

Where Did She Go? - Tóki iyaya He?
A Poem by Prof. Dr. Emma LaRocque and its translation into Lakota by Jan Ullrich

Where did she go?

That orange-red glow
from an old black woodstove
in Sapp's "Making Rabbit Soup"
Teased out a pain,
a memory so deep,
of a life,
a way of life,
of a face,
many faces,
of smells,
of sweetgrass smells
of stories told in a language
I will never know again.

Where do they go
The voices that sang
and cried
and cooed swinging babies
wrapped in canvas
suspended by rope
nailed to the browned
poplar beams holding up
the tar-papered roof ?

Where do they go?
The faces
In many shades of brown
aging
in concentric circles
like old cultured trees?
My grandmothers, my grandfathers,
My aunts, my uncles,
My mother

Where did she go
Her voice chanting Cree
In the morning,
Her voice cooing Cree
to her babies
In mid-afternoon
Her voice crying.
In the evening
grieving the dusk of her ancient culture.
Her voice raging
in the night
of her sorrow of Woman,
her sorrow of Native.

Where did she go?
Her face triumphant
at chasing away Pehehsoo the Thunderbird
from scaring her children.
Her face in determination
Swatting mosquitos
away from her blueberries
that will nourish her children.
Her face in lilting laughter
and animation
Telling on Wisakehcha
playing games on ducks and foxes
Wisakehcha playing games on humanself.

Where did she go?
Her face at rest -
in zero absolute stillness
posed for morticians
it was almost more than I could bear.
Her face, her voice
fading
in concentric circles.
Damn crazy cells
felled her
like a mad axeman
fells
a regal northern tree.

Where did she go?
Her voice, her faces
that wake me in the night

Where did she go
Her voices, her faces
that turn my coffee
into a cup of tears
with the first wisp of day?

Where did she go
My great,
ancient
cultured Tree,
My mother, My Cree?

Tóki iyaya he?
Mazoceti fannila na sápa kin he
ziša iyoyanbya he.
Sapp „Maštinska wahanpi kágapi kin“ táwa kin el.
Ča he un iyokišil mahingle, yazan mahingle.
Icin líla tanyan wéksuye hingle.
wičoni wan
wičoh'an wan
ite wan
ite óta
wómna óta
wačanga kin wówaštemna
wičooyake kin
hena iyapi wan un oyaka pi kin he
Ici'nunpani slolwayin kte šni.

Hená tóki iyaya pi he?
Wičaho kin lowan pi k'un hena
čeya pi k'un hena
Hokšic'opa kahunhunza pi eya (?)
wičayawaḥwala pi k'un hena
Hokšic'opa kin mniḥuha šóka un iyapehan pi (?)
Wágačan ipatanpi kin tiče ipatan k'un hena aokatan pi na ikantunyan gegeya pi.
(gégeya pi??)

Hená tóki iyaya pi he?
Ite kin hena e pi.
Hena gimna pi, gísapa pi, gitka pi, gigi pi, gísa pi.
Hena kan áya pi
Çokaya mimemeyela han pi.
Çan eya ehanni ozu pi na kíçanyan pi
ça ákilececa pi
Unciwiçawaye kin, òunkašilawaye kin hena
Tunwinwiçawaye kin, leksiwiçawaye kin
Inawiçawaye kin, atewiçawaye kin
Inawaye kin

Tóki iyaya he?
Taho kin Lakolya lowan
Híhanni šna
Taho kin waçanyeža Lakolya wiçaglahwala
wíkuwabya šna.
Htáyetu šna. (!)
Taho kin céye
Için ehanni wiçoh'an táwa kin
htamaçaohanziya han ça he un
Taho kin çanzeya céyaniya
hanhepi šna
Wínyan tawoiyokšice cin he un (!)
Ikce Oyate tawoiyokšice cin he un (!)

Tóki iyaya he?
Ktélakel
Ktélakel iteoyuze
Wakinyan kin cékiya wiçayahapa ça he un
Için waçanyeža kin kokiçewicaya pi kte
Tawaçinkic'unyan iteoyuze.
Háza hetanhan çapunka habhabya kahinta
Tawaçanyeža kin hena yúta pi okihi pi kte ça he un
Otantunyan na šlišli ihat'a iyeoyuze
Iktomi ohunkakan oyake ecunhan
Iktomi magakšica na šunčila wiçagnaye
Iktomi ikce wiçaša kin wiçagnaye.

Tóki iyaya he?
Lílahci ablakela
na asnikiyakel iteoyuze
hapi kin ecunhan
Líla iyotiyewakiye na
kinil cantowakihi sni.
Ite na ho
Átan'in sni áye
Cokaya mimemeyela han
Čehpi kin śicawaćin yutakuni sni áye
ća yuunke.
Wićaśa wan witkotkoyakel wazićan
kaunke
Ákilećeca.

Tóki iyaya he?
Ite na ho
Hanmiśtinma ehan makaćice (??)

Tókiya iyaya he?
Ite na ho kin hena
Tokahe ánpaó kinhan
wakalyapi mićawa kin
ki-iśtamnihanpi hingle.
Tóki iyaya he?
Ćan tánka
oźu pi na kíćanyan pi kin (kíćanyan?)
mićawa
Inawaye kin, Lakota mićawa kin.

Some reflections

I actually do like that moving piece of Native poetry, and I also appreciate the knowledgeable and quite sensitive translation into the Lakota language accomplished by LLC Director Jan Ullrich. The task of translating Emma LaRocque's work into an Aboriginal tongue is meritorious, and transposing it into a Native cultural surrounding quite close to the author's own Cree culture is appropriate. Yet, since LaRocque's piece of poetry obviously is a highly personal document - telling of her sad and grievously felt bonds to her mother and her Cree heritage - with due respect to the author, I do not deem it proper that this personal attachment's very topic be all-captured by just replacing all things Cree by Lakota to make it „consistent“.

- So I'd plead for using the Lakota terms for „Cree“ instead, e.g. „Maštincala (wičáša)“ or (better) „Šahiya“.
- „Unciwičawaye kin, tunkašilawaye kin hena
Tunwinwičawaye kin, lekšiwicawaye kin
Inawicawaye kin, atewicawaye kin
Inawaye kin“

„My grandmothers, my grandfathers,
My aunts, my uncles,
My mother “

That's how Prof. LaRocque describes her cultural background according to her self-conception in an interview:

„How do you describe your own cultural background? Yourself?“

“I've started to hyphenate it a while ago because I used to just say Métis, well that's funny 'cause I used to first say Cree back in the 1970's. Then I realized that I wasn't just Cree, that I was Métis and so I started to use that. Then I realized that Métis became such a universalised term and that it truly obscures my particular cultural and historical background...so I've gone back to hyphenated Plains Cree-Métis... I am Métis because I come from a cohesive culture that blended Cree and French in my case, but it became a culture all its own. ... I grew up Cree, I grew up on or near or around a trap line, on the land, off the land. I grew up with Cree stories, legends, ethos, foods, and my whole world was Cree-Métis.... Identity is funny, you try not to tell people who they can or cannot be and yet there are some distinct historical and cultural markers who tell us who we are. I'm not insinuating one is superior or inferior to another but we all have specific backgrounds to be true to, especially when we are in the role of scholars.”

*Emma LaRocque, Department of Native Studies, University of Manitoba:
(Interview with R. Eigenbrod, June, 2001)“*

So my careful guess is that she feels Cree, referring herself to a Cree cultured childhood (with her mother using the Cree language, telling Cree stories etc.) rather than a Métis one (in the sense of language and culture specifically Métis - i.e. a culture French-Native in its own right, different from Cree).

The author, while speaking of her grandmothers, grandfathers, aunts, uncles and her mother, doesn't refer to her (French?) father at all! Her poem is telling of her Cree mother, her „great, ancient cultured Tree“ and, apparantly, of her Cree relatives only, their „faces in many shades of brown aging in concentric circles“ (...) „like old cultured Trees“.

Ullrich's - at first sight - a bit „lengthy“ Lakota translation of „my aunts, my uncles“ (see above!) of course caught the eye. It became clear what was his knowledgeable intention doing this: to adequately mirror the - a bit complicated - Dakota kinship system in his rendering!

Yet, is the poem's sense conveyed truly, hence an adequate translation, by mentioning „mother's sisters“ (inawicaye - „mothers“/aunts) and „mother's brothers“ (leksiwicaye - uncles), but also „fathers brothers“ (atewicaye - „fathers“/uncles) and „fathers sisters“ (funwinwicaye - aunts) and at the same time - according to the original text! - leaving out „my father“ (atewaye)? I don't think so.

- Since the original text most blatantly appears to be speaking of the author's *Native* kinship only, the translation's Lakota terms „atewicawaye kin“ and „funwinwicawaye kin“ to me do not seem to be appropriate.

Some further notes:

I'd prefer to stick to the old-fashioned(?) use of *cin* instead of *kin* after umlaut (e.g. inayA, ateyA etc. -> inawaye cin, atewicawaye cin - my mother, my fathers/uncles).

There is some vocabulary a bit doubtful to me (typos?) marked in the above text, that need further examination. As soon as there will be time, this article will be continued. I'd appreciate your contributions.

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