

“I AM NATIVE AMERICAN” BY SPIRITWIND WOOD'S ETHNICITY ANALYSIS OF NATIVE AMERICAN EXISTENCES

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Abstract

This research paper will discuss Kelly "Spiritwind" Wood's *I am Native American* (2014) poetry analysis. The poetry made Native American identity relevant to the present day. Native Americans are a well-known part of America that has largely been overlooked due to colonial and contemporary "White American" assimilation. Using ethnicity assimilation and restatement theory from Campbell, the researcher will use a descriptive qualitative method to examine the poetry's meaning. The outcomes demonstrate assimilation in three forms—idealism, religion, and culture—as well as the poet's resistance and defenses as a member of the younger Native American generation.

Key words: Assimilation, Ethnicity, Native American, Resistance

INTRODUCTION

In a nation, many races congregate in the United States. The melting pot and multiculturalism are two examples of the many ways that Americans' diversity can be demonstrated (Pranoto & Suprayogi, 2020a), (Al Falaq et al., 2021). The immigration that has occurred for a considerable amount of time and continues to this day is to blame for America's unique situation (Samanik, 2019), (Kardiansyah & Salam, 2020). It is only natural for the general public and decision-makers to pay attention to immigration, culture (Kuswoyo et al., 2021), (Afrianto & Gulö, 2019), and identity given that immigration is not a new phenomenon in the United States of America (Abidin et al., 2022), (Puspita, 2021), (Teknologi, Jtsi, Wulandari, et al., 2021). According to the law of English-oriented cultural standards, People of Color (POC) are expected to blend in with other races and cultures (Gordon, 1961) (Aminatun et al., 2019), (Mandasari & Oktaviani, 2018), (Oktaviani et al., 2021). On the other hand, multiculturalism the desire to preserve one's original culture (Kuswanto et al., 2020), (Suprayogi, Samanik, et al., 2021) and ethical identities while adapting to a new environment exists among some of them (Afrianto & Restika, 2018), (Muliyah, Rekha, et al., 2020), (Oktaviani, 2018). This condition determines how Americans interact with one another and mix their cultures (Sari & Wahyudin, 2019), (Arpiansah et al., 2021), (Mertania & Amelia, 2020). They have

provided many Americans with a potent and effective means of forging a plural identity that is productive on both an ethnic and national level (Cahyaningsih & Pranoto, 2021), (Pranoto & Suprayogi, 2020b), allowing them to belong to multiple sets of values rather than just one (Puspita & Amelia, 2020), (Asia & Samanik, 2018). There is no singular identity for these Americans; Instead, they switch between two or more, each with its own language, customs, and values (Kardiansyah, 2019), (Fakhrurozi et al., 2021). Nevertheless, the culture began to "disappear" over time, particularly among the younger generation (Aguss et al., 2021), (Fakhrurozi & Adrian, 2021). They are regarded as modern and liberated, unattached to any culture (Aldino & Ulfa, 2021). The social life of these people is also impacted by secularism in the government (Afrianto & Ma'rifah, 2020), (Teknologi, Jtsi, Amelia, et al., 2021). The differences between immigrants, Native Americans, and White Americans became blurred as a result of assimilation (Putri & Aminatun, 2021), (Sari & Oktaviani, 2021). As a result, Native Americans' culture and nature are difficult to introduce and preserve.

Many people bring this problem to public through mass media, from music, movie, and literature (Mandasari & Wahyudin, 2019), (Amelia, 2021), (Samanik, 2018). Some famous representation of Native Americans can be found in West Movies such as *The Last of Mohicans* (1992) and *Pocahontas* (1995). Others are from literature, such as novels, folk stories, and poems (Muliyah, Aminatun, et al., 2020), (Mandasari & Wahyudin, 2021). Native American culture is known for their love to the nature and how beautiful they describe and praising them (Gulö, 2019), (Agustina et al., 2021). *The Last of Mohicans* is a movie that brought the conflict between the native and the colonial (France and England) that inspired from unfortunate event of The Fort William Henry Massacre in 1756 (Adelina & Suprayogi, 2020), (Samanik, 2021), (Aldino et al., 2021). *Pocahontas* was also inspired by true event and figures from 1607 (Ahmad et al., 2020), (Oktavia & Suprayogi, 2021). Both of the movies depicted the Native American as people who love their homeland and put high respect and loyalty for their family (Puspita & Pranoto, 2021), (Afrianto et al., 2021) and love through the dialogue, the action, and interaction between the characters (Nurmala Sari & Aminatun, 2021), (Oktaviani et al., 2020). Despite of the condition of communication back then, the mentioned movies gained international popularities throughout the world (Ivana & Suprayogi, 2020), (Endang Woro Kasih, 2018).

Nowadays, people can freely share their writings through internet (Yulianti & Sulistiyawati, 2020), (Fithratullah, 2021). The globalization makes them easier to share the awareness and not only reach the local (Americans), but also the whole world (Kurniawan et al., 2018), (Gulö et al., 2021), (Qodriani & Wijana, 2021). One of them is Kelly ‘Spiritwind’ Wood, a Cherokee-German man that love the culture from his ancestor (Suprayogi, Pranoto, et al., 2021), (Samanik & Lianasari, 2018). Some known poems that he wrote are *I am Native American*, *A Cherokee Prayer*, and *No Peace Anymore*. Through his poems, he shares his pride and admiration to the culture and teachings despite of people’s view of his belief (Fakhrurozi & Adrian, 2020), (Kardiansyah & Qodriani, 2018). In one of his poem titled *I am Native American* (2014), Wood used combinations of strong and direct language, and the poetry is pretty much self-explanatory (Ngestirosa et al., 2020), (Yulianti & Sulistyawati, 2021), (Fithratullah, 2019). However, the language that he used bring much emotion and meaning that conveys his messages and identity to the world (Setri & Setiawan, 2020), (Journal et al., 2021), (Muliyah & Aminatun, 2020).

This paper is aimed to serve the analysis of one of Spiritwind Wood’s poems, titled *I am Native American* from the ethnicity and the meaning behind the poem. The purpose of this research is to learn how the poet use the combination of words to bring out his messages of Native American values to the audience. Another important aspect from the research is to learn how young generation embracing the ancestry, the culture, and the moral values of Native American in modern days. It cannot be denied that the past, present, and future of America always have the relation to the culture of Native American, despite of the amount or the frequency the culture being used (Krupat, 1998). By using literary approach and supported by theories and previous studies, the researcher is interested to analyze deeper into the poem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The researches of poems and the meaning of them have been done many times. On the other side, the concern and curiosity of Native American literature and culture also drive many students and experts to analyze more on the literature through time (Candra & Qodriani, 2019), (Suprayogi & Pranoto, 2020). In this research, the researcher will take several previous studies as supporting data to analyze the poem. The first research came from Arturo Arias with title *From Indigenous Literature to Native American and*

Indigenous Theorist: The Makings of a Grassroots Decoloniality (2018). In this essay, decolonial concerns pertaining to Native Americans and Indigenous peoples will be highlighted and critiqued in the context of current Indigenous narratives (Qodriani & Wijana, 2020), (Qodriani, 2021). Their perspectives both add to and obfuscate the presumptions of Western decolonial thinkers. In addition to assisting in tearing down the unseen barriers dividing them, examining their creation gives continuity to the political and epistemological quests of each. Other research is coming from Sarah Dowling with title *Rethinking Transnationalism in American Poetry* (2022). In order to weaken the grip of the United States' very notion, the paper seeks to highlight the country's basic linguistic diversity. It contends that this concept of national literature, which assumes that it is created in the language that the nation's citizens speak as their "first" and "genuine" mother tongue, does not accurately reflect the reality that exists in the United States.

The theory that will be used to analyze the poem are about the assimilation and resistance of the Native America ethnicity. Since the beginning of colonization, the European saw the Native American as 'savage' and 'uncivilized', far from familiar with their culture. This perspective is planted through generations of America until now. Native Americans were described by White Americans in positions of cultural dominance as being racially inferior, primitive, and infantile, and as needing severe readjustment to the 'better' life of the dominant culture. These myths contributed significantly to the discourse—a manner of thinking and speaking about Native Americans—that led to the general opinion that they should be destroyed (Campbell, 2015). With that reason, White American assimilated their culture by planting the 'ethical uniformity' in education level, while making Native American as 'un-America' (Foucault in Campbell, 2015). By taking points from the previous studies and the theory, the researcher will analyze the word choices from the poet and connect them with the theory of assimilation that happened in United States of America.

METHOD

The poet was described and examined as part of the descriptive qualitative technique utilized in this study. When an analysis is qualitative, it is based largely on a constructivist viewpoint, taking into account historically and socially created individual experiences. The data are divided into two types, primary data and secondary data. The primary data is the

poem titled *I am Native American* by Spiritwind Wood. The secondary data are the previous study, theory, and additional literature, research and article that related to the topic of the discussion. The process of research contains three main parts. The first part is doing research on the poem, the poet, theory, and previous study. The next part is analyzing the poem by selecting the combination of the words and the meaning behind them. Last part is concluding the findings by sorting and describing them in this research paper.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After reading and analyzing the poem, the researcher found that the poet used combination of words that symbolize the assimilation and resistance of Native American ethnicity. Here, the researcher will explain the meaning per stanza.

You can judge me for who I am

try to change my point of view

only if you think you can

but I can see right through you

and know just who you are

The first stanza stated his position in the society, how he being treated and the prejudice from people. From the tone and context of the poetry, the word ‘you’ is referred to “White Americans” that depicted as the ‘civilized’ people. These people tried to convinced the subject “I” to see what they want to see but not the truth. The sentences “but I can see right through you, and know just who you are” showed that the subject actually knows the intention behind the treatment from ‘White Americans’. They could use sugar-coated words and actions or directly disagree to accept the existence of the Native American culture. However, “I” will not ever get distracted or fooled by the statement and lies they made.

You can say my religion is wrong

Still I am going to stand strong

To all that I believe in

For I am a Native American

The second stanza showed the thing that the subject “I” believe as the truth, that is the culture and religion of Native America. The poet used the word “stand strong” to emphasize the defense from other influences. It has been known that “White Americans” were the descendants from European who travelled to the America continent. They travelled not only to explore the world, but also to claim the land and spread the authority and beliefs of Christianity. When they found America, they saw something different from their culture and appearance. The way the native live did not match the standard of European, so they called them savage and uncivilized. One of the steps eradicating the actuality of Native American was through religion (Christianity). This action has been done for many years until now, despite of the advanced technology and the “open-minded” people. The religion and the culture are seen as “outdated” and “old-fashioned” that do not suitable with the situation. Thus, the situation makes it easier to shove the doctrine to young generation.

*I was born into the world of White man
their ways they would try to teach
many words I heard they would preach
trying to change me from within
from a path that has taken me far*

The third stanza portrayed the activities of “White Americans” or other white people doing assimilation towards the subject “I” from the Native American culture. This stanza is functioning as the evidence of the first stanza, as the depiction that this is the reality of the society in America. The poet used sentences “their ways they would try to teach” and “many words I heard they would preach” are the act of assimilation from “White Americans” to cover or get rid of the Native American culture through education and social life basically. By making ‘legal teaching’ under the word ‘proper education’, they wanted to make Native Americans to act and dress like “White Americans” or similar to them. This also related to the assimilation through language, convincing people to talk with language that has never been spoken before to become their official language, consciously (through government and education) and unconsciously (through commercial and daily activities).

*But my veins flows with my pride
of who I am deep inside
with the wisdom that you need
that of the American Indian*

The fourth stanza showed the resistance from the subject “I” to the act of assimilation from previous stanza. It is also showing the strong bond between the subject and the ethnicity that related to them.

*Though I am only a mix breed
the blood of my Ancestors I bleed
their Spirits are a part of me
that shows me my visions I see
on this Red Road that I must be
for this is who I am
a true Native American*

The fifth stanza acted as the emphasize of the previous stanzas. It is also the sign of how the subject “I” really proud of the culture and belief that they got from the ancestors, despite of having only half of the blood. The poet used Red Road as a portrayal of their fate or way of life that they decide to choose. This stanza also portrayed the decision that the subject chose, or the poet himself chose. Wood is embracing his Cherokee blood instead of move away from it. Here, the audience will see the sincerity of Wood as a part of small number of younger generations that choose to keep and show their Native American identity. He is paving the stigma of Native American and stand up against the current.

CONCLUSION

There are a few points that can be deduced from the meaning of Spiritwind Wood's poem I Am Native American. The reality of Native American ethnic assimilation and resistance is

the first point. The researcher discovered sentences from the first, second, and third stanzas that indicate the integration of various aspects of life. Wood mentioned three aspects of life: how people think (opinion and decision), their religion and beliefs, and the language and culture they live in. They focus on those three points by making statements and engaging in activities that attack the culture's existence, such as claiming that their religion is false and dressing and speaking in a manner more European. From those vantage points, the poet also addressed the issue, prejudice, public opinion, and coercion to him and younger Native Americans as a whole. The second point is the shape of resistance from the younger generation that represented by Spiritwind Wood. The poet used sentences that portray the path and side that he chooses in his life. Even though he is mix-breed, he embraces the culture that he got from his ancestors rather than following the current of modernism and influences from the "White Americans". This shows that Krupat's statement is true, Native America was, is, and will be part of culture of America and its people, despite of time and technologies that always move forward.

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