

PLAINS CREE

during childbirth
a cree woman knelt
in a circle of mid
wives one cut the
navel cord the
afterbirth wrapped
in hide hung in
the branches the
cord laced on a
skin bag worn a
round the baby's
skin he was
not washed but
dried with moss
and dry wood
and placed in a
hide bag stuffed
with moss given
a name if the
child got sick
someone came gave
him a new name

CREE RITES

at puberty the
girls stayed a
lone in a tipi
4 days with an
old woman all
menstruating
women went out
into the trees
the young girls
chopped wood
sewed beads on
a piece of hide
they ate little
cried a lot
scratched her
head with some
pointed stick
many had visions
on the 4th nite
the women went
to the shelter
prayed piled

up the wood
pushed it over
each woman
carried some
of the wood
home then they
ate and opened
surprise gifts

THRU BLUE DUST, NEW MEXICO

i

all day sorting
flowers mesquite
for its black
dye wild rhubarb
desert broom for
toothache datura
for dreams does
she hear the other
women laughing
remember that thin
man's tongue
sorting a pile of
snake weed brittle
bush creosote for
cementing clay
lily bulbs pears
lizards run across
her feet but she
doesn't look down
or at any silver
or water to not
see the tip of
her nose cut off
for being unfaithful

xx

tularosa basin
the wind never stops

the lake dries to
crystal marsh
white sand waves

southwest wind
of gypsum
drifts white dust
into the dunes

they eat plants
insects only

those things
that grow fast

plants with stems
40 ft long only
light animals
the white mice
make it

xxi

looking for water
they left the pueblo

 moved to frijoles canyon

 found a creek that
 flowed all year

 green beans
 on the canyon floor they

 honey combed the
 cliff
 the walls so soft

even a child could
dig with his fingers

 wove cotton the
 sun on their faces

 glazed this clay

until something with a
huge mouth

 moved into
 their houses

black mesa

pueblo indians fought
spanish guns
till they starved

caves with pools
of cool water

damp mossy slow

women waiting for their
baby's head
slick hair
the black

squatted or sat up
stones between their teeth

later damp blood
leaves the placenta
buried under
the floor

umbilical cord in
a safe place in
the house
to bring sun
to both of them

BRISTLE CONE PINES

"It has turned out that
longevity is a function
not of size and majesty
but of poverty and
struggle."

New York Times, 6/16/74

the oldest living
stunted and twisted
clinging to wind
blasted edges the
trees like drift
wood against the
blue bristle cone
forest too wild
even for hawks or
coyote the pines
claw timberline
soil so poor no
thing else grows
not even sagebrush
stones tilt like
thrown down graves
wood smooth as skin
the branches glow
whipped by 4000
years of ice 3
quarters dead
hanging on to life
by a narrow strip
of living bark
you can count back
to the year of
jesus adjusting
to dry spells to
cold growing a
ring of itself to
protect itself
like most survivors