
of boutiques and bistros
we disembarked to de-urbanize
and re-ruralize

it was dusk thirty
when we achieved the highway
to retrace the vector
across the divide
the moon hung in the night blue sky
entirely outlined but with only one eighth
of its surface illuminated
giving it a pronounced oblong
almost pumpkin shape
mercury glistened a few degrees south
we sang songs with the radio
all the way back the farm

josie was in the dummy seat
and as she stretched closed
the barb wire gate
i focused again on the spring tide moon
we had driven only nine miles
but I was taken
with how much closer we seemed
a couple thousand miles
closer to the moon

Ceremony

rooked crows talking all at once
at sunrise
like unruly school children

unlike songbirds speaking to each other
intervals of call and response

i stopped making coffee
went outside to listen

peachy glow eastern late summer sky
impressionist's blush over treeline

i squawked with them
five minutes non-stop
listening for human reply

none talking together
or to each other
at first light

save stockbrokers

More Like Children

we
live
more
like
c h i l d r e n
at our house
than most
people do

we built it ourselves
with our own hands
no mortgages
squirrels and chickadees

men women children
without contractors
in a forest
for building inspectors

house has a built-in
bedroom to the
the other bedroom
and egressible by

ladder from an upstairs
downstairs bathroom
upstairs is accessible
way of a climbing rope

someone called it
family robinson
our house is built
lumber doors windows

a cross between swiss
and peewee's playhouse
with antique (salvaged)
sinks tubs faucets so it

is not very
but the air

energy efficient
is always fresh

some spiders and other
they stay pretty much
we are bigger than they are
than we like poison
that the house is not finished

insects live in our house
out of our way because
we like them lots more
it does not bother us
because neither are we

Holhpokunna the Garden of the Bumblebees

he protected and fed
the *vlla lawa* children
 an artisan crawling through
 the bathrooms of the rich
 making mosaics
 materializing
 material phantoms of desire
 receiving their praise
 receiving their scorn

intimately observing
katakshi komunta
the dread curse
that what they have is never enough
 he has handled hundreds of thousands
 of their holy dollars
 never cheating or failing to pay workers
 tax collectors
 insurance wasps

 now the children protect themselves
 and their children

no longer a stolen moment for a poem
a blooming black-eyed susan
but many hours swift flight
the beating of diaphanous wings

 his work now fields of rich clover
 coneflowers plum blossoms
 oak tassels primroses
 to crawl inside purple
 white orange yellow and black