

THE TECHNIQUE OF INDIAN COMPOSITION

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QUOTATIONS in preceding articles have illustrated nearly the whole range and variety of Indian literary production. It remains to classify these systematically according to *form*. In this endeavor, we are, of course, hampered by the necessity of using translations which do not reproduce accurately the style of the original. Nevertheless, in literal translations and accurate paraphrases are clearly discernable many such literary devices as repetition, contrast and balance, figures of speech. As the reader has unquestionably noted for himself there are also unquestionable evidences of creative imagination and sensitiveness to beauty.

Following the plan of previous articles, it is perhaps best to mention first the style of the prose oratory before undertaking the more complicated problem of the various poetic devices. The harangues and speeches already quoted probably illustrate the range of oratorical technique if not of subject matter. In many tribes, such as the Cree, there were official orators. "Among the Aztecs the very word for chief *tlaotani* literally means 'orator'." In one Chilean tribe the chiefs were chosen for oratorical skill.¹ Since in all tribes the man whose voice was "loud in the council" held a place of honor, it is only natural that notable speakers were produced. There is power and literary merit even in the scattered fragments of Indian oratory which remain to us. The style of these pieces is, furthermore, quite different from the abbreviated terms which the red men at other times expressed their thoughts. The following assertion is amply borne out by the formal harangues of the Iroquois Councils and the addresses to Sir William Johnson, and also by the speeches of Logan and Pine Leaf.

¹Brinton, *Aboriginal American Authors*, Philadelphia, 1883. pp. 43-44.

"In most of the languages the oratorical was markedly different from the familiar or colloquial style. The former was given to antithesis, elaborate figures, unusual metaphors . . ." Students of the philology of the Indian languages also assert that the oratorical style was also distinguished by more sonorous and lengthened expressions. Thus among the Choctaw the word *akakano* was used in speeches for *ak*, *okakocha* for *ok*, etc.² The devices of antithesis and metaphor mentioned above are also strikingly evident in the poetry and will therefore be discussed later.

Among the religious ceremonials, chants, and formulas, and indeed, all Indian compositions, perhaps the most noticeable technical device is excessive repetition. The Indians evidently were determined that their deities should not fail to heed their requests through failure to hear them. They even outdid the prophets of Baal, by crying unto their god (or gods) not only all day, but for many days and nights together—in most cases, no doubt, with the same negative results.³ In quoting previous selections I have tried to avoid the tediousness by making numerous excisions. The real flavor of an Indian prayer is seen in the following:

"In beauty (happiness) may I dwell.
 In beauty may I walk.
 In beauty may my male kindred dwell.
 In beauty may my female kindred dwell.
 In beauty may it rain on my young men.
 In beauty may it rain on my young women.
 In beauty may it rain on my chiefs.
 In beauty may it rain on us.
 In beauty may our corn grow.
 In the trail of pollen may it rain.
 In beauty before us, may it rain.
 In beauty behind us, may it rain.
 In beauty below us, may it rain.
 In beauty above us, may it rain.
 In beauty all around us, may it rain.
 In beauty may I walk.

²*Ibid.*, p. 44, with quotation of Rev. Cyrus Bejington, *Grammar of the Choctaw Language*, Philadelphia, 1870, p. 20.

³See *Bible*, I *Kings*, 20-40. The ceremonial practice of scarification mentioned in the biblical account was closely analogous to the same thing among American aborigines.

Goods, may I acquire.
 Jewels, may I acquire.
 Horses, may I acquire.
 Sheep, may I acquire.
 Beeves, may I acquire.
 In old age,
 The beautiful trail,
 May I walk."⁴

Unquestionably one of the most cogent reasons for this excessive repetition was that of practical effectiveness. The Indian wished to be sure that nothing was omitted from his prayer, and that in the course of a given ceremonial he had not forgotten any spirit or power or charm. Any slight omission might bring down on his luckless head the wrath of the incensed deity.⁵ Therefore are the chants so monotonously similar and so numerous.

It also seems to be true that repetition satisfies some sort of an emotional craving among any primitive people. Even in so highly developed a literary work as *Beowulf* (as compared to the chants of the primitive Americans) the excessive repetition is a most noticeable feature. It is also a characteristic of children in their games to repeat rigamaroles either with meaning or without, over and over again, often to the annoyance of adults who do not sympathize with the cravings of primitive natures.

This quality of repetition is not alone characteristic of religious or magical compositions. It is found in practically every type of Indian utterance. Where the song was too short to permit repetition within it, the singer, or singers, gave it again and again until their breath failed. One can imagine the circle of warriors passing the peace pipe and solemnly chanting by the hour this song of peace: "My pipstem."⁶

This sort of repetition, *i. e.* without variation, also occurs within longer songs or chants, usually at intervals as a sort of refrain, or more often as a device to secure emphasis. The recurring "*ecka!*" in the Omaha chants to the wolf and crow is an illustration of this, and the phrase from the Osage Rites, "Verily, at that time and place,

⁴Mathews, "The Night Chant", pp. 111-112.

⁵A faint survival of the same idea is seen in the European legend about the bad fairy godmother or spirit who was not invited to the christening, and who thereafter wreaked vengeance on the child.

⁶Densmore, "Chippewa Music", II, p. 128.

it has been said, in this house", is another instance of the same thing. This refrain means that the ritual which follows is authentic, having been formulated by true medicine men of the Osage tribe in their lodges.

A more common kind of repetition, perhaps, includes variation. The Indian loved to surround his ideas with many words on all sides so that they could not possibly escape. Having adopted a certain form of expression, he repeated it, inserting each time a variant of the original idea. Each variant idea thus received the full benefit of the emphasis from the recurring form. This is true of the prayer (quoted above) asking for happiness and prosperity for the singer and all those connected with him. In a larger sense it is also true of the Osage chant of the Puma, the Red Boulder, the Black Bear, the Morning Star, *et al.* In this latter case the words of each verse are slightly altered, but the general terms used in speaking of each of these deities are approximately the same.

Behold the great red boulder that sitteth upon the earth.

Verily, I am a person who draws to himself the power of the
great red boulder.

Behold the great red boulder that sitteth upon the earth.

Even the great gods themselves

Stumble over me as I sit immovable as the great red boulder."

.

" . . Behold the Black Bear, that is without blemish, that lieth
upon the earth.

Verily, I am a person who has made of the Black Bear his body.

.

Behold the great black boulder that sitteth upon the earth.

Verily, I am a person that sitteth close to the great black boulder."⁷

Repetition with and without variation is also found in the shorter songs.

SONG OF APPEAL TO THE BEAR

"father
send a voice
father
send a voice
a hard task
I am having

⁷La Flesche, "Osage Rites". p. 108.

father
 send a voice
 a hard task
 I am having."⁸

"I SING FOR THE ANIMALS"

"out of the earth
 I sing for them
 a Horse nation
 I sing for them
 out of the earth
 I sing for them
 the animals
 I sing for them."⁹

By means of both these kinds of repetition is produced an effect of balance, undoubtedly a consciously achieved one. All the selections quoted in the present chapter are quite symmetrical. Through the introduction of variations an equally deliberate contrast is obtained.

"Yellow butterflies
 Over the blossoming virgin corn,
 With the pollen-painted faces
 Chase one another in brilliant throng.

Blue butterflies,
 Over the blossoming virgin beans,
 With pollen-painted faces
 Chase one another in brilliant streams.

Over the blossoming corn
 Over the virgin corn
 Wild bees hum:

Over the blossoming beans,
 Over the virgin beans
 Wild bees hum.

Over your field of growing corn
 All day shall hang the thunder cloud;
 Over your field of growing corn
 All day shall come the rushing rain."¹⁰

⁸Densmore. "Teton Sioux Music", p. 263.

⁹Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music", p. 215.

¹⁰Natalie Curtis, *The Indians' Book*, pp. 484-5.

In this selection the corn field with fluttering swarms of butterflies and bees hovering over it in the bright sunshine is contrasted with the same during a rain storm. There is also contrast between the yellow and the blue butterflies, and between the thundercloud and the rain. In this song, too, is evident an idea of progression (*i. e.* from fair weather to rain, from the clouds that precede the storm to the storm itself). Perhaps a more notable example of these same rhetorical tricks is seen in the chant to the wolf and crow, in which the plain with its herd of grazing buffalo is contrasted with the same after the hunt is over and the animals are lying dead, while the flocks of crows settle down to their feast.

In the case of the longer rituals, at least, the nature of the appeal had a great deal to do with the form of the ceremony. Most of them were recited or chanted as an accompaniment to various symbolic acts which are described or hinted at in the text. In the Osage Rite of the Chiefs, the members of all the gentes recited simultaneously those parts of the ritual which explain the meaning of the life symbols (as various plants and animals) of their own gens. While this was going on the candidate who was being initiated made an offering of these life symbols to the various gentes. Thus in a sense the whole ceremony is a sort of dramatic cosmographical recital in which are described the origin and significance of nearly everything in the Indian's universe, and also of tribal history and institutions.

The Hako was a somewhat similar ceremony, but with a more definite idea of supplicating the powers of nature for various benefits, especially in behalf of the children. It consisted largely of a number of songs (rather than recitations) which accompanied religious acts. In one of these the whole party marched over the prairie for a considerable number of miles on a symbolic journey to the abode of Mother Corn (actually to another village). On the way they sang various songs in honor of the buffalo, of the corn, and of various features of the landscape such as the mountains and mesa tops. Naturally these songs were short, since a long continuous ritual would be hard to keep going under such conditions.

“When to prepare us a pathway Mother Corn sped
Far in her search for the Son, passing this place,
Lo! She beheld buffalo in herds here.

¹¹See La Flesche, Introduction to “Osage Rites”, p. 47 ff.

Now, as we walk in the pathway Mother Corn made,
 Looking on all that she saw, passing this place,
 Lo! We behold buffalo and many trails here.

. . . .
 Mountains loom upon the path we take;
 Yonder peak now rises sharp and clear;
 Behold! It stands with its head uplifted,
 Thither we go, since our way lies there.

. . . .
 Here is the place where I came, seeking to find the Son;
 Here have I led you again, here is our journey's end.
 Thanks we give unto Mother Corn!
 Here is the place where she came, seeking to find the Son;
 Here she has led us again, here is our journey's end."¹²

Space does not permit the quotation of more songs from the "Hako", many of which are tedious, but enough has been given to indicate the nature of the ceremony. A part of it, at least, is dramatic in that the people act out a legend of the mythical Mother Corn and her search for her "Son", and sing descriptive songs at various junctures in the proceedings.

The Navaho Night Chant, a ceremony for healing a sick person, is even more elaborate in some of its aspects. It includes an infinite number of maskings and many dances, together with songs and prayers by the medicine men and other participants. The whole ceremony lasts for nine days, and costs the patient two or three hundred dollars.¹³ A typical episode and song in this ceremony are the following described by Mathews:

SHAKING THE MASKS

"At midnight or wonderfully near that hour for a people who use no time-pieces, the shaman starts the waking song, the refrain of which is *hyidezna* or *hidezna*, which means, he moves, he stirs, and proceeds to 'waken' or shake the masks [which represent the various gods]. As he begins each stanza, putting one hand under and the other over the selected mask, he lifts it two or three inches from the ground, holding it horizontally; when he comes to the refrain he lays the mask down. . . . When the masks are all shaken he begins a song somewhat different from the first in words, but similar in

¹²Fletcher. "The Hako", pp. 302-307.

¹³Mathews, Introduction to "Night Chant", p. 4.

tune, and proceeds to shake all the other properties" [sacred objects and symbolic costumes needed by the dancers in the rituals to follow]:

WAKING SONG

"He stirs, he stirs, he stirs, he stirs.
 Among the lands of dawning, he stirs, he stirs;
 The pollen of the dawning, he stirs, he stirs;
 Now in old age wandering he stirs, he stirs;
 Now on the trail of beauty, he stirs, he stirs,
 He stirs, he stirs, he stirs, he stirs."

Many stanzas succeed this, naming various gods, and the special "property" [*i. e.* costume or adornment] of each one. There follows a monologue prayer by the Shaman, and songs which continue the rest of the night.¹⁴

These rituals, and in fact all Indian compositions are highly symbolic. The general key to these symbols has already been given in the first of these articles. At the present juncture it will be pertinent to call attention to but one symbolic feature in these compositions: that of sex. It is evident that this concept at least is common to all peoples.

"Of two things which are nearly alike, or otherwise comparable, it is common among the Navahoes [and all other tribes as well] to speak of or to symbolize the one which is the coarser, rougher, stronger, or more violent as the male, and that which is the finer, weaker, or more gentle as the female. Thus: a shower accompanied by thunder and lightning is called *niltsabaka* or he-rain, while a shower without electric displays is called *niltسابااد*, or she-rain; the turbulent San Juan River is called *Tobaka*, or Male Water, while the more placid Rio Grande is known as *Tobaad*, or Female Water.¹⁵ All the more important selections which have been cited are examples of symbolism, which, when not self evident, have been explained. To attempt further classification would merely be to duplicate which has been done.

There is, however, a different, and somewhat narrower type of symbolism which is found in the short songs, especially those of the northern tribes. Each of these songs represents an incident, a dream, a special situation, or a mood which the singer wished to

¹⁴Mathews, "The Night Chant". pp. 110-112.

¹⁵Mathews, "The Night Chant". p. 6.

recall. Since action was the key note of the Indian's life, nearly all the songs commemorate action. Much of the effect of the song and its meaning was expressed in the actual singing and the dancing which often accompanied it. The Indian was more prone to express his passions and ideas in deeds and motions than in words. For these reasons Indian songs are hard to translate, and even harder to understand when translated. The English is almost never an adequate rendering of the original. "In some of the songs, however, the meaning is fully expressed in words. Yet even such a song cannot be wholly understood without a knowledge of the event which called it into being, the legend with which it is connected, or the ceremony of which it is a part."¹⁶ "These principles must be borne in mind when we apply the canons of criticism to the poetry of the ruder races. It is not composed to be read, or even recited, but to be sung; its aim is often not to analyze thought or to convey information, but to excite emotion."¹⁷ It is in the effort to create the proper background necessary to understand these primitive attempts at self-expression that the present article is written. Another distinguishing feature between primitive and civilized songs is that the former are sung only for the appreciation of the singers. "The Indian makes no concession to his audience . . . ; whether the fact be outward or inward, object or emotion, it is presented with a realism that is as unaffected as it is simple and powerful. . . . There is grim sufficiency in this arrow song—

'Scarlet is its head.'"¹⁸

The following song further exemplifies the difficulties of the translator:

"Warm door in winter."

This is cryptic, unless one knows that the song was composed by a hunter to recall the time when he nearly perished in a snow storm. Just in time he discovered the brightly lit door of a friendly tribesman's tipi.¹⁹ There is a laughable naivete about some of these crudely realistic deities. This one was meant, no doubt, to celebrate a rather ghastly affair.

¹⁶Natalie Curtis, *The Indians' Book*, pp. xxi ff.

¹⁷D. G. Brinton, *Aboriginal American Authors*, pp. 46-7.

¹⁸H. B. Alexander. "The Poetry of the American Indian", *The Nation*, December 13, 1919, Vol. CIX, No. 2841, p. 758.

¹⁹Burton, *Primitive American Music*, pp. 161 ff.

I wonder
 If she is humiliated
 The Sioux woman
 That I cut off her head."²⁰

Other songs, as we have seen, are somewhat more obvious in their symbolism, and exemplify much better poetry. The southwestern tribes, especially, composed the most artistic verses. Natalie Curtis (Mrs. Paul Burlin) has waxed enthusiastic on the subject. Her remarks are worth quoting to indicate some of the aesthetic rewards in this study.

"The Indians' primal conception of life is a poetic figure. The son of our vast continent calls himself the child of the Earth-Mother with her gift of corn, and of the Sun-Father, fertilizer of the earth. The impersonal, life-giving force behind and beyond the parent sun and earth is, in the language of the prairies, the 'Great Mystery'. In Pueblo Indian song, a distant storm with sheet lightning seen afar off on the desert's horizon takes form as Black Cloud Youths, who, at the earth's edge, are practicing with their lightning arrows.

In the ceremonial rain songs, the birds, like the Indians, call the rain with song, and then the swallow, the 'tiding bearer', flies to tell the corn the 'glad news' of coming rain. There are many kinds of rain in Southwestern poetry: the male-rain, strong and sometimes violent; the female rain, soft and gentle; the up-starting rain and the down-pouring rain. The 'walking rain' moving in symbolic gesture and in song through many a ceremonial dance, is a distinct desert image. Where but in that clear air may one see, passing over the wide earth, a shaft of rain falling from a cloud, and literally 'walking' across the desert? The rainbow, pictured in sand-paintings, on head-dress, and in silver necklaces, is often likened to a youth, brilliantly decked and painted, face and body, even as the Indians painted themselves for the ceremonial dance. To those who know the song literature of the desert tribes, New Mexico and Arizona become an enchanted land as filled with mythical personages as was Greece to the ancients."²¹

In these poetic figures there is indisputable evidence of extreme sensitiveness to beauty, and of creative imagination. The following

²⁰Densmore, "Chippewa Music", II. p. 120.

²¹Natalie Curtis (Mrs. Paul Burlin), *The Indians' Book*, New York, 1907, p. 467.

song of a blue-bird, short as it is, contains one very happy metaphor (which is, by the way, carried over literally from the Indian words), and shows a most joyous appreciation of the bird-songs at dawn. At the present time it is a question whether any other American poets could get as much poetry out of the same subject.

"Just at daylight *Sialia* calls.
The blue bird has a voice,
He has a voice, his voice melodious,
His voice melodious that flows in gladness
Sialia calls, *Sialia* calls."²²

The magpie is made the subject of a figure even more striking: one almost worthy of Shakespeare.

"The Magpie! The Magpie! Here underneath
In the white of his wings are the footsteps of morning.
It dawns! It dawns!"²³

A Zuñi corn grinding song contains the concept mentioned by Miss Curtis of the swallow as harbinger of the rain:

"Yonder, yonder see the fair rainbow,
See the rainbow brightly decked and painted!
Now the swallow bringeth glad news to your corn
Singing, 'Hitherward, hitherward, hitherward, rain,
'Hither come!'

Singing, 'Hitherward, hitherward, hitherward, white cloud,
'Hither come!'

Now hear the corn-plants murmur,
'We are growing everywhere!
Hi, yai! The world, how fair!"²⁴

The Navaho story of the sun god shows a capacity for poetic thought and love of the beautiful rivaling that of the ancient Greeks.

"Johano-ai [the sun-father] starts every day from his hogan

²²Washington Mathews, *Navaho Legends*, Boston, New York, 1897, p. 28.

²³*Ibid.* The poets of the civilized Mexican tribes were also exceptionally distinguished. "They made use of a pure, brilliant, figurative style, and had developed a large variety of metrical forms."—D. G. Brinton. *Aboriginal American Authors*, p. 51 ff. The study of Mexican culture and poetry, however, must be reserved for a later volume.

²⁴Curtis, *The Indians' Book*, p. 431. As proof of the authenticity of this poetry I append the word for word translation of the corn grinding song just quoted. It is to be found in the *Indians' Book*, Appendix, p. 557.

"Rainbow painted, beautiful, your corn swallow talking swallow now hither rain coming now hither white clouds coming it said corn all growing here."

[lodge, or dwelling], in the east, and rides across the skies to his hogan in the west, carrying a shining golden disk, the sun. He has five horses—a horse of turquoise, a horse of white shell, a horse of pearl shell, a horse of red shell, and a horse of coal. When the skies are blue and the weather is fair, Johano-ai is riding his turquoise horse, or his horse of white shell or of pearl; but when the heavens are dark with storm, he has mounted the red horse, or the horse of coal.

Beneath the hoofs of the horses are spread precious hides of all kinds, and beautiful woven blankets, richly decorated, called 'naskan'. In olden times the Navajos used to wear such blankets, and men say they were first found in the home of the sun-god.

Johano-ai pastures his herds on flower-blossoms and gives them to drink of the mingled waters. These are holy waters, waters of all kinds, spring water, snow-water, hail-water, and water from the four quarters of the world. The Navajos use such waters in their rites. When the horse of the sun-god goes, he raises, not dust, but 'pitistchi', glittering grains of mineral such as are used in religious ceremonies; and when he rolls and shakes himself, it is shining pitistchi that flies from him. When he runs, the sacred pollen offered to the sun-god is all about him, like dust, so that he looks like a mist; for the Navajos sometimes say that the mist on the horizon is the pollen that has been offered to the gods.

The Navajo sings of the horses of Johano-ai in order that he, too, may have beautiful horses like those of the sun-god. Standing among his herds, he scatters holy pollen, and sings this song for the blessing and protection of his animals:"

SONG OF THE SUN-GOD'S HORSE

"How joyous his neigh!
 Lo, the turquoise horse of Johano-ai,
 How joyous his neigh,
 There on precious hides outspread standeth he;
 How joyous his neigh,
 There on tips of fair fresh flowers feedeth he;
 How joyous his neigh,
 There he spurneth dust of glittering grains;
 How joyous his neigh,
 There in the mist of sacred pollen hidden, all hidden he;
 How joyous his neigh,

There his offspring may grow and thrive for evermore;
 How joyous his neigh!"²⁵

This song appears the more positive evidence of creative imagination, when it is remembered that the horse was first introduced to the Indians in the 16th century; and that they fabricated the legend after that time. The god of war, or "flint youth", is the subject of another very vivid hymn, which the god himself was supposed to have sung in his war expeditions:

"Lo, the flint youth, he am I,
 The flint youth.

. . . .
 Clearest, purest flint the heart
 Living strong within me—heart of flint;
 Lo, the flint youth, he am I, z
 The flint youth.

Now the zig-zag lightnings four
 From me flash,

Striking and returning,
 From me flash

Lo, the flint youth, he am I,
 The flint youth.

There where'er the lightnings strike,
 Into the ground they hurl the foe—

Ancient folk with evil charms,
 One upon another dashed to earth;

Lo, the flint youth, he am I,
 The flint youth.

.²⁶

Although Indians of all tribes were, apparently, more prone to express relationships and associated ideas in metaphors than in other figurative expressions, yet they could use similies with very good effect. The two following songs indicate the range and scope of their poetic observations.

SONG OF THE BLUE-CORN DANCE

"Beautiful, lo, the summer clouds,
 Beautiful, lo, the summer clouds!
 Blossoming clouds in the sky,
 Like unto shimmering flowers,

²⁵Curtis, *The Indians' Book*, pp. 361-3.

²⁶*Ibid.* pp. 362-4.

Blossoming clouds in the sky,
 Onward, lo, they come,
 Hither, hither, bound!"²⁷

LULLABY

"*Puva* (sleep) *puva, puva,*
 In the trail the beetles
 On each other's backs are sleeping,
 So on mine, my baby, thou,
Puva, puva, puva."²⁸

One is also reminded of the realistic statement by the grim and murderous Sioux:

"The wolves have no fear as they travel over the earth.
 So I like them will go fearlessly, and will not feel strange in
 any land."²⁹

The question of associations of Indian ideas has already been discussed, and has been sufficiently exemplified by quotations cited in the present and preceding articles. In general one may say that the Indians did not associate *forms* so much as they did *qualities*. A man does not *look* like a wolf, but he may have the qualities of ferocity, cunning and courage which the wolf seems, at least, to possess. Therefore, the man says he is like a wolf, and prays to the spirit of the wolf as a deity who can heighten these attributes in the worshipper. A similar though more complicated case of association is reported by Dr. Fewkes in speaking of the Tusayan Indians:

"By simple observation the untutored mind recognizes that rain follows lightening, and what more natural than that it should be looked upon as the effect? He therefore worships lightning because of this power. The course of the lightning in the sky is zig-zag as that of the snake, both kill when they strike. The lightning comes from the sky, the abode of the sun and rain god, and the simple reasoning of the Tusayan Indian supposes some connection between the lightning, snake, and rain. The sustenance of the primitive agriculturist comes from the earth, and if the soil is non-productive, the sun and rain are of no avail. The Tusayan Indian thus recognizes the potency of the earth and symbolically deifies it as the mother." This earth-goddess is called "'Mother of germs,'" "'Old woman,'" "'spider woman,'" "'corn maid,'"

²⁷*Ibid*, p. 432.

²⁸*Ibid*, p. 480.

²⁹Fletcher, *The Omaha Tribe*. B. A. E. Vol. 27. Part I. pp. 417-419.

“‘growth goddess’”. This latter concept is associated with fire; “for in the Indian conception fire itself is a living being, and what is more natural than association of fire and growth?”³⁰ In this latter series of associations the idea of form enters somewhat (the zig-zag streak of lightning compared with the snake), but the resemblance is not at all exact. The Indian seemed to have a better eye for color similarities, but even here, he did not carry them too far. The resemblance of the colors turquoise, pearl, white, garnet, and jet, to the various shades of color in the sky is more general than exact. In this connection it might be added that the only colors which impressed him at all were the primary ones, red, yellow, blue, green, black, white,³¹ and flashes of light or things which reflected them.

“Corn-blossom maidens,
 Here in the fields,
 Patches of beans in flower,
 Fields all abloom,
 Water shining after rain,
 Blue clouds looming above.
 Now behold!
 Through bright clusters of flowers
 Yellow butterflies
 Are chasing at play,
 And through the blossoming beans
 Blue butterflies
 Are chasing at play.”³²

Before leaving the subject of figures of speech, attention is called to the other lesser devices of personification and exclamation, which occur in nearly every selection. Metonymy is also used, but only occasionally:

“Well
 I depend upon no one's heart [meaning courage] but my own.
 So
 thinking of this
 I look for horses.”³³

Frequently the Indian poet secured a charming effect without the

³⁰J. W. Fewkes, *The Tusayan Ritual*, pp. 691-2.

³¹I have not discovered reference in any Indian composition to the color brown mentioned by Mooney.

³²Curtis, *The Indians' Book*, p. 485.

³³Densmore, “Teton Sioux Music”, p. 413.

use of any poetic device except simple descriptive phrases.

“Hither thunder, rain-thunder here,
Hither the rain-thunder will come ;
Hither rain, moving-rain—
Onward now, over all the fields,
Moving-rain.

And the wet earth, 'mid the corn,
Everywhere, far and near,
It will shine—water-shine.”³⁴

“Daybreak
appears
when
a horse
neighs.”

This song of the daybreak is poetry in its lowest terms, surely. Yet to one who knows anything of life in the open it recalls long rows of tents (or tipis if you like) silent in the gray light of dawn ; the sound of stamping from the picket line where the horses are scarcely visible through the early morning mist ; a long whinny ; streaks of light in the east ; human figures emerging from their sleeping places to begin the arduous activities of the day.

Enough has been said to indicate that there was a great deal of conscious art in the speech, ritual, and song of the American Indian, and that standards of criticism are frequently evident. These were undoubtedly most definite, and most frequently applied in choosing orators, as the excellence of the Iroquois councils testifies. That they were used in composing tribal ceremonials is also certain. In such ceremonies of the Osage Rites, a definite group of men regarded as competent were assigned from generation to generation to add to the ritual. The societies within the tribe also had their official poets. And although the individual composed songs largely for his own delectation, evidence is not lacking that he, too, measured his work according to a standard, even though it was an ill-defined one. Miss Densmore remarks: “In the phonographic recording of about 6000 Indian songs and in contact with a large number of Indian singers the writer has found unmistakable evidence of musical criticism. Certain men are generally acknowledged to be ‘good singers’ and certain songs are said to be ‘good songs’.” This implies that the

³⁴Curtis, *“Indians’ Book*, p. 489.

³⁵Densmore, *“Teton Sioux Music”*, p. 300.

songs and singers satisfy some standard of evaluation. The Indian may not be able to formulate this standard, but its existence is evidence of an aesthetic impulse."³⁶ Unfavorable criticism, perhaps, was the inspiration of the unhappy Chippewa who dolefully chanted:

"I am unable to harmonize my voice
With the voices of my fellow Indians
Which I hear at a distance."³⁷

In concluding this section on the technique of Indian composition, it remains only to comment on the tonality of the songs in relation to their content. Accurate data are not available for all tribes; but Miss Densmore's statement on the Chippewa is probably typical.

"As we are accustomed to connect a minor key with the idea of sadness, it is interesting to inquire whether the same mode of expressing sadness obtains in Chippewa music. First it is observed that, apart from love songs, there are few songs of sorrow. The series of 340 songs contains 142 in minor tonality, of which only 20 (14 per cent) are songs of sadness, comprising practically all songs of this character. Among the 85 Mide [medicine society] songs there are only two of sadness; these are burial songs. Many Mide songs mention sickness, but always with an affirmation that it will be cured by supernatural means. Six of the 88 war songs contain the idea of distress. . . . It will be noted that two of these refer to the grief of the enemy, and in one a condition of distress is relieved by the use of medicine; the three which may be considered songs of unenlightened sadness are the songs of the departure of warriors . . . and the song of the warrior left to die on the battlefield. . . ."³⁸

³⁶Densmore, "Teton Sioux Music", pp .58-59

³⁷Densmore, "Chippewa Music", I, p. 114.

³⁸Densmore, "Chippewa Music", II, p. 17.