

“A LABOR OF LOVE”: A SOCIAL AND LITERARY HISTORY OF THE
BLUE CLOUD QUARTERLY

by

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Abstract

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This thesis will explore the literary and historical context of a small magazine publication entitled the *Blue Cloud Quarterly*. The first publication of its kind to focus entirely on Native American poetry, the *BCQ* played a significant role in shifting the canon of American literature towards diverse voices and experiences. Contemporary scholars have largely overlooked the publication’s critical contribution, but its influence on the Native American literary resurgence of the late 20th century was profound.

The *BCQ* was published during a time of intense change in the Roman Catholic Church both on a global and local level among the Native American communities of the Dakotas. After influence of these changes on the publication has been discussed, this research project will also be addressing some of the challenges and criticisms received by the editor of

the *BCQ*, Br. Benet Tvedten, OSB. Close readings and literary analysis of various issues of the *BCQ* will serve to establish the significant role played by the *BCQ* in sharing with a large audience the experience of American Indian people in their own words. Examples provided include the work of students, prisoners, and women writers.

The thesis concludes by asserting that the influence and significance of the *BCQ* is an important field of study that is rich for further investigation. The primary modes of research for this study were first person interviews and archival work, which serves as further evidence of the need for greater research in this area.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

In the summer of 1968, the country was caught in the turmoil of grief and social upheaval. Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated in April, an event that led to riots from Watts to Washington D.C. Two months later, Robert Kennedy was gunned down. As August approached, tensions were building in Chicago as the city (and protesters) planned for the Democratic National Convention. A quiet Benedictine monastery in the midst of the South Dakota prairies seemed to be about as far removed from such chaos as possible. The shifts in American society, however, were being precisely reflected in the work of a young monk who was editing a small booklet called the *Blue Cloud Quarterly*. Named after the Blue Cloud Abbey where the monk lived and worked, it had been produced and edited by others before him, but he was moving the publication in a new direction. The result of this work would help to usher in what some have referred to as the Native American Renaissance and change the landscape of American literature.

This thesis will examine the history of the *Blue Cloud Quarterly* (BCQ), a literary publication that has been largely ignored by critics and scholars, although its contribution to the formation of the canon of contemporary Native American literature in particular and American

literature in general is profound. Many scholars have examined the role of little magazines and small presses in the construction of the American literary canon, and this publication serves as a pristine case study for this approach. From questions of purpose to subscriber responses to matters of content control and the editorial process, the *BCQ* exemplifies all that has made small presses such a powerful and challenging vehicle for changes in literary history. While the details of the *BCQ*'s past are interesting anecdotes of American literature, the heart and soul of the publication can be found in the poetry it contained over its two-decade run. The evolution of the Roman Catholic Church's relationship with Native communities is reflected in the pages of the publication, as are the struggles faced by many Native American people in the midst of the social changes of the twentieth century. This thesis will also consider the growing number of American Indian women writers and the significance of their voices in the literary world of the 1970s and 80s.

Organization

This project will begin its exploration of the literary and historical context of the *BCQ* by first establishing the research methodology used and the immediate social context in which the *BCQ* came to be. Its role in helping to redefine the American canon of literature will then be discussed, particularly in terms of the medium of small magazines and presses. The

BCQ was published during a time of intense change in the Roman Catholic Church both on a global and local level among the Native American communities of the Dakotas. After influence of these changes on the publication has been discussed, this paper will also be addressing some of the challenges and criticisms received by the editor of the *BCQ*, Br. Benet Tvedten, OSB. Close readings and literary analysis of various issues of the *BCQ* will serve to establish the significant role played by the *BCQ* in sharing with a large audience the experience of American Indian people in their own words. Examples include the voices of students, prisoners, and women writers. The paper will conclude by asserting that the *BCQ* is an important field that is rich for further investigation.

Methodology

Given the nature of the project, the research process for this study was primarily based on the contents of the *BCQ* itself, recorded personal interviews with the publisher of the *BCQ*, Tvedten, and manuscripts and correspondence contained within the small press archives at Brown University. In addition to research related directly to the *BCQ*, extensive in-person interviews were also conducted with Tvedten's editorial colleagues and writers, Maurice Kenny and Joseph Bruchac. The archival process and interviews being utilized for this research was born of necessity. Because there has been very little scholarly research on the

contributions of the *BCQ*, a focus on primary documents and first-hand accounts of the quarterly's publication days must form the backbone of any discussion of its significance.

The *BCQ* was published from 1955 to 1988. The Blue Cloud Abbey, located in Marvin, South Dakota, housed a small group of Benedictine monks and oversaw schools on the Yankton and Crow Creek reservations in South Dakota, and the Ft. Totten (now called Spirit Lake) and Turtle Mountain reservations in North Dakota. Since 1955, the abbey had been producing small booklets four times a year to update benefactors around the United States on various happenings at the abbey and within its ministry. These booklets were primarily photographic in nature, connecting the supporters of the ministries with the fruits of their investments. Sometimes these booklets focused on major changes taking place, such as the establishment of a priory in Cobán, Guatemala in 1962, but they also often simply featured the daily routine of monastic life at the abbey. In 1967 two occurrences coalesced to change the course of *BCQ*: first, the monk who had been the primary photographer for the very image-heavy publication began studying in Europe, and second, Br. Benet Tvedten became its editor.

Tvedten was born Denis Tvedten in Casselton, North Dakota, in 1936. Having received his Bachelor's degree in English at St. John's

University in Minnesota, he entered the abbey in 1958, at the age of twenty-one. He took his vows and the religious name Benet in 1960. It was due to his skills as a writer that Tvedten was given the duties of editor for the *BCQ* in 1967. The monk who had been the primary photographer for the pamphlets left to study in France that year, and Tvedten was appointed to take over the editorial responsibilities, thus opening the door for a radical departure from the course the publication had taken up to that point.

In *American Indian Literatures*, A. LaVonne Brown Rouff lists the *BCQ* as an early small press in her extensive bibliography of publishers (188). Ruoff's work is a crucial source for early publications, and her mention of the *BCQ* alongside the *Greenfield Review*, *Contact II*, and *Sun Tracks* (each widely considered to be notable publication outlets for Native writers in the 1970s and 1980s) speaks to their commonalities. What sets the *BCQ* apart, however, is both the early date when it began to almost exclusively feature Native writers and the regularity of its publication. Mention of the *BCQ* as the publisher of many of the chapbooks and poetry collections catalogued in *The Columbia Guide to American Indian Literatures of the United States Since 1945* also serves to demonstrate the significance of much of the work produced by the abbey's press (Blaeser 190). Contemporary reviews and criticism of specific chapbooks

and issues were kept by Tvedten and added to the press's archives at Brown University. These documents, often contained in local newspapers or literary review magazines, serve as the primary sources of contemporary response to the *BCQ*. While these writings are not all necessarily scholarly in nature, they do provide a window to the general reception of the *BCQ*'s work in the early days of the emerging field of contemporary Native American literature.

Apart from Ruoff's mention and the cataloguing in the *Columbia Guide*, the work of Tvedten's small press has been mostly lost in obscurity. It is precisely because of this dearth in scholarly criticism that this in-depth study of the history of the *BCQ* is necessary. Many of the contemporary responses to issues of the *BCQ* exist only on the yellowing pages of other small publications also stored in the archive. Analysis of these responses, as well as the interviews with Tvedten and his contemporaries, serves to place the *BCQ* in the broader historical context of other early publishing outlets and the emergence of Native American literature.

Chapter 2

Another American "Renaissance"

F. O. Matthiessen's formative *American Renaissance* used the five crucial publishing years of 1850-55 as building blocks for his analysis of the nature of American literature. He presented his methodology within the context of all that could be studied about those years, even if his own work sought to focus on just one aspect of the material produced during this time of literary blossoming. He wrote, "You might be concerned with how this flowering came, with the descriptive narrative of literary history. Or you might dig into its sources in our life, and examine the economic, social, and religious causes why this flowering came in just these years. Or you might be primarily concerned with what these books were as works of art, with evaluating their fusions of form and content" (vii). Being forced to select just one of these areas of study left Matthiessen painfully aware "of the important books I have not written" (viii). When taking on the formative years of what many have come to call the Native American Renaissance, a similar process of elimination must be used. It is impossible to present in these pages a study of every facet that made 1968 through the late-1980s such a significant time for Native American publishing. Indeed, James Ruppert argues that even delineating these specific years creates a false barrier between the publications before and after, as well as the oral

traditions that functioned as the primary mode of cultural regeneration since time immemorial (173). Whether one wants to refer to it as a renaissance or not (Maurice Kenny has argued that “resurgence” is a superior term [Personal Interview]), it is clear those years were significant in helping redefine the expanded canon of American literature.

The concept of a Native American renaissance (or “resurgence”) exists within a historical framework, defined by simultaneous publications and political and social justice actions occurring in different locations and involving different individuals. Tvedten's decision to shift the *BCQ* towards Native American writers occurred in 1968, the same year N. Scott Momaday published *House Made of Dawn*. Considered by many to be the beginning point of contemporary Native American literature, Momaday's book won the Pulitzer for Fiction in 1969, making the author the first Native American to win the literary honor. Within that same year, Vine Deloria, Jr. published *Custer Died For Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, and John R. Milton edited a special issue of the *South Dakota Review* dedicated to American Indian writers, which later was adapted into one of the first anthologies of Native American Literature (Hobson 1). Joseph and Carol Bruchac established *The Greenfield Review* that year, a periodical that was intended to be a publishing outlet for multicultural writers, including Native Americans (DeLucia 80). In 1970, Dee Brown published

his bestselling *Bury My Heart At Wounded Knee*. When viewed within the context of what else was published shortly after the shift in Tvedten's editorial choices, it is clear that the *BCQ* was located precisely at the beginnings of a major movement within the literary world. Matthiessen's many options for study would certainly apply to this more recent time period, as would his space limitations. This study will be primarily utilizing the approach of literary history, as this is the method that best lends itself to establishing the historical and literary significance of the *BCQ*.

Paul Lauter makes a distinction between "*literary history*" and "*literary history*" when discussing methodology, pointing out that "the revived interest in history among literary scholars derives from the fact that the marginalized texts they choose to study embody, often depend upon, historical contexts about which critics know little" (59). While a thorough analysis of the *BCQ* certainly requires this *literary history*, it is also crucial to trace the *literary history* surrounding the publication, particularly as it pertains to the issue of the canon of American literature.

In Ralph Waldo Emerson's famous 1837 address "The American Scholar," he defines the course of American individualism in literature by arguing not only that the entirety of a person's life is worthy of expression, but that expression from all walks of life is necessary. He sees young America as ripe for a revolutionary shift away from entrenched obsessions

with the ideas and forms of the past to a new way of wholeness. The old traditions of Europe are exemplified by “the English dramatic poets [who] have Shakespearized now for two hundred years,” while America has declared independence not only from the British king but also from tired literary forms (502). New language and new expressions will be formed that “cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests.” This new literature, uniquely American, will reflect “the common”: the spirituality, the sublimity, the bursting nature of an individual's existence (508). Foreshadowing the canon wars of the next century, Emerson speaks of the “literature of the poor, the feelings of the child, the philosophy of the street, the meaning of the household life” as exemplifying the types of sources where original—and truly American—expression can be found (508).

Ten years later, Margaret Fuller reiterated many of Emerson's points in her argument that American literature has an inherent “earthy” quality that defies European norms. Unlike the English literature that is penned in by “walls and ceilings,” American literature is in “every impulse free” (1654). The characteristics of this literature are influenced by the physical nature of American land, but even more so by the heterogeneous racial mixing occurring in this new land: “[What suits Great Britain] does not suit a mixed race, continually enriched with new blood from other

stocks the most unlike that of our first descent” (1654). This argument presents the primary relevance of Fuller's essay to this thesis: her insistence that American literature is inherently multicultural. She speaks of a future rich with new voices, a time when “the winds from all quarters of the globe bring seed enough, and there is nothing but preparation of the soil, and the freedom of the atmosphere, for ripening of a new and golden harvest” (1655). While Fuller seems to be envisioning something quite different from the twenty-first century understanding of multiculturalism (she speaks of an ideal “fusion of races,” for example, which remains Eurocentric), it is noteworthy that as early as 1846, at least one critic's prospects for the future of American literature included diverse voices.

For all of these revolutionary ideas that churned so forcefully in the early to mid-1800s, by the 1920's American literature was defined almost exclusively as a white man's world. Although publication increased for women and many racial minorities throughout the early 20th century, these changes did not seem to impact what was taught and studied as “literature” (Lauter 22). Academia's isolation from these writings continued throughout the 1950s; Paul Lauter's research into the classroom anthologies of the time shows that of the twenty-one collections published between 1917 and 1950, “nine contained no works by black artists; three included only a few spirituals; four contained one black writer each; two

printed some spirituals and one black writer (W.E.B. Dubois; Countee Cullen [was] dropped in a revised edition)” (24). Apart from the token presence of Emily Dickinson, women writers fared no better; when the National Council of Teachers of English met in 1948 to evaluate the teaching of American literature in college, they found a total of three women writers in the ninety syllabi they studied (26). Apart from a small section entitled “American Indian Poetry” in Oscar Williams' 1946 *American Poetry*, Lauter notes no other inclusions of Native writers in anthologies in these years (25). It was evident by the mid-twentieth century that the enthusiasm of Emerson and Fuller for an American literature that reflected the experience all Americans had fallen short.

The Power of Little Magazines

There were small outlets, however, that encouraged the quiet publication of these voices. A unique aspect of the development of American literature from the mid-1800s and into the nineteenth century was the growth of little magazines and small presses. In the introduction to his 1945 book *The Little Magazine*, Frederick J. Hoffman proudly declared that “[little magazines] have introduced and sponsored every noteworthy literary movement or school that has made its appearance in America in the last thirty years” (2). Both Hoffman and Edward E. Chielens have attempted to define what it means to be one of these “little magazines”;

Hoffman saw them as publications designed to “print artistic work which for reasons of commercial expediency is not acceptable to the money-minded periodicals or presses” (2). Chielens defined them as “magazines founded by an individual or small group, usually with a small, precarious budget, in order to publish new writers or a new school of literature not accepted by the large commercial publications” (vii). If either of these definitions are accepted, it is little wonder that these publications were the primary mode of the expression of marginal art and experience. Hoffman's exuberant declaration of the productivity of the three decades prior to 1945 is overshadowed, however, by the prolific years that came after. Much as Hoffman did thirty years prior, Michael Anina, a contributor to the formidable collection, *The Little Magazine in America*, writes of the mid-1970s as a pinnacle in publishing history, noting that there are “twice as many magazines in print at any moment in the mid-seventies as existed altogether in the first thirty-five years of little-magazine history” (10).

This profound growth is reflective of the social changes and various civil rights movements occurring within these years. The margins of society that small publications had been representing for generations were speaking more and more loudly, and as their voices rose, so did the number of their publishing options. The role played by these little magazines in maintaining an avenue for expression for marginalized

groups (and Native Americans in particular) in the United States cannot be overemphasized. Between 1925 and 1970 there were no formal Native American literary magazines, but there were over five hundred small magazines that specifically focused on social situations being faced by Native people either on or off the reservations (Littlefield xi). After its establishment in 1962, the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) regularly distributed newsletters containing its students' poetry. While the full development of what Daniel Littlefield refers to as "a true native press" did not occur until after 1970 (in the first year of that decade, there were more small publications established than in any other previous year), the preceding decades laid the groundwork (xix).

The fact that the *BCQ* made the shift from a newsletter to a literary publication in 1968 is evidence of the cutting-edge nature of Tvedten's work. Within just a few years, the *BCQ* was one among many. The *South Dakota Review* had been occasionally publishing American Indian writers, and the University of Arizona began producing *Sun Tracks* in 1971, publishing important American Indian writers such as Simon Ortiz and Joy Harjo. Small magazines such as the *Greenfield Review*, *Pembroke*, *Akwesasne Notes*, *Contact II*, and the *Road Apple Review* were diligently working to present the poems of those who were quickly coming to define Native American literature. In the introduction to his 1979 anthology, *The*

Remembered Earth, Geary Hobson noted that many of the works in his collection were first published through such presses. Mentioning the *BCQ* among them, he wrote, "These publications have offered a forum for Indian writers that might not have been so easily obtainable any place else" (7).

Beginning in 1977, the Modern Language Association held annual convention sessions, seminars, programs, and sponsored studies to examine and reconstruct the traditional American literary canon. This work by the MLA was acknowledging what was already occurring within the literary world. When Paula Gunn Allen's editorial work in *Studies in American Indian Literatures* was published by the MLA in 1983, the *BCQ* had already been publishing Native poetry and art for fifteen years. The profound importance of small presses, newspapers, and periodicals in establishing the American canon of literature is abundantly clear when one considers that the *BCQ* and these other small magazines were publishing the voices that would come to redefine American literature well before academia and the mainstream press.

Midwives for a Movement

The *BCQ*'s unique contribution to the growth of a greater social and literary awareness of American Indian people and their writing has been largely overlooked in the academic studies of this time period. It has not

been forgotten, however, by those who were active writers and participants in the resurgence of Native American literature occurring at the time. Joseph Bruchac, for example, refers to Tvedten as “an iconoclast in the best sense of the word” (Personal Interview). When news came to him that the *BCQ* would be closing down, Maurice Kenny wrote that “the *BCQ* is an important voice for the Native American community. It has offered a window to young writers that would not have been given [to them] in other areas. It is especially important that the *BCQ* lives.... it is especially valid, especially needed” (Letter, 1976). In 1979, Geary Hobson wrote that Tvedten and the other editors who worked as the early publishers of American Indian literature were “like midwives to a rising generation of writers” (8). These words are echoed in the recognition Tvedten received from the Wordcraft Circle of Native Writers and Storytellers in 2000. Given that Tvedten has lived as a monk for the last six decades, he has not accumulated a great many material goods. Two items that he has carried with him, however, even throughout the closure of his abbey and his subsequent relocation to North Dakota, are the plaque he received and a t-shirt commemorating that year's conference in Tahlequah, Oklahoma. The plaque reads: “To Br. Benet Tvedten, *The Blue Cloud Quarterly*, for demonstrated commitment and significant contributions as the editor of *The Blue Cloud Quarterly*, ensuring that the

voices of Native Writers and Storytellers— past, present, and future— are heard throughout the world” (Tvedten, “Re: *BCQ*”).

This acknowledgement from Wordcraft Circle highlights the contribution of the *BCQ* in the field of Native American literature. More than seventy-five chapbooks were published during the time it was dedicated to American Indian issues and writers, and they are each rich with opportunity for additional study. Although the *BCQ* published various anthologies and chapbooks throughout its lifetime, at its heart, it always remained a quarterly literary magazine that fit precisely within what Chielens's and Hoffman's definitions of little magazines had in common: it was always pushing boundaries. The *BCQ* was the first outlet dedicated almost exclusively to Native poetry that published regularly and reached broad readership. Throughout the twenty years Tvedten was at the helm of the *BCQ*, the early days of contemporary Native American literature blossomed and grew, particularly for American Indian women, and these shifts are reflected in the evolution of the little magazine. The work of Tvedten in helping to establish a community of editors and writers is reflected in personal correspondence with individuals such as Joseph Bruchac and Maurice Kenny. These written communications indicate the relationships that drove the publishing boom that occurred in the 1970s that Michael Anina referred to as so revolutionary (10).

The success of small magazines has historically been linked to the establishment of an editorial and publication community, and often contributors and readers are one in the same. In his survey study of small publications, Anania claimed that the only readers of literary magazines were “editors and writers, mostly, and a few stray fans” (22). With a subscription list of roughly 4,000, there were certainly more than “a few stray fans” of the *BCQ* than there were editors and writers, but there is a general truth to Anania's statement. The correspondence contained in the archives of the *BCQ* contain personal communications with editors and writers such as with John Updike, A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff, Adrienne Rich, Joseph Bruchac, Robert J. Conley, Lee Francis III, Maurice Kenny, and many others. In his preface to *The Rise and Fall of Early American Magazine Culture*, Jared Gardner states: “the notion was preserved throughout [the early years of small publications] that the magazine was itself the natural outgrowth of readers who had been summoned by the periodical to become contributors themselves” (x). Tvedten's relationships with Bruchac and Kenny in particular serve as examples of the short distance between being a reader and being a contributor. These relationships also suggest the collaborative nature of editing and publishing in the new world of Native American literature, as well as Tvedten's role as a central character in this unfolding scene.

An author of more than 80 books and a contributor to hundreds of publications, Joseph Bruchac has established himself as one of the most prolific writers in the field of Native American literature. After work in Ghana with his wife Carol in the 1960s, Bruchac returned to his hometown of Greenfield, New York, and the couple began work on what became the *Greenfield Review*. It was founded in 1969, with the clear editorial mission of “publish[ing] good poetry by a wide variety of people, but to pay special attention (without excluding any group or individual prior to seeing their work) to certain areas: African poetry, poetry by '3rd world' writers, women, people in prison, etc” (qt. in DeLucia 80). Bruchac saw the need for an avenue of publication for “new and established poets from all around the world,” who could speak to experiences outside of mainstream white culture (Personal Interview). The first issue of the *Greenfield Review* was published in 1970, fully funded through the sale of the family's Volkswagen. Very few Native American writers were well known at that early date, but some of Bruchac's earliest connections were made with Maurice Kenny and Tvedten (Personal Interview). Bruchac refers to those turbulent years as “an eruption,” and he saw the establishment of a strong community as central if the changes occurring in society were to be represented in the literary world. Years later, Bruchac wrote in his guide to new publishers and editors, “I was taught to believe that the best

relationships were reciprocal ones.... There should be a sense of community and bond between those people who care enough to write poetry and fiction and those who care enough to publish it” (qtd. in DeLucia 3). He and Carol put these truisms into practice as their home became essentially a lending library, and his correspondence connected poets, writers, editors, and artists (81).

Tvedten dedicated several issues of the *BCQ* exclusively to Bruchac's poetry, but their strongest connection was not as writer and editor, but as collaborators and fellow publishers. Bruchac described their cooperative process in the following way:

We were always letting each other know about things, and Maurice [Kenny] would ask me about someone (or I would ask Maurice about someone), Br. Benet would ask me about someone, or I would send someone to Br. Benet. We did a lot of sending people to each other because between the three of us, we could get a lot published, but each of us individually could only do so much (Personal Interview).

Evidence of this collaboration is found in the press's archives. As early as 1974, Bruchac was writing to Tvedten, seeking artist contacts for one of his projects. Kenny regularly alerted Tvedten to when he would be printing

a review of *BCQ* issues in his publication, *Contact II*, and in 1977 he sent him a xeroxed list of over twenty bookstores he was certain would want to carry the *BCQ*. Rather than engage in competition over who discovered the freshest and newest poetic voices, the three editors experienced, “a lot of excitement about the fact that [we had found somebody to share], and it wasn't that you wanted to be the only one publishing them, it wasn't this sense of ownership, it was more a communal thing” (Personal Interview).

Having had his first book of poetry published in 1958, Maurice Kenny (Mohawk) was certainly one of the more experienced poets by the time the 1970s hit the literary world. Bruchac has claimed that when he began editing the *Greenfield Review*, “Maurice Kenny was one of the few poets being published at that time who was identifying himself as a Native... there were virtually no other people out there of that generation who were printing and publishing” (Personal Interview). A large gap exists, however, between Kenny's earliest publications in the late 1950s and his reemergence into the literary world as the 1970s unfolded. His return was in large part due to the need for a personal reckoning with the American Indian Movement's (AIM) occupation of Wounded Knee in 1973, the outcome of which was *I Am the Sun*, a long poem deeply rooted in the oral traditions of the Lakota (Wilson, 139). Kenny's first collection of poetry after his full return to literary work (*North: Poems of Home*) was published

by Tvedten in 1977, and by that time Kenny had begun co-editing the multicultural literary magazine *Contact II*. He was also running his own small publication, Strawberry Press, which was dedicated entirely to Native poets. The friendship between Tvedten and Kenny is recorded extensively in their letters to one another over a period of almost two decades, as is their publishing collaboration. Multiple references are made in their letters to recommendations for illustrators, poets, possible sources for reviews, and opinions on new presses and editorial processes. One particular postscript serves as a good example of hundreds of similar exchanges: "Try Carpenter Press with the novel. Don't tell him I said so, but he just received a sizable NEA [National Education Association] grant" (Letter, no date). As can be expected of two individuals working in a challenging field, some of these exchanges were also purely cathartic. Both editors had published work by the poet Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel, for example, who was notorious for submitting her poetry handwritten on whatever scraps of paper were lying about. In a letter to Tvedten, Kenny wrote, "Our Wilma is too much. Just had another note from her. No! it didn't arrive on grocery bag, but it was a crumpled long sheet of some two feet.... a little back fat, a little corn, smudged with California orange juice" (Letter 1978).

Although most of his poetry did not explicitly delve into his sexual orientation, it was a known fact in literary circles at the time that Kenny was homosexual, and Tvedten certainly was aware of this (Tvedten, Personal Interview). Even before Tvedten published him for the first time, Kenny had published an essay entitled “Tinselled Bucks: An Historical Study in Indian Homosexuality” in *Gay Sunshine: A Journal of Gay Liberation* in 1976. According to Will Roscoe, this powerful essay “boldly reclaimed Native two-spirit traditions for contemporary gay Indians” (Roscoe). In 1979, Good Gay Poets published a book of Kenny's poetry entitled *Only As Far as Brooklyn*, a groundbreaking collection that blended “gay and Indian consciousness” (Roscoe). Both Bruchac and Kenny have referred to Tvedten as “brave,” and, noting his own inclusion in the *BCQ*, Kenny points out, “Well, he ran risks publishing me!” (Interview). Whatever these risks may have been, Kenny had confidence in his friend and colleague: “Br. Benet was such a wonderful, wonderful, sweet, giving, intelligent, brave man. I can't give enough accolades to him. He was wonderful to work with.... and he never, ever censored” (Interview). Tvedten's reciprocation of this affection is seen in his dedication to Kenny in the 10th anniversary issue of the *BCQ*, acknowledging him as a “poet, publisher, editor, and supportive friend” (Tvedten 17.4).

The *BCQ* in a Catholic Context

When nineteenth-century novelist Charles Brockden Brown wrote his editorial manifesto for his new publication, *Literary Magazine*, in 1803, he defined his editorial role in the following way:

I cannot expatiate on the variety of my knowledge, the brilliancy of my wit, the versatility of my talents. [I] have them not myself, [but I] shall think myself entitled to no small praise, if I am able to collect into one focal spot the rays of a great number of luminaries. (qtd. in Gardner 5)

While Tvedten certainly possesses his own share of knowledge, wit, and talent (as exhibited in his own novel and numerous memoirs of monastic life), this attitude of being a channel for others is reflected in his work with the *BCQ* for the two decades of its existence. His own creative writings were never featured in any issues, and even his editorial notes only appeared a handful of times. The shift he made in 1968, however, regarding the content and focus of the *BCQ*, was marked by a personal decision that also reflected work that was being done at the monastery and changes that were occurring in the relationship between the Catholic missionaries and Native communities they had served for generations.

In 1967, an important addition was made to Blue Cloud Abbey when the American Indian Cultural Research Center was founded as a training ground for those who were working with Indian people on the reservations. The original concept was centered on missiology, sociology, and theology, and three monks were sent from the monastery to train in these areas (Tvedten interview). Each of them, however, were eventually pulled from training for various reasons, and the responsibility for the center fell to Fr. Stanislaus Maudlin, a priest who had worked on various reservations in the Dakotas for decades before he was called back to the abbey to run the center (Interview). Instead of the ecumenical training center that the AICRC had originally been designed to be, it turned into something quite different under the leadership of Maudlin. Many of the Native artifacts that had been given to the various missionaries over the years on the different reservations were sent to the research center and displayed. Under Maudlin's guidance, the research institute became dedicated to cultural preservation and to the education of visitors about Indian life and religious practices (Interview). During this time Maudlin also edited a bimonthly newsletter entitled *Tekawitha Conference Newsletter* that disseminated information about the abbey's work and that of the AICRC.

The simultaneous beginnings of Maudlin's work with the AICRC and Tvedten's work with the *BCQ* in the late 1960s and early 1970s was not coincidental. Even at its peak numbers, the abbey remained a tightly knit cooperative community, and the purpose of the work done by the priests and brothers with Native Americans was changing rapidly. On a global scale, these years were also a time for transition for the Roman Catholic Church. The Second Vatican Council had been held in Rome from 1962 to 1965, and the results of this council were far-reaching. One of its most significant documents, *Nostra Aetate (In Our Age)*, acknowledged the connection that exists between the Catholic Church and other religions of the world in a revolutionarily new way. Arguing that all religions are united in their search for truth, the document declares that

[Other] religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones

she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.

Clearly this teaching contradicts the practice of systematic annihilation of culture so commonly associated with the missionary and boarding school work of the Church among American Indian people. The Vatican II document declared that instead of replacing cultural practices with Eurocentric constructs, the role of the Church was to “recognize, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men” (“Declaration”). Promulgated in 1965, *Nostra Aetate* clearly had an impact on many religious communities during the next decade, and its influence is evident in the choices that were being made at Blue Cloud Abbey.

In late 1969, activists involved with AIM challenged the Lutheran Church of Sioux Falls to examine its history of cultural genocide in its work on the reservations in North and South Dakota. Shortly thereafter, the AIM members carried their complaints to the National Council of Churches in Detroit, Michigan (Littlefield 25). Beyond seeking acknowledgement of past wrongs committed against Indian individuals and communities, AIM demanded greater Indian involvement in ecclesiastical decisions and practices and a commitment to the defense of Indian rights by the churches. While the Catholic Church did not belong to the NCC, many

within the Church were anticipating the coming changes. In an editorial published by Maudlin's *Tekawitha Conference Newsletter* Br. Edward M. Red Owl (who was also a monk at the abbey and involved with the AICRC) warned that the ecclesiastical changes AIM was calling for were necessary and inevitable (qt. in Littlefield 25). In March of 1970, Maudlin changed the name of the newsletter to *American Indian Culture Research Center Newsletter*, and with this name change came a change in focus. That issue of the newsletter printed a letter written by the new abbot of Blue Cloud, Fr. Alan Berndt, declaring that the Benedictines were intending to turn over the schools and mission churches on the Yankton, Crow Creek, Spirit Lake, and Turtle Mountain reservations to tribal management. Berndt saw this transition towards Indian self-determination as vital support of the communities' efforts to move beyond being what he called "wards of the state" to truly autonomous entities (*Blue Cloud Abbey*). "We recognize the present desire among Indians for self-determination," Berndt wrote. "We also are aware of your natural right and acquired ability to determine your own affairs" (Maher 141).

Darkening the memory of these years are the accusations that were brought against the Catholic administration of the schools in lawsuits filed between 2004 and 2008. Former students of St. Paul's School on the Yankton Sioux reservation in Marty, South Dakota recounted horrific

sexual and physical abuse at the hands of the nuns and priests at the school throughout the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Some of the accused were former priests and brothers of Blue Cloud Abbey, and while the South Dakota Supreme Court ruled against the plaintiffs on legal technicalities, the suffering experienced by victims of this abuse cannot go unmentioned. It may never be known who at the abbey knew what was happening in the schools and when they knew it. That these alleged abuses were occurring at the same time that work was being done to validate and give greater autonomy to Native communities speaks to the divisions within the Church at large. The majority of the members of Blue Cloud Abbey agreed with Abbot Berndt that the time had come to move away from involvement in the mission schools. Maudlin appeared on television several times to try to ease community concerns about the transfer of ownership and direction of the schools to the tribes. The reasoning he provided at the time was twofold; first, that the purpose of the Benedictines on the reservations was to be priests and not administrators; and second (reiterating Berndt's point) that since the land where the missions were located belonged to the tribes, it was only right that the Indian people “design the education for their own society” (Maher 141).

These details about the local situation begin to explain why Tvedten made the editorial decision to move the *BCQ* away from mission updates

and towards Native American poetry. When given the assignment to produce what he called “the benefactor's booklet” by the abbot at the time, Fr. Gilbert Hess, Tvedten decided almost immediately to change its purpose (Tvedten, Personal Interview). The monk does not frame his reasons for the shift in political or religious terms, but practical ones: “I was given the assignment. The fact that Fr. Roger [Dieckhaus] had a new assignment, [meant that] I succeeded him. The fact that Odilo [Burkhardt] was studying [in France], that's what determined the birth of the poetry magazine” (Personal Interview). Tvedten's reasoning speaks to the communal nature of monastic life at Blue Cloud Abbey, as well as the changes that were occurring within the Catholic Church. While the transition away from control of the Indian missions did not occur until three years later, the creation of the AICRC and the *BCQ* were clear signs of a new direction.

Chapter 3

Changes and Challenges

The first step the new editor of the *BCQ* took to change the magazine came in the late summer of 1968. It was the third installment of volume fourteen, and instead of featuring the daily happenings of the abbey, it contained lyrics written by the well-known singer/songwriter Cree artist, Buffy Sainte-Marie. Accompanying these lyrics were historical photographs obtained from the General Archives in Washington, D.C. Sainte-Marie had been voted Best New Artist by *Billboard Magazine* four years before, and many of her songs focused on the on-going crisis facing Native American/First Nations people. The three poems by Sainte-Marie included in this issue were “My Country Tis of Thy People You’re Dying,” “Now that the Buffalo’s Gone,” and “Seeds of Brotherhood.” The accompanying archival photographs remain startling to modern viewers, and they must have been downright shocking to those expecting a ministry update from the abbey. There were no images of chiefs and Indian princesses, bedecked with feathered headdresses and standing before their teepees, images which had become part of the national psyche in large part due to the TV westerns of the preceding three decades. Instead, these were images of the Sioux leader Big Foot lying dead and frozen on the Wounded Knee battlefield, of starving Apaches

waiting for food in the confines of their arid strip of land in Arizona, and of Apache prisoners lined up along train tracks for the curious eyes of Eastern whites to peruse. Connecting the atrocities of history with the tumultuous, mid-century present, the final image in the booklet was one of the recently assassinated Robert Kennedy speaking intimately with an American Indian child during his visit to the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota (a visit which had taken place on his way to California to clinch the Democratic nomination for president). On the inside of the back cover, the booklet closed with the following statement: “We hope that those who have read this booklet from cover to cover have become profoundly disturbed by the songs of Buffy Sainte-Marie” (Tvedten, 14.3).

One can only speculate on the reaction of the donors to the abbey who received that issue. Photos of this sort were not readily accessible to the public at the time; in fact, archival records show that Tvedten had difficulty obtaining any photographs that would have been fitting. Apologetic responses to his requests for photographs came from the Amerind Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union, with the ACLU stating, “In reply to your letter of July 19th, for photographs conveying the problems faced by American Indians, we have none, I regret to say” (Baldwin). Tvedten eventually found the photographs he used through the National Archives, which charged the significant sum of

\$1.25 per photograph. Obtaining access to Sainte-Marie's lyrics was a much easier process, however, and she gladly gave her permission in a personal letter to Tvedten.

The response to the issue still seems to surprise Tvedten after all these years: upon being sent out to the roughly 20,000 subscribers, there were so many requests for additional copies that the issue had to be reprinted (Tvedten, "Introduction"). One of the many responses Tvedten received came from California Indian Legal Services, which stated that, "we feel that this is perhaps the most outstanding pamphlet on the American Indian that we have ever seen" (Rosenfelt). They went on to request an additional hundred copies for use in their "work on behalf of the American Indians." Requests for more copies also came from various Catholic Indian missions and from a high school teacher in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, seeking resources for use in his sociology class (Burns). A Chippewa artist from Michigan named Clifford Shawano requested permission to copy the photographs used in order "to oil Paint [sic] a complimentary protriarte [sic] along with puting [sic] Miss Saint-Marie's words to script of the Italic or 'Old English' type, hand lettered by me on animal skin, embossing all the initial capitals in gold leaf [sic]." Perhaps most indicative of changes in the national consciousness, however, was the response from a Mr. E. Melrowke of Holyoke, MA: "Indeed I was

profoundly disturbed by the songs of Buffy Sainte-Marie! What human being wouldn't [sic]? But now my reason for writing. What can I do? What would you have me do? What is the answer? I am not a wealthy person. Thank you [underline original].”

Tvedten's decision to focus on Native American issues and poetry was not a gradual one; he was certain when he edited the Sainte-Marie issue that this would be the new purpose of the magazine (Personal Interview). Very little work had to be done to find material to publish, and after the success of the first issue, contributors were quick to send Tvedten their writing. Even so, the follow-up issue contained poetry that Tvedten had personally sought. In 1969, he contacted Terry D. Allen, a writing instructor at the Institute of American Indian Arts, to inquire about the possibility of publishing the work of some of her poetry students. She responded with ten poems from her creative writing class. These poems filled the third issue of *BCQ's* volume XV, *Ten Poems*. The following young poets were included: Albert R. Milk, Jr (Sioux), Carl Concha (Taos Pueblo), Boots Sireech (Ute), Patty Harjo (Seneca-Seminole), Charles C. Long (Navajo), Deborah Finley (Colville), Phil George (Nez Perce), Dave MartinNez (Navajo), and Raymond Teeseteskie (Cherokee). The variety of styles found within the chapbook were as diverse as the tribes represented. While the specific topics of the poems also differed greatly

from each other, a strong theme of conflict with dominant Anglo culture ran throughout. The construction of a sense of self in contrast to the perceptions of white America can be seen in Carl Concha's "Proud": "I am happy for what I am. / I know what I am, all right, / But I must tell you that I am not / What you think I am" (2). Adding poignancy to this theme is the youth of the poetic voices. Albert R. Milk captures the uncertainty of adolescence exacerbated by cultural confusion in his poem "Self-Image": "Do they think, 'He holds himself above us?' / Is it because I'm quiet? / Why?" (2). Taking a more politically activist stance in his poem "This is Today?" Dave MartinNez discusses the changes to Navajo life and land that came with the oil wells, one side effect of which was contaminated brown drinking water (9). Deborah Finley's "Grandfather" compresses the genocide of America's Native people into her experience of the loss of her grandfather:

I won't feel the same going to places we used to go.

I won't hear the beautiful forest sounds.

as clearly as I did with him.

I won't see the magnificent sights

I did through his eyes.

No more. He is no more (7).

It is significant to note, though, that while conflict and painful adaptation is clearly an issue in this chapbook, there were also a number of poems that did not mention white culture or injustice at all, but rather simply focused on various aspects of American Indian life. Patty Harjo's untitled poem, Charles C. Long's "Yei-ie's Child," and Phil George's "Night Blessing" all delve into the spiritual self and the search for a tangible presence of the divine. Harjo's short verse connects the physical "roots, herbs, and long black hair / [that] Grace the ground" with the source of a spiritual strength that sustains and that / "shall make you strong" (3).

Raymond Teeseteskie's "My Kind of School" closed the chapbook. While the fraught relationship between boarding and mission schools and American Indian communities is not specifically mentioned, Teeseteskie presents an antithesis to the restriction and oppression that so often defined the American Indian educational experience. He writes:

Deep in the forest

Where a cool breeze

Fans my face,

Where the warm sun

Shines in bright

Geometry problems

Through the leaves

While birds lecture and scold

And squirrels play at recess

Through the trees--

This is my kind of school (13).

While no particular boarding school is specifically mentioned by Teeseteskie, the implication here is that greater value can be found in the antithesis of everything that these schools were known to be. This raises a complex question when looking at *Ten Poems* in the context of its place in the Blue Cloud Abbey's quarterly publication. The schools run by the abbey on the reservations in North and South Dakota seem to be precisely the types of schools Teeseteskie seems to be speaking against. It is notable that this was the chapbook's final poem (and final statement), and it had been placed by Tvedten on the last page and without any accompanying illustration.

On the back of the issue, underneath the recipient's address, a note from Lloyd New (Cherokee), the then Director of IAIA, explains the mission of the institute and the care it takes "to avoid the destruction of ethnic traditions." This was a challenging note to end on for a publication being sent to those who had donated to Blue Cloud Abbey's mission work

on the reservations. It is possible that at the time of its publication in 1969, Tvedten and the other monks at Blue Cloud were already preparing for the declaration that was to come in 1970 regarding the management of the mission schools on the reservations.

Teeseteskie's poem serves as a prime example of the potential conflict faced by a Benedictine monk publishing Native American poetry in a Catholic publication. Even though it is likely that Tvedten was unaware at the time of the abuse allegedly committed by some of his monastic brothers, it does not mean he was oblivious to the risks he was taking with the confrontational new direction of the *BCQ*. There was already a tradition of Catholic mission publications including poetry or prose written by Indian children in standard Western forms and content. During the 1920s, there was a proliferation of newsletters being sent out from Indian boarding schools to donors and supporters, extolling the virtues of assimilation and their work in seeing that it was accomplished (Littlefield xii). Many of these publications used writing samples from their students to prove their successes. One of the primary differences between the *BCQ* and these newsletters and booklets is that Tvedten's publication precisely fit the definition of a traditional small press: "primarily literary, often experimental, and typically unfettered. Virtually [all small presses] are published, edited, and financed by one person or by a small group of

persons who are amateurs—that is to say, people without a profit motive” (Pollak, qtd. in Olson 35). Because the *BCQ* was no longer used as a donor hook, Tvedten was free to publish poetry that he genuinely found to be of high quality and worthy of publication. The other key element found in Tvedten's editorial approach is that his choices were “unfettered.” It is difficult to comprehend how a publication stamped with the name of a Catholic religious community could ever be considered entirely “unfettered,” but given the social climate of the time, the changes occurring in the abbey's relationship with the tribal communities, and Maudlin's work with the AICRC, Tvedten's editorial choices were fitting to his context.

This is not to say that the challenging tone of the *BCQ* did not encounter resistance. In 1970, Tvedten diverged from the poetry that had marked the publication for the last two years and published an essay written by Dr. David Anderson of San Fernando Valley State College entitled “American Indian Flood Myths: A Case of Cultural Genocide” (16.3). While response was largely positive (Anderson's essay was republished in several academic publications), Tvedten also received the following response from a subscriber:

Reverend (?!?) Frs,

Please, in the most absolute way, take me out of your mailing list. [...] Good for you that The Holy Bible New Testament speak [sic] of the age of apostasy. You are it. Do not send me any of your blasphemous literature. [...] I hope not to view you in hell and I happy in Heaven.[...] You perfect idiot. The missionary [sic] are not the fabricators of the Flood—the inspire [sic] writer is inspired by God, again I say, you perfect idiot, worthy of all Christian pity. Without any respect or admiration or anything literature admiration can't awake, [signature] (Lorio).

Tvedten also recalls a phone call he received from a former novice of the abbey who was employed at the Flandreau Indian School in Flandreau, South Dakota at the time. “He was terribly disturbed by some of the radical poetry I had published,” Tvedten remembers. “[He was upset by the] critical poetry, critical of the church and the [mission] school system” (Personal Interview). Perhaps the most outraged response, however, came from a priest in the Diocese of Sioux Falls who was so upset by what he read in the *BCQ* that he contacted the abbot of Blue Cloud. His indignation was prompted by the poetry of Adrian C. Louis (Lovelock Paiute), which Tvedten published twice, once in 1977 and again in 1979.

While Louis included references to a “maidenhead I kissed” (“Her Crinkled Brown Shoe,” 25.3), “the bitch goddess success” (Colorless Green,” 23.3), and “electrical sperm” (The Pseudo Shaman's Cliche,” 23.3), it was his reference to the Statue of Liberty's “bronzed vulva” (“Statue of Liberty,” 25.3) that drove the diocesan priest to express his outrage to Tvedten's superior (Personal Interview).

Tvedten maintained total control over the publication, however, and the content and themes he published were never censored by his superiors. This independence fell well within the American tradition of the small press, as described by Felix Pollak in 1977:

[Little] magazine editors typically resist any indebtedness to patrons, even patrons who don't want to dictate taste.... Most editors don't even want school sponsorship, because once a board of regents, a college president, or a department head puts his hands into the pie, he's likely to make demands or set restrictions.” (Pollak qtd. in Olson 37)

Chapter 4

Clarity of Purpose

The pressure described by Pollak was never experienced by Tvedten. While many organizations and individuals continued to ask for reprints of issues, it was clear that the vast majority of subscribers were carry-overs from the days when the *BCQ* was intended to be a mission update. With this in mind, in 1972, the benefactors were provided with the option of staying on the publication's mailing list. Most asked to be removed, and subscriptions dropped from roughly 20,000 to less than 4,000 (Tvedten "Re: BCQ"). This marked the official turning point for the *BCQ*, setting it squarely in the direction Tvedten had been guiding it since the Buffy Sainte-Marie issue in 1968. In 1975, the *BCQ* was being mailed to 3,110 households in the United States, 150 libraries domestically and in Canada, and 152 locations in other countries (Tvedten "Re: BCQ"). A high school English teacher in St. Paul, Minnesota, wrote to Tvedten and informed him that "all 500 sophomores read copies of the *Quarterly*. Several students asked for your address so they could subscribe" (Eckholm, qt. in Tvedten "Re: BCQ"). One entire issue had been translated into German by Catholic monks and published in their periodical. The Microfilming Corporation of America and Xerox-University

Films were both microfilming the publication, and several poems had been translated into Polish and published (Tvedten "Introduction").

The dramatic drop in subscription would have been seen as a death knell for a commercial publication, but for Tvedten and the *BCQ*, it allowed for a defining of focus. After *Ten Poems*, the editor never had to request material again. Perhaps because of Momaday's winning of the Pulitzer or because of the dramatic social changes taking place during the time, Tvedten quickly found that "the whole country was suddenly aware of the plight of its first citizens" ("Introduction"). This created some difficulties for a single editor attempting to sift through material submitted to one of the few sources publishing about a topic that had become very popular very quickly. As a non-Native poet once remarked to him, "Every bad poet in America is writing about Indians now" ("Introduction"), and many of them were sending their poetry to him. One particularly terrible example of this trend reads as follows: "On a mesa, a Sioux met a Ute / Named Lisa. He thought she was cute. / He said: 'Come on, Lisa, / Let's get off this mesa / And climb up that hill— it's a butte'" (Rushton). This cheap pastiche certainly does not exemplify the majority of submissions, however, and the high quality of submitted material allowed Tvedten to further narrow his purpose for the *BCQ*—would it be a publication that discussed simply American Indian issues and culture, or would it be

primarily a venue through which Native writers could find publication?

Tvedten chose to give priority to American Indian writers, while occasionally dedicating select issues to poetry submitted by non-Native poets (Tvedten "Introduction").

The vast majority of poets Tvedten published were not professional writers. None of the students included in *Ten Poems*, for example, went on to have distinguished writing careers (although many did go on to do important work among their tribal communities and, in the case of Charles Long, with the United Nations working group on Human Rights of Indigenous People [*Navajo Nation*]).¹ Through Craig Volk, a writing instructor who conducted classes in the South Dakota State Penitentiary, Tvedten began correspondence with a twenty-seven year old inmate of the penitentiary named Tony Long Wolf Jr. in 1979. Long Wolf had been a student in one of Volk's poetry classes in the prison, and Volk had seen "the first flash and hum of [Tony's] poetic terminal" after several sessions ("Introduction"). Tvedten dedicated an issue in the spring of that year to Long Wolf's poetry, and the stark clarity of the poet's language still rings

¹Only Patty Harjo and Raymond Teeseteskie had their work published later. Harjo later changed her name to Ya-Ka-Nes and was anthologized in the important work edited by Kenneth Rosen, *Voices of the Rainbow* (1975). Teeseteskie's "My Kind of School" was published by Oxford University Press in 2003 in a poetry book for children entitled *A Poison Tree*.

from the pages. One of the poems selected by Tvedten for publication is entitled "Another Jug":

Three sat in a junk car.

One arched his neck

For the last drop

And then threw the empty wine bottle

Through the front window

That wasn't there.

It sailed in the air

Did a few somersaults

And shattered into pieces

As it hit an old tire rim,

All in slow motion.

He turned to his friends and asked,

"How much coins you got?" (11)

Volk wrote in his introduction to the chapbook that he hoped Long Wolf would continue writing, and the two of them maintained correspondence even after Long Wolf was moved to a work farm in Yankton, South Dakota. Two years earlier Tvedten had published another issue dedicated to an inmate, G. Jake Bordeaux. Also a student of Volk's, Bordeaux wrote poetry that explored the loss of self that occurs behind bars: "My cell has made a shadow / out of me. / Green iron bars / breathe stale air and it is me / who staggers then falls / wonders / then cries. / I am one man in many / and I have closed the door / on myself" ("One Man in Many Doors," 24.2). In a letter to Tvedten, Volk expressed profound frustration at the parole board's inflexibility towards allowing further education for Long Wolf: "I'm all for the democratic process, but what the hell[?] Jake's (and Tony's for that matter) book [sic] have strong poems published elsewhere & are by people who should be heard, who indeed need to be heard." These contributors in particular serve as examples of the significant role played by the *BCQ* in giving an audience to those whose voices had been diminished or extinguished altogether.

Chapter 5

Women's Voices in the *BCQ*

While continuing to publish new and unknown poets and writers, the *BCQ* also received submissions from writers who were quickly becoming established in the new field of Native American literature such as Joseph Bruchac, Norman H. Russell, Geary Hobson, Maurice Kenny, Diane Burns, Silvester J. Brito, Wendy Rose, Anita Endrezze, Ralph Salisbury, William Oandasan, Joy Harjo, Duane Niatum, Gerald Vizenor, and Paula Gunn Allen. Several of these poets appeared numerous times over the course of the *BCQ*'s publishing years, each with whole chapbooks dedicated to their work. One of the most notable transitions that occurred throughout the publishing years of the *BCQ* was the establishment of a place for women poets. The twenty years in which the *BCQ* published were pivotal years for women writers, particularly women of color.

It would be inaccurate to perpetuate the idea that Indian voices were entirely silent before N. Scott Momaday's literary accomplishments in 1968-69, and this would also be an inaccurate statement about American Indian female writers as well. Throughout the 1800s and early 1900s, some of the strongest voices speaking out for the rights of Indian people were those of women; Jane Johnston Schoolcraft (Ojibwe), Sara

Winnemucca (Paiute), S Alice Callahan (Muskogee), E. Pauline Johnson (Mohawk), Zitkala-Ša (Yankton-Dakota), Mourning Dove (Okanogan), Ella Cara Deloria (Yankton-Dakota), and others wrote of their experiences and those of their people in times when Native populations were reaching record lows (Van Dyke 85). The resurgence of Native writers in the 1960s and 70s, however, was also driven by women writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna), Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna/Métis), Joy Harjo (Muskogee/Cherokee), and Linda Hogan (Chickasaw), all of whom contributed to the changing American canon on equal footing with Momaday, James Welch, Gerald Vizenor, Joseph Bruchac, and other male Indian writers.

The experiences of American Indian women were not immediately reflected in Tvedten's editorial choices. Excluding the Saint-Marie issue, in the first five years of the *BCQ*, there were only seven poems published by women (there were no female poets included at all in 1970). In 1975, however, Tvedten edited his first chapbook dedicated to a female poet. Jeanne Bonnette's collection of poetry entitled *Pueblo Poems* featured work dedicated to the people of the region and was illustrated with her photographs of the Southwestern landscape (21.1). Bonnette did not include any tribal affiliation in her bio, but *BCQ* soon made a significant statement in support of Native women writers.

In 1977 Wendy Rose (Hopi/Miwok) claimed a *BCQ* chapbook of her own under the unflinching title “Academic Squaw: Reports To the World from the Ivory Tower.” Illustrated by her own drawings, the poetry included in the chapbook did not fail to live up to the challenging language of the issue's title. Her title poem, “Academic Squaw,” confronted the filter of academic ethnography that she saw as reducing Native cultures into little more than “repaired forms in museums”; her concluding lines state, “Grandmother / We've have been framed” (10).

Another selection of Rose's entitled “For the White poets who would be Indian,” confronted what Tvedten had been discovering himself: that “every hack wants to write about Indians [these days]” (Tvedten qt. in Milton, 13 Jan). Her poem reads in part:

You think of us only when
your voice wants for roots,
when you have sat back on
your heels and become
primitive.

You finish your poems

and go back (Rose 17).

Tvedten's decision to include this poem is as a challenge to his own editorial function. The process of filtering out those whom Rose refers to as “white shamans” was a complex one, and the question of authenticity was one she discussed at length in a correspondence with John R. Milton, poet and editor of the *South Dakota Review*. Milton wrote to Tvedten after reading Rose's poem, stating that this was a problem which bothered him “both as an editor and a poet” (2 Jan). He called Rose's poem “the best comment I've seen concerning a kind of poet who is becoming all too common.” Tvedten put the two in contact, and Rose's response to Milton provides a profound analysis of the authenticity issue:

It is an artistic frustration to me when reviewers persist in reviewing my chromosomes rather than my work.... I want my work to stand or fall on its own. I do not want it to be accepted or rejected according to what ethnic group is currently in fashion. But there are [some] in the world who appear to be “cashing in” on an apparent fad. Somehow I get the feeling from them that they really *are* trying to *be* Indian, in the same sense that a white actor tries to *be* Indian in a movie.... [It is to these] “white shamans” to whom I

direct the poem, not to non-Indian people who express themselves from the same input as many Indian poets (Letter).

Rose goes on to acknowledge that the issue of definition remains, and she maintains that “an ‘Indian’ poem is a poem written by an Indian” (Letter). A non-Native person should not be accused of trying to appropriate Indian culture “just because [his or her] central theme has to do with coyotes,” but Rose draws a line at those poets who make “references to some kind of mystical connection with Indian people and heritage in order to convey a response to the ‘natural world,’” particularly when those poets go on to “win a Pulitzer Prize by doing so” (Letter). Although this is a personal correspondence between Rose and Milton, Rose’s delineations could be read as Tvedten’s criteria for including a poet’s work in the *BCQ*. He has never explicitly stated how he made his editorial decisions, but a survey of the work included in the publication’s run reveals a careful avoidance of the “white shamanism” so strongly condemned by Rose.

Few of the poets published in the *BCQ* carried as much established literary authority as Paula Gunn Allen when her collection, *Star Child*, was published in the summer of 1981. She had already received a National Endowment of the Arts writing fellowship three years before, and she had started editing *Studies in American Indian Literature* (Allen 22). She had

not yet published *The Sacred Hoop* or *Spider Woman's Granddaughters*, but both of these important works were in process when Tvedten published *Star Child* (at the end of her bio, there is mention of her work in "an extensive study of American Indian Women in Writing" (*Star Child*, 27.3). The unfortunately low number of women writers published in the first few years of the publication may not have been fully compensated for by these chapbooks and others by female poets, but they did serve to raise the profile of American Indian women poets. In a letter written to Tvedten in August of that year, noted feminist scholar and writer Adrienne Rich asked for several copies of *Star Child*, calling it a "powerful and marvelous book." She went on to entreat Tvedten to send copies of Allen's work to women's bookstores around the country, advising him that the poet's work was in high demand and that providing it to a wider audience was an "important work." Rich, at the time, was publishing *Sinister Wisdom*, a literary journal featuring feminist and lesbian voices, and she had a firm grasp on the changes that were occurring in the literary world regarding women writers. Rich's appeal to make Gunn Allen's work readily accessible and the exchanges between John Milton and Wendy Rose via Tvedten speaks also to the interconnected web of editors, writers, and publishers that provided the groundwork for the resurgence of Native American literature during these years. While male poets continued to

dominate in the pages of the *BCQ*, after 1981 Tvedten dedicated five more chapbooks exclusively to female poets, and included art by Wendy Rose in several more.

One of these chapbooks was Mary TallMountain's collection *There Is No Word for Goodbye*, published as the first issue of 1981. With the same intensity Wendy Rose brought to the question of ethnic authenticity, TallMountain explored the issue of religious identity. As a Catholic publication being edited by a white man, both of these issues raised questions that must have faced Tvedten on a regular basis: how "Indian" must a contributor be and how much should his or her poetry reflect the teachings of the Catholic Church? In TallMountain's work and biography, one sees this balance of identity at work. Born to a Koyukon/Athabaskan mother and a Scots/Irish father, TallMountain was adopted by a white family when she was six and removed from her native village in the interior of Alaska. At the time her work was published in the *BCQ*, she was actively attempting to reclaim the heritage that had been stolen from her, and this effort is reflected in her poetry. The joy she finds in her Athabaskan heritage is captured in poems dedicated to her grandmother ("Matmiya") and mother ("The Hands of Mary Joe"), and her desperate struggle to fully accept this heritage in an unaccepting and discriminating environment can be seen in "Indian Blood":

They butted to the stage,

darting questions; pointing.

Do you live in an igloo?

Hah! You eat blubber!

Hemmed in by ringlets of brass,

grass-pale eyes,

the fur of *daghooda-aak*²

trembled.

Late in the night

I bit my hand until it was

pierced

with moons of dark

Indian blood (14).

²(Athabaskan) caribou parka

In her young adult years, TallMountain had become Catholic, and the influence of this faith can be read in her quotations from St. Francis' *Litany of Praise* and excerpts from the New Testament book of Luke (*There Is No Word*, 18, 19). These quotations exist alongside poems that are also expressions of Athabaskan spirituality, thus providing an example of the merging of traditional Catholicism with the spirituality of Native people so commonly found in tribal communities. The line between the official teachings of the Church and the private spiritual practices of her followers has always been a moving one, and it is one often explored in the pages of the *BCQ*, from Anderson's essays on flood myths to TallMountain's poetic prayers. In a note at the conclusion of her poem "Light Upon the Chugach Mountains," TallMountain wrote, "There was a sword of mist buried to the hilt in a trail of clouds around the mountains. The hilt took the evanescent Shape of a Crusader's cross. Fearful of such beauty for a moment, I wrote this, now I perceive the sword, the cross, the vast breath, are but one face of the One..." (17). Perhaps it is this understanding of many aspects of one divine presence that enables TallMountain (and others) to juxtapose images such as a lone wolf speaking for his people and the words of a 13th century Italian saint (15). *There Is No Word For Goodbye* went on to win a Pushcart Prize that year, and it is worth noting

that in 1988, when Tvedten was preparing to print the *BCQ*'s final issue, he chose to print a chapbook made up entirely of TallMountain's poetry.

Chapter 6

Endings

By its ten-year mark, the *BCQ* had made significant changes. Some of these changes were purely aesthetic: due to the acquisition of its own printing press, the abbey had begun to publish the *BCQ* in-house. This allowed for higher-grade paper and print quality. The covers of the later booklets were heavier and better withstood the abuses of mailing, and the typeface was darker and more precise than in earlier issues. Notable also was a shift away from photography accompanying the writing. While some photographs continued to be seen, original artwork from either the writers themselves or other American Indian artists were used on the covers and throughout the booklets. The chapbooks dedicated to Wilma Elizabeth McDaniel featured only a hand-written note in child-like cursive on the front, excerpts from her poems (which were, in fact, submitted on various bits of mismatched paper) (30.3, 34.1). Several others featured the detailed pen-and-ink drawings of Paul War Cloud, a Sisseton-Wahpeton Sioux artist and community leader who passed away in the early days of the *BCQ*'s publication (17.3, 20.4, 27.4, 31.2) The 1987 chapbook featuring William Oandasan had no artwork at all, but rather featured a bold type-face and bright white paper (33.3).

In his introduction to the *Tenth Anniversary of Poetry* issue in 1981, Tvedten wrote, "Although I do not know if the *BCQ* will last another ten years, I am confident that some of the poems which have appeared in it will be remembered for a long time.... My gratitude is also expressed to the monastic community in which I live" (27.4) By 1988, the abbey's photographer had long since returned from his studies in Europe, and a new abbot had been appointed the new leader of the monks at Blue Cloud. According to Tvedten, the new abbot, Fr. Denis Quinkert, asked that the *BCQ* "revert to its original format" (Tvedten "Re: *BCQ*"). A return to the mission updates from the 24-page literary publication of the previous twenty years never came to be. In addition to editing the *BCQ*, Tvedten had been producing a four-page newspaper for benefactors and friends of the abbey, and it was this newsletter that continued after the cessation of the *BCQ*.

The publication did not go quietly, however. In a beseeching letter to Tvedten, Kenny wrote, "I do hope that something, someone, will pump in the desperate breath [to the *BCQ*]... if you yourself must give up the horns. A total defunct would be not just tragic, but murder. Surely a mysterious something will come to the aid of *BCQ*'s life" (Letter 1976). Several offers were, in fact, made to purchase or subsidize the *BCQ* in order to keep it alive. The University of California, Davis, asked if Tvedten

would be willing to transfer the *BCQ* to their Native American Studies department, and Silvestor Brito also offered to buy the press through the University of Wyoming. Although Tvedten did calculate the cost per issue for prospective buyers, it was never sold or passed on. The stormy seas of small press publishing had already put the *BCQ* at risk several times in its two-decade run, and his situation within the abbey's community was also a significant factor. Joseph Bruchac was not surprised by its closure, but rather by what a long run the *BCQ* had enjoyed: "I was just amazed they kept letting him do it. I wondered, 'How long are they going to let him do this? How long is he going to get away with this?' And when eventually he did get transferred, I thought, 'Well, there it is, it's finally happened.' But he managed to do it for all those years, and thank goodness he did. Thank God he did" (Interview).

Tvedten had been in touch with Brown University's John Hay Library as early as 1981 to arrange for storage of the *BCQ*'s archives upon its cessation (Brown). Even though its closure did not come as a surprise, it was not an easy process, and in later writings, Tvedten referred to the *BCQ* as his "labor of love," ("Re: *BCQ*"). "When it became necessary for me to move on to something else," he wrote, "I sensed the loss of work which had become very dear to me" ("Introduction"). On the back cover of the final issue, this very simple note was written: "Dear Reader, the *Blue*

Cloud Quarterly will be published no more. Thank you for your interest over the years. - Brother Benet Tvedten, O.S.B., Editor” (34.4). Many long-time subscribers grieved the loss: “I hope you can take pride in knowing your work was itself a piece of art, with a great beauty, that over the years has helped me to search for the best in myself” (Kersen). Another letter read, “Perhaps, like a child, I ask why did it have to die, and perhaps I know. But I am sorry. I will miss my old friend” (Brading).

In a letter to Tvedten thanking him for his work with the *BCQ*, Richard Boudreau of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse wrote:

I can't believe how many times as I look through the lists of American Indian poets that they have been first or at least early on published by Blue Cloud Abbey Press [*BCQ*]. For any group of writers, there has to be a vehicle through which they can be read by the general public.... Your press was one of the few that published such writings. It filled a need, and it did it well — unbelievably well.

It is precisely for these reasons that the *BCQ* deserves further academic study. By the time it was retired, the *BCQ* had published more than 150 poets, many of whom had never been published before. Emerson's and Fuller's dreams of an American canon made up of a diverse choir of

voices are exemplified in these pages, and the credibility publication gave to many of these poets has had far-reaching implications. Boudreau considered the *BCQ* a central factor in the revitalization of American Indian people as the twentieth century progressed, and stated, "I point out the many things that happened 20 years ago— Momaday's novel and Pulitzer, AIM and Alcatraz, Deloria's *Custer* and the *Blue Cloud Quarterly*.... we will probably look back on [the 1970s and 80s] as we now do on the Harlem Renaissance or the Chicago Renaissance." Tvedten's work placed alongside such events and publications emphasizes its significance, as well as how overlooked it has been in academic circles for the last thirty years. Just as Matthiessen was forced to be selective in his analysis of the American literature published between 1850 and 1855, this study has only touched the surface of what further research into the *BCQ* has to offer. The questions left unexplored here are numerous: What is the significance of blending amateur and professional poets, writers, and artists when giving voice to an oppressed culture? What does the dramatic shift in readership in 1972 say about the response to Native American literature by people with no previous exposure to it? How did the other work done by the abbey, such as the AICRC, influence and shape the direction of Tvedten's work? If the *BCQ* had not been canceled when it was, what purpose, if any, might it have continued to serve?

As of this writing, Tvedten is in his seventies and is still living a monastic life. Blue Cloud Abbey closed its doors in 2012, but Tvedten has stayed in the Dakotas and continues to write meditations on the spiritual and monastic life. Because he was the sole editor of this important work, his insight and experience are invaluable to anyone researching its beginnings. In his introduction to the tenth anniversary issue, Tvedten wrote: “No doubt those ancient monastic scribes knew what they were doing when they copied Beowulf. Nowadays we follow that same tradition by using a Heidelberg offset” (27.4). This reference to the cultural preservation work performed by monks centuries ago is perhaps the most concise explanation Tvedten has ever given for the potential risks and conflicts he was willing to face by publishing authentic voices and experiences. Not allowing the volumes of this important publication to fade into the archives is the responsibility of an academic community interested in continuing to amplify the voices first shared by a small abbey press in South Dakota.

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Bethany Yardy received her BA in English from Spring Arbor University, graduating with honors in 2005. Although her focus during her undergraduate was nineteenth century British literature (an interest she cultivated during a term studying at Oxford University), her graduate work at the University of Texas at Arlington was primarily centered on twentieth century writers, particularly in the fields of Chicano and Native American literature.

Yardy conducted research into the *BCQ* for three years while at UTA, and traveled to North and South Dakota, Rhode Island, and New York to conduct interviews and archival research. Future academic work will continue to explore the contribution of the *Blue Cloud Quarterly* and pursue a more in-depth analysis of many of the issues raised in her graduate thesis.

Yardy currently teaches Social Studies and American Literature at an alternative high school in Fort Worth, Texas.