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