

Edward Dorn and Leroy Lucas, *The Shoshoneans: The People of the Basin-Plateau*. Expanded second edition. Edited by Matthew Hofer. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2013. 165pp. \$34.95

The Shoshoneans first appeared in 1966 as a firsthand report on the condition of the remaining Native American tribes of the Great Basin plateau, who were all designated by their shared language, *Shoshone*—a Numic branch of the Uto-Aztecan linguistic family. Comprised of a long essay by Edward Dorn and a series of photographs by Leroy Lucas, *The Shoshoneans* emerged as the result of a road trip in which both authors traveled from Idaho to Nevada and back in the summer of 1965. Despite these initial circumstances Dorn's essay does not exclusively fall under the category of travelogue but rather exhibits an eclectic and idiosyncratic mixture of different literary and discursive genres. Ranging from historical expositions and ethnographic inspections to impressionistic reports and lyrical descriptions, Dorn's prose appears to reflect the complexities of the sociopolitical panorama that he envisaged. As Simon J. Ortiz affirms in his foreword to this new expanded edition by the University of New Mexico Press, Dorn sought to unite his voice with the general outcries of discontent that pervaded the United States, of which the Vietnam War was just one among many causes. In Dorn's evaluation, the prevailing state of global affairs affected the sense of locality: "You don't have to talk about Vietnam. You don't have to talk about South America. You can talk about Nevada. That's much closer to home. That's right here."

In this regard *The Shoshoneans* "is not necessarily a pro-Indian text," as Ortiz comments, but could be considered instead a study and legitimization of dissenting Native American communities within the broader frame of the radical 60s. In fact, a defining tension permeates the entire essay in the tangible opposition between the notions of community and nation—which also became the most notable source for what Dorn would retrospectively term his "fashionable concern for the social and cultural appurtenances of Native American life." According to Dorn, Native Americans were indifferent to possessing a United States citizenship, and they held no interest even in the sense of belonging to a country. This position made them part of the Fourth World, Dorn's category for tribal societies dispossessed by and excluded from prevailing Cold War classifications of nation-states. To assert his own sympathetic sense of membership to the Fourth World, Dorn not only disowned his citizenship (at least discursively) but also equated his own condition as a poet with that of the Native American: "I have to be there with the Indians. I don't have a country any more than they do. I'm like part of the Fourth World too. I, of necessity I have to be part of the Fourth World to retain any possible honor for myself." Perhaps the most prominent conclusion *The Shoshoneans* allows the reader to draw is the incommensurability of Dorn's own aspirational nationality: his

voyage to the Fourth World would deny him any sense of honor by exhibiting the transgressive nature of his presence there and the consequent negation of any sense of belonging.

When first published, *The Shoshoneans* offered concise and relevant insights into Dorn's poetic ambitions. Nonetheless, these insights have had to wait for the retrospective and analytic framing of the current republication in order to come fully to view. In this expanded edition, editor Matthew Hofer includes several appendices to further contextualize and specify the interests and concerns that Dorn held throughout the period, along with the implications and consequences of his journey into the Great Basin. As part of the generation of poets that emerged after World War II in the United States, Edward Dorn was immersed, as was his mentor Charles Olson, in the search for an essential and primal ground for his poetry; for Dorn this quest took the paradoxical form of wandering. Introducing the book's ample and illuminating cache of supplementary historical and archival materials, Hofer writes that "Ed Dorn's serious engagement with Native Americans and the western United States became a quest to discover something about place, time, and American identity that entailed, at first, a need to get lost." The echoes of his findings among the Native American tribes of the Great Basin can be heard in his subsequent poetry, such as his most renowned work, the *Gunslinger* epic, or his collection from 1974, *Recollections of Gran Apachería*. In *Recollections*, for instance, "The Whole European Distinction" stresses the resistance of Native American tribes to white invaders since the seventeenth century as an event that "can only be attributed to / the superiority of Native / over Alien Thinking."

The Shoshoneans opens with an event in Duck Valley that Dorn acknowledges as the climax of the entire trip. At this particular moment he and Lucas meet Willie Dorsey, a 102-year old Shoshoni who Dorn suspects of being "probably the oldest living being in Idaho or Nevada." The encounter is so central to Dorn's trip because it illustrates the deeper relationship that he develops with the individuals he attempts to approach. Dorn is sincerely stricken by the drastic conditions of impoverishment in which Willie Dorsey and his wife live—conditions recorded in all their severity and devastation in Lucas's stark black-and-white photographs. But as he contemplates the couple, Dorn finds himself supplementing this sympathetic reaction by indulging in the paroxysm of his awe:

Thus wrapped in the service of their ritual antiquity, they formed an effective edge of the real, an area of existence both life and death, neither morbid nor quite quick. A substantial prayer of flesh, plasma, spirit, all one fluid. And so, if this all sounds religion, I hope it does in no orthodox sense, more *religare*—to tie back: the nearly absolute briefness of ceremony, its power an intense spark, renewable as each time it constitutes the entirety of creation, the *Every Thing*.

The alternation between metaphysical and mundane remarks is a basic iterative feature of *The Shoshoneans*. It exemplifies Dorn's almost excessive awareness of his position at the moment he encounters the Native Americans—an awareness that constantly evokes in him a feeling of intrusiveness. Perhaps sensing an incompatibility between his political allegiances and the ethnographic purpose of his journey—a feeling intensified by the anthropological overtone that the photographic material brings—Dorn is always mindful of the historical implications of his presence as an outsider. Reflecting on his encounter with Willie Dorsey, Dorn writes, “I was struck right off and singularly by his beauty, the sense of power of his presence I later remembered I felt immediately, but I also saw myself as a curious paleface.”

No doubt with a touch of ironic helplessness, Dorn emphasizes in these encounters a dichotomy between his sense of powerlessness before a tribal culture awe-inspiring in its otherness and his very real (if tacit) power as a white poet-ethnographer. These gestures are crucial to Dorn's account: they make his activities resonate with what he regards as the imperial relationship between the US and Native peoples, which is defined by the violent imposition of the nation over the community. When outlining the expanse of the Great Basin region, Dorn tellingly underlines the established relations of power by instructing the reader in the spatial appropriations inherent to cartography:

Lay your right hand palm down, fingers spread, on a map of the West scaled approximately one inch to fifty miles, your little finger under Salt Lake City directly under the wall of the Wasatch, the end of your thumb on Reno by Lake Tahoe in the Sierra Nevadas, the tip of your great finger just under the mountains of Idaho, your index finger touching the southeast corner of Oregon, the heel of your hand above Las Vegas, and you have covered the Basin-Plateau area.

Dorn frames the notion of an object of study by symbolically placing its entire domain under the grasp of his hand, correlating this action with the inevitable enactment of control proper to the nation-state. “They don't think of this as a country. After all that's our word: America.” During a talk given at Berkeley following the trip, and published in this expanded edition, Dorn would contend: “You say, ‘Well, you're American too. You're the first Americans.’ Nix. They're not the first Americans. They never were Americans. That's your word. You applied the word ‘American’ to them.”

In *The Shoshoneans*, the antagonism between indigenous tribes and the imperial nation-state is encapsulated in the historical proliferation and censorship of Native American rituals and dances. For Dorn, the 1890 massacre at Wounded Knee registered both an atrocious instance of “national lust” and “another installment in the spiritual death of America.” The spiritual

consequence of the massacre was the permanent erasure of the Ghost Dance, “a preparatory celebration for the coming of the Messiah.” Ultimately, a deep reverence for the spiritual practices of other people underlies Dorn’s anti-imperial stance: he promotes and cultivates devotion to a religious diversity that, despite its continual decay, he still regards as quintessential to America.

The Shoshoneans is where Dorn fully articulated his personal opposition to a particular national project of standardization, a position he had already worked out in his correspondence with LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka. Dorn rejected the idea “that any people are told to destroy, or get rid of, what is most essentially themselves before admittance into the homogeny. Since there is no spiritual life worth entering,” he argued, once America has destructively consolidated its national empire, “they are asked, as initiation, to subscribe to the cheap and dishonorable mentalism of the ‘American Dream.’” *The Shoshoneans*, then, should be read as an essay on America coming from two distinct perspectives. It is a document that both captures a particular moment in the developing concerns of a poet who was deeply committed to the notion of a heterogeneous America and reflects, in turn, his role in a project that defined the 60s as a whole: radically reimagining the nation’s democratic ideals by exposing their underlying corruption.

Gerónimo Sarmiento Cruz

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Lew Welch, *Ring of Bone: Collected Poems*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2012. 262pp. \$17.95

Lew Welch’s *Ring of Bone* was first published by Donald Allen’s Grey Fox Press in 1973, two years after Welch disappeared from Gary Snyder’s Nevada County cabin. Welch himself prepared the manuscript, arranging in roughly chronological order all the poems written between 1950 and 1971 he saw fit to publish. Supplemented by the uncollected poems Allen gathered after Welch’s disappearance (presumed to be a suicide) and included alongside the poet’s own selection, *Ring of Bone* is, as the subtitle to the new City Lights edition indicates, Welch’s *Collected Poems*. In his preface, Welch calls it “a spiritual autobiography,” and the book “tells a story”: the poet leaves soul-killing Chicago, where he worked for several years writing ad copy for Montgomery Ward, heads “On Out” west to his native California, retreats into the mountains of his “Hermit Poems,” and then finds “The Way Back” to friends and lovers in San Francisco. In this personal mythology, inflected by the Buddhist practice Welch shared with college friends Snyder and Philip Whalen, the poles are “The Mountain” and “The City,” self and “the din,” solitude and sociality.