

## Powys, Indian culture and worship

This is the surface of the earth upon which I, an anonymous individual, am walking in time surrounded by space.<sup>1</sup>

This image of himself, in its detachment and stark simplicity, is very similar to what we know of the philosophy of the first Americans, and this he may have subconsciously imbibed during his four years in upper New York State. America has, through its interminable horizons and scorching suns elevated John Cowper to a cosmic awareness, where he has gained enough strength and distance to think in terms of elements, stars, planets.

And yet, in a sense that is really abysmal, you drink up, as you cross those titanic expanses, the sense of a positively dizzy freedom, freedom not only from political human traditions and social human traditions, *but from the human point of view itself!* Yes, this is the gist of the matter; this is the crux; this is the rub. I can never, *never* repay the debt I owe America in the inmost penetralia of my soul. For the enormous mass of the soil of America has itself poured into me a formidable kind of super-magic—not “black” nor “white”, but beyond them both! It is as though the excess of magnetism, exuding from a continued contact with such an enormous segment of planetary matter as this huge continent supplies, turns a person into a sort of cosmogonic medicine-man.<sup>2</sup>

### JCP's last circuit

The diaries he kept from 1929 to the end are important records of his life, and the 1930 Diary is particularly interesting for it clearly shows his excitement at the imminent changes about to happen. That year saw the very last of his circuits, a long one lasting five weeks. Frederick Davies in his vibrant Introduction to the Diary<sup>3</sup> asks us to consider

... that he criss-crossed backwards and forwards through eight States: Illinois, Iowa, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Missouri, Georgia, Texas and Virginia; that he made eighteen train journeys most of which were several hundred miles in length; that twelve of them were made at night; that he crossed and re-crossed the Mississippi six times; and that he gave over thirty lectures.

This circuit took place between early January and mid-February. Considering his age and the bad condition of his health, it is an amazing feat indeed. But that tour was to be the last: he had decided that the time had come for retirement from his nomadic life.

### 13th April 1930: Installation

At the age of 58 he had decided, as he writes, “to make the grand plunge, ‘burn my ships’, as we say and try to earn my living by my pen.”<sup>4</sup> This he was going to do, once in the little house he had bought at Phudd Bottom, up-state New York<sup>5</sup>. For him, if not for his companion Phyllis, it was the beginning of Paradise. The friendly farmers, their neighbours, would come to help them when needed, but what was of prime importance was his cherished

<sup>1</sup> John Cowper Powys, *Elusive America*, ed. Paul Roberts, Cecil Woolf, London, 1994, p.217.

<sup>2</sup> JCP., *Ibid.*, p.221.

<sup>3</sup> *The Diary of John Cowper Powys*, 1930, ed. Frederick Davies, Greymitre Books, 1987.

<sup>4</sup> JCP., *Autobiography*, Colgate Press, NY, 1968, p.607.

<sup>5</sup> See Map of Last Tour at <http://www.powys-lannion.net/Powys/America/Last.htm>.

isolation, what he calls “his semi-anchorite life”, long walks on the wooded hill just behind their house, giving full swing to his inmost impulses, and the gratifying possibility of going wherever he wished in the area. At last, he had “space wherein to expand.”<sup>6</sup>

When I finally gave up lecturing and settled down to the quietness of a country life I did so under the psychic aura of the ghosts of the proud Mohawk nation....<sup>7</sup>

For very soon, he began to have a special kind of relationship with the the tribe who had probably lived in that part of the country long ago. According to ethnologists, Indians are thought to have come from the north-east of Asia as part of a vast circumpolar culture which spread from Scandinavia and the north of Russia to Siberia. That is why it is possible to find common traits, such as shamanism, the belief in spirits, and animal ceremonials. By 8000 BC they had migrated through Alaska and Canada and occupied the whole of north America. The Mohawks<sup>8</sup> were based in the northeaster woodlands of North America. They were part of a group of five native nations (the Mohawks, the Senecas, the Cayugas, the Onondagas and the Oneidas, united in the Iroquois League, after an agreement between them had been signed around 1400, which had put an end to tribal wars. The Tuscaroras joined the League 200 years later. Such Confederacy was one of the examples of representative democracy, later indirectly used as a model by the founding fathers of America. The agreement between the five tribes was concretised by The Tree of Peace, a tall white pine which represented the great binding law unifying the five Nations through the symbol of four white roots growing from the Tree of Peace extending towards North, South, East and West. The Mohawk lands stretched from the Mohawk valley in the north of New York state to the St Lawrence river along the Canadian border. The Mohawks called themselves *Kanyen'kehàka*, or People of the Place of Flint. Their other name, which seems poetical but in fact described an important function, was ‘Keepers of the Eastern Door’. Vachel Lindsay’s poem<sup>9</sup> gave the title Powys chose for the last chapter of *Autobiography*.

The very first day after their arrival in Phudd Bottom, JCP went at once on a walk up the hill behind the house and started “christening” as he says, “every stump and stone, every rock, swamp and rivulet in this virginal Arcadia<sup>10</sup>”, trees, unknown birds, grave-yards:

Alone I walked to the Five Naked<sup>11</sup> and then on and on to the top of the hill where there is a sort of stone circle where I prayed to the dead great chief and to his unknown gods and I found a single arbutus and two Hypaticas.

The following day, he was entranced and exhilarated to the point, as he admitted, of walking “too far” up the mountain “to worship the god of the hill.”

... [I] made my way towards one of the large flat stones of this region that lay at the bottom of a thickly-wooded eminence. At the top of this hill, which must have been about the height of Montacute Hill, was an avenue of large heaps of heavy stones, which I hoped were the grave-mounds of old Indian Chiefs, Mohawk chiefs, for the Mohawk were my favourite nation; and at certain seasons during these four years, at the two equinoxes and at other pivotal days, I used to climb to this wooded summit and walk up and down this “death-avenue”, as I liked to call it, kneeling in front of



Location of the house and hill at Phudd Bottom  
2009 aerial photograph courtesy  
Hawthorne Valley Farmscape Ecology Program

<sup>6</sup> JCP., *Autob.*, p.628.

<sup>7</sup> JCP., *Elusive America* ‘Farewell to America’ p.210.

<sup>8</sup> See [http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mohawk\\_nation](http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Mohawk_nation)

<sup>9</sup> Vachel Lindsay, ‘There’s a Mohawk in the sky’. See Annex 1.

<sup>10</sup> JCP., ‘An Englishman Up-State’ in *Elusive America*, p.203.

<sup>11</sup> Five trees in a circle with which JCP communed.

each pile of stones and invoking these dead Indians.<sup>12</sup>

From the beginning, we thus witness a new element introduced in his life, a cult for the invisible presence of the “impersonal generations” of that particular region, its first people, perhaps reincarnated in the many birds he heard around him, for towards the end of that momentful year, he noted:

Over the ridge are grey mists; warm, hazy, vaporous, lovely grey waves of tender spring-like mists. I took Black clear across the field and stood and listened to various symbolic sounds each of which was a separate sensation composed of old forgotten sensations of the impersonal generations. The voices of crows, in this sunshine, in this haze, in this warm mist, from 3 directions. The crowing of cocks, the barking of Rover—the baying of hounds, the harsh noise of American “blackbirds”.<sup>13</sup>

He had never shared D.H. Lawrence’s fascination for the Quetzalcoatl cult of New Mexico. His preference went to the nomadic Indians of the Easterly States, which he had learned to venerate in his childhood through *Hiawatha*, “an exciting and thrilling poem”, a theme to which he will come back in a 1929 essay<sup>14</sup> on Longfellow, extolling the particular perfection of that poem.

My Indians are the Red Indians of the East, not the Indians of New Mexico, or Old Mexico, or any other Mexico. It is an inconsistency in me, being the idol-worshipper that I am, but all the same when it comes to Indians I prefer heroes who worship, as my father taught me to do, a Great Spirit whose breath bloweth like the wind, to artistic tribes who worship Quetzacoatl and his feathery snake.<sup>15</sup>

From now on, among his many rites which he forces himself to follow, there will be on Powys’s part the habit of going up the hill, to worship heavy stones which he interpreted as grave mounds of Mohawk chiefs:

But every day I would go to this low-lying stone in the grass, this grey stone spotted with lichen, and crouching before it I would tap my head against it, uttering words “rather to be concealed than revealed”; but incidentally calling upon the souls of the dead Indians to cure Llewelyn of all his troubles, whether they were of mind or body.<sup>16</sup>

John Cowper lends an attentive ear to these long-departed Indians, and it is as though they are slowly taking a more active role in his everyday life.

I heard the Indian Tombs on top of Phudd telling me this layer or film of ice lay on them & begging me to climb up the Mount & salute them. This I was too lazy to do. I notice how if you are to be happy in this world you have forever to be hardening your heart. My heart also—that other stone—hath a film of slippery ice on it. I too O dead Indians am an ice-covered Stone.<sup>17</sup>

But at the same time, as he wrote in *Autobiography*, he candidly confessed: “I had trillions of



Ho Nee Yeath Taw No Row

a Mohawk member of the Wolf clan, from the village of Canajoharie, NY, some 130km NW of Phudd Bottom.

From a 1710 painting by John Verelst.

Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1977-35-3

<sup>12</sup> JCP., *Autob.*, p.635.

<sup>13</sup> JCP., *1930 Diary*, 19 December.

<sup>14</sup> JCP., ‘The Real Longfellow’, in *Elusive America*, pp.161-171.

<sup>15</sup> JCP., *Autob.*, p.548.

<sup>16</sup> JCP., *Autob.*, p.635.

<sup>17</sup> JCP., *1931 Diary*, Sunday 17 January.

trillions of 'spirits from the vasty deep' at my disposal, ready to obey my indignant 'white magic'<sup>18</sup> and there happens to be a sort of rivalry between them:

The Indians of Hill & the God of Phudd commanded me to come to the Phudd Stone & tap my head. But I refused. I too am a Magician! I said. So they set themselves to show their Power & I set myself to show my Power. (...) The spirits of the Indians were making a grand coup, a great rally against me however—& *all went Wrong*.<sup>19</sup>

Powys showed a rather extraordinary sensitivity to the ways of American Indians when living in Phudd Bottom.

I am far prouder than I used to be; but it is Indian pride. It is pride in myself as an anonymous human-skeleton, stalking up and down the face of the earth, adjusting its spirit to the necessities of life and death, and giving itself up to the most thrilling of all sensations, the sensation of sharing the little, evasive, casual waftures of mystic happiness, coming on the air in a doorway, on the sun-rays in an old barn, on the moon over a turnip-field, on the wind across a bed of nettles, and of sharing these *with the forgotten generations of the dead*.<sup>20</sup>

### **Some informal considerations about creeds common to JCP and to Indians**

Took Black *up Phudd* & I can tell you this was an effort! I have not been there for so long. I went the steep way, past the 5 Nakeds who I embraced & past where the T.T. slept when we first went there in September so long ago and I prayed to the dead Indians in the highest heap of stones and also in the first I came to and also in two heaps in the *Avenue of the Dead* up there. But as I went away three more ghosts of dead Indians—dark swaying slender bodies cried come to me—come to us! come to us! But I *would not*.<sup>21</sup> (...) I visited my old favourite dead tree—O I did enjoy it so. But I was nervously agitated by those Ghosts of Indians calling to me & I talked to the tree saying unto it "Self first—self first—self first—Dead Indians second!" but the tree answered me not a word. (December 3, 1931)

The fact is that there seems to exist troubling similarities between the nature of the rites Powys performs and those which were familiar to the Indians. We won't presume to push our point too far, for we are well aware that we are dealing here in generalities. Even today specialists of native American Indians admit that their knowledge of their philosophical or metaphysical concepts is uncertain. There is a great variety of view points and a certain amount of differences in religious rituals, all based on oral tradition, between the many tribes who inhabited North America. But we are tempted to follow Powys here: "it is most interesting to me to note the way in which this ancient 'Culture' ... can be, at any rate imaginatively, called up (...) out of the vasty deep<sup>22</sup>".

For many Indian tribes, there never was properly speaking a creation of the world, it had always existed. Men were created at the time of "the first beginning". The universe was divided into the sky, the earth and the subterranean world. They believed in a 'Great Spirit', the 'Master of the Cosmos', but that deity was rarely invoked. Many Indian tribes held a particular cult to *tam sogobia*, 'Our Earth Mother'. She received gifts during the Sun Dance, tobacco was spread on the ground on this occasion, and water was also spilled on the earth in her honour. The number "four" was important for them, and in most Indian tribes we find that there were four worlds, four colours, four seasons, four winds... In all of them, we find four fundamental elements: an identical conception of the world, the notion of cosmic harmony, the direct experiment of powers and visions and they share a common view as to the periodical cycle of life. In the Mohawk myths, Sky Woman, representing fertility and earth, is of divine origin and "fell" on our planet, emerging through a "hole" which is the navel of the world. Indians make no clear differentiation between gods and human beings, neither is there any between human beings and animals, sometimes seen as spirits. There are a great many spirits in Indian religion, as well as "powers". In many Indian tribes, feathers were used in their headdress or hair so as to incorporate the powers of birds, representatives of the 'Beings of above', but it was not so among the Mohawks. They saw their hair as a connection to the Creator, and therefore grew it long, except when they went to war. Then they would cut it, leaving only a narrow strip.

Amerindians sought an equilibrium between men, animals, trees, plants. Which was also

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<sup>18</sup> JCP., *Autob.*, p.630.

<sup>19</sup> JCP., *1931 Diary*, Wednesday 27 January.

<sup>20</sup> JCP., *Elusive America*, 'Farewell to America', p.219.

<sup>21</sup> JCP., *1931 Diary*, Jeffrey Kwintner, 1990, p.297.

<sup>22</sup> JCP., *Elusive America*, 'An Englishman Up-State', p.198.

the *leit-motiv* of Powys's philosophy, as expressed in all his essays.

The material of its [the ichthyosaurus-ego] earth-life—the fetishes, the sacraments, of its diurnal piety—are food and drink and sleep and wind and rain and dew and grass and sand and rocks and stones and the miracle of the vegetation.<sup>23</sup>

Trees were considered sacred and venerated. That is why if it was deemed necessary to cut a tree, there was a ceremony during which they asked the tree to forgive them and spread tobacco as an offering. A great Indian Chief declared:

Do you know that trees talk? Well, they do. They talk to each other, and they'll talk to you, if you will listen. Trouble is, white people don't listen. They never listened to the Indians, and so I don't suppose they'll listen to the other voices in nature. But I have learned a lot from trees, sometimes about the weather, sometimes about animals, sometimes about the Great Spirit.<sup>24</sup>

Which brings to mind a memorable passage in *A Glastonbury Romance*, concerning an old solitary ash tree under whose branches John and Mary have been making love. It hears John exclaiming (as many others had said before in the very same place, during a century) "How extraordinary that we should have met!", and JCP adds with due seriousness:

The language of trees is even more remote from human intelligence than the language of beasts or of birds. ...its vegetative comment thereon would only have sounded in human ears like the gibberish: *wuther-quotle-glug*.<sup>25</sup>

And he also mentions the healing power of trees,

Now there is a path along the edge of the small stream flowing near this house where there grows an enormous and very ancient willow. To this aged tree I have given the mystic name of the "Saviour-Tree", and here and now I recommend to all harassed and worried people who can find in their neighbourhood such a tree—and it needn't necessarily be a willow—to use it as I do this one. For the peculiarity of this tree is that you can transfer by a touch to its earth-bound trunk *all* your most neurotic troubles! These troubles of yours the tree accepts, and absorbs them into its own magnetic life; so that henceforth they lose their devilish powers of tormenting you.<sup>26</sup>

Four elements were fundamental to Indians: air, water, fire and stones. They were worshippers of sacred stones. Some tribes thought they were alive and could be talked to. For the Sioux for instance *Tunkan* was The Rock, the oldest supernatural entity. *Yuwipi* were little hard and round stones which also brought protection. Even now, meetings still take place during which the *yuwipi man* (a kind of shaman) has been asked to protect someone who is going away. He gives him a skin-made little bag, in which a round stone, *wasicun tunkan*, has been placed, wrapped in sagebrush leaves. The stone has been given the name of a deceased person by the *yuwipi man*, and is therefore a kind of support of the dead man's spirit, which will protect the man who carries the stone around his neck.

Some natural phenomena like trees, certain mountains, lakes or geysers, were seen as supernatural, as well as much (but not all) of the world around them. Some objects were also considered sacred and therefore taboo, such as the Sacred Pipe of the Arapahos. These objects were important because they helped men to affirm their character, to improve the quality of life and, even more, to evoke supernatural powers in order to improve the condition in nature and people.

American Indian tribes resorted to singing, and dancing, but above all to prayers in order to accelerate ecstatic states. There is a host of interacting 'spirits' and of 'powers', invoked during dreams and visions. The interpretation of dreams is a decisive factor before undertaking any action. The Quest for Vision, that is to say a direct contact with a supernatural power, is of prime importance for most Indians. The rituals were constantly manipulated and transformed, through personal ecstatic, or mystic, experiences.

Imagination was a preeminent factor in their links with 'the other reality'. There seems to have been some line of demarcation between ordinary life and the supernatural, but it is difficult to be more precise, for the whole of nature participated in their conception of the sacred, especially through meditation or an ecstatic state (or trance).

The many staffs in Powys's life, wands of the magician, were also charged with power. John Cowper would later mischievously remark:

... henceforth, beginning today I intend to record the colour of my Ties as well as the nature of my Sticks. This—according to the urge *not* of "Exhibitionism" or "Narcissism" for I am not either though I am a born mountebank, actor clown, charlatan, comedian,

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<sup>23</sup> JCP., *In Defence of Sensuality*, Gollancz, 1930, p.247.

<sup>24</sup> See [www.motherearthnews.com/Nature-Community/1970-09-01/Walking-Buffalo.aspx](http://www.motherearthnews.com/Nature-Community/1970-09-01/Walking-Buffalo.aspx)

<sup>25</sup> JCP., *A Glastonbury Romance*, Simon and Schuster, 1932, p.73.

<sup>26</sup> JCP., *Autob.*, p.650.

pierrot, & Petrushka! But out of pure *Animism* for my *sticks* are my *idols*; and my ties are my living sans-doll Rags.<sup>27</sup>

But, more seriously, he also wrote:

Sometimes I pretend to myself, that I, who have always aimed at being a 'magician' beyond every other aim in life, have really learnt a few occult secrets from the spirits of the Red Indians, this most original and formidable race among all the children of men.<sup>28</sup>

In all tribes there exist different types of *medicine men*, who use different methods or even a mixture of several: some can speak to sacred stones, others are able to predict the future or cure illness, due to their great knowledge of plants. A group called "dreamers" have supernatural powers, which are deemed dangerous because they can be used in a positive, but also in a negative way. (Powys often tells us that he was conscious of his own powers, and was particularly wary about not projecting evil ones.)

Another important group was made up of the *heyokas*, or sacred clowns, also called 'divine tricksters'.<sup>29</sup> They appeared as comic characters, sometimes even as charlatans, rogues and were supposed to make spectators laugh. But the sacred clown, represented by Iktomi the coyote, is above all a cultural hero. He is known under different names: the Coyote, the Crow, the Great Brother, the Great Master of the animals, the Great Shaman... and plays a predominant role in the Amerindian mythology. G. Wilson Knight had very shrewdly remarked on the similarity of the *heyoka* with JCP:

Powys is recalled by a character Coyote Old Man, in Indian mythology regarded as the Creator of the World, who is a mixture of wisdom and folly, matching Powys's favourite regard of himself as a clown or charlatan.<sup>30</sup>

This paradoxical character, mischievous and gifted with humour, carelessly dressed, manipulating old and used things, singing badly, does exactly the contrary of the custom among his tribe, in a seemingly incompetent manner. But in fact, by so doing, the *heyoka* shows that when altering the order of custom and using contrary concepts the same results are achieved as in a 'normal' attitude. By his apparently crazy acts he demonstrates that everything changes all the time, and that rituals are also submitted to the erasure of time.

Here again, Powys's beliefs concerning life are close to those of the Amerindians, as we can see in the following passage taken from *In Defence of Sensuality*, where he extolls what he calls "the ecstatic life-worship of Life":

This Sacramental Dance of the ichthyosaurus ego in all living things is not only a sex-dance: it is an eating-dance, a drinking-dance: it is a sleeping-dance, a walking-dance. It is the great solemn Dance of Life, that mocks the silly, sneering facetiousness of human humour. Clumsy it is, and awkward, and very grave. But it has its own grotesque earth-humour too, a humour that antedates the grimaces of the oldest clown in the world.<sup>31</sup>

For Indians everything, including in the metaphysical realm, is prey to changes brought by time and events. The great lesson given through the strange attitude of the sacred clown is therefore that all human beings are independent and different from each other, and, as a consequence, that they can rely on themselves only. But it also shows that they are an integral part of the universe.

All mortal creatures, men and women along with the lower animals, experience moods, under certain conditions, of exultant, flowing, luminous, thrilling happiness. Such happiness—what Wordsworth calls 'the pleasure which there is in Life itself'—is surely the most wonderful and desirable thing in the world! Put anything else, out of all mortal experience, in the scales against it, and it will out-weigh all. When such happiness flows through you, transforming, illuminating, inspiring your whole being, you feel at once that you are in touch with an 'absolute', with something absolute any way, if not with *the* absolute.<sup>32</sup>

Chief Seattle, Chief of the Suquamish and Allied Tribes, in the famous speech allegedly given in 1854, warned the White Man:

And when the last Red Man shall have perished, and the memory of my tribe shall have become a myth among the White Men, these shores will swarm with the invisible dead of my tribe, and when your children's children think themselves alone in the

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<sup>27</sup> In his 1941 Diary.

<sup>28</sup> JCP., *Autob.*, p.548.

<sup>29</sup> See Paul Radin, *The Trickster: a Study in American Indian Mythology*, NY, Philosophical Library, 1956. Also, Ake Hultkrantz, *The Religions of the American Indians*, Berkeley & Los Angeles, UCP, 1979.

<sup>30</sup> G. Wilson Knight, *Visions and Vices*, Cecil Woolf, 1990, pp.107-8.

<sup>31</sup> JCP., *In Defence of Sensuality*, pp.245-6.

<sup>32</sup> *The Aryan Path*, October 1933

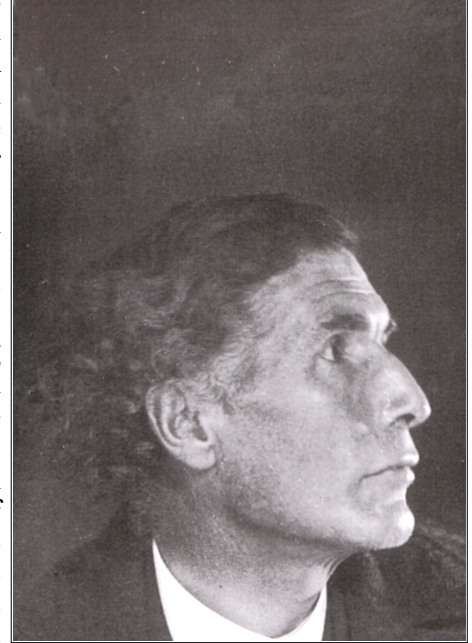


field, the store, the shop, upon the highway, or in the silence of the pathless woods, they will not be alone. In all the earth there is no place dedicated to solitude. At night when the streets of your cities and villages are silent and you think them deserted, they will throng with the returning hosts that once filled them and still love this beautiful land. The White Man will never be alone.<sup>33</sup>

### JCP seen by Helen Dreiser

To see him—his swift, smoothly rhythmic movements as he walked along, cane in hand, head up; (...) or in an old deserted Indian cemetery, against the sky or trees as an appropriate background for his rare profile—was something never to be forgotten. Each tree he passed on his daily walks through the woods—with his black cocker spaniel, “The Very Old”, as he named him—was a special symbolic landmark to Jack. One group of trees was his beloved Tintern Abbey, another Stonehenge, still another Glastonbury.

We often saw him sitting at rest, his hands and chin on his heavy crooked walking stick. His little home, “Phudd’s Bottom” as he liked to call the bottom of the hill where it was situated near Hillsdale, New York, and in which he lived for several years before leaving the United States for good to return to his birthplace in North Wales, was in the center of three graveyards—one Lutheran, one Baptist, and one supposedly Indian. The Indian graveyard is situated on the flat at the top of a hill where rows and rows of crude heaps of large stones are piled to high peaks. The front row, as Jack imagined it, was made up of the graves of the big chieftains, while the others were scattered here and there over the plateau. And as he contemplated the existence of the departed chieftains, he would suddenly burst into poetry which, as he stood with arms extended in exaltation, he seemed to hurl into space.<sup>34</sup>



WHOEVER YOU ARE!

*Whoever you are! claim your own at any hazard!*

*These shows of the East and West are tame compared to you;*

*These immense meadows—these interminable rivers—you are immense and interminable as they;*

*These furies, elements, storms, motions of Nature, throes of apparent dissolution—you are he or she who is master or mistress over them,*

*Master or mistress in your own right over Nature, elements, pain, passion, dissolution.*

Walt Whitman

<sup>33</sup> See [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief\\_Seattle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Seattle)

<sup>34</sup> Helen Dreiser, *My Life with Dreiser*, The World Publishing Company, 1951, p.55-6.

### THE MOHAWK IN THE SKY

*(Being a Parable of the Sudden Appearance of the United States Ideas in World Affairs.)*

Beware,  
Oh British Empire.  
There's a Mohawk in the sky!  
Beware,  
Plotters of Servia.  
There's a Mohawk in the sky!  
Beware,  
Oh Russian Red-Fire,  
There's a Mohawk in the sky!  
Beware,  
Sages of India,  
There will be war on high:  
There's a Mohawk in the sky!

And beware,  
Each Irish gnome,  
There's a Mohawk in the sky!  
Beware,  
Ghosts on the Rhine,  
There's a Mohawk in the sky!  
Beware,  
Ghosts of Rome,  
There's a Mohawk in the sky!  
A war of dreams on high!

Oh ghosts of dusty Egypt,  
And dusty Palestine,  
Awake your priests and prophets,  
Fill them with battle wine;  
Send them to war on high.  
Beware,  
Beware!  
See there  
In the roaring air,  
There's a Mohawk in the sky!



Tee Yee Neen Ho Ga Row  
Emperor of the Six Nations, (ca. 1680–1755)  
From a 1710 painting by John Verelst.  
Library and Archives Canada, Acc. No. 1977-35-4

'Every Soul is a Circus' (1929) in *The Poetry of Vachel Lindsay*, vol. 2, ed. Dennis Camp. Peoria, IL: Spoon River Poetry Press, 1985.