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A Struggle between Warring Worlds

There is a point in one's life when an imperative decision needs to be made. There is a time for one to leave his comfortable shelter and venture out into a world of harsh realities. Just as a young adult leaves everything he has ever known for the first time and heads off to college, he approaches a new and unfamiliar world. The familiar world that one leaves behind begins to clash with the new one presented. All of the customs and familiar exchanges between one and his old environment now seem foreign and strangely reminiscent. However, this new culture brings new conflict. To which world does one belong? In Nila NorthSun's "Up & Out" and in Nora Naranjo-Morse's "Mud Woman's First Encounter with the World of Money and Business," two clashing worlds emerge, highlighting the varying approaches that NorthSun's speaker and Naranjo-Morse's Mud Woman take to find which world they belong to.

In "Up & Out" the tension between the two worlds of the now-familiar city life and the reservation life that she is nostalgic for affects the way the speaker navigates through each. This tension is caused by differing values between the two worlds. In the city, the trite society the speaker has succumbed to revolves around money and useless materialism. She explains that although "we made better money . . . it got sucked up by / the city by cable t.v. / by sparklettes water by / lunches in cute places / by drinking in quaint bars / instead of home like we did / on the reservation" (NorthSun lines 18-25). All of her hard-earned money gets sucked backed into the centrifuge of the city. Living the wasteful high life with "high food high medical/high entertainment" does not help the speaker's

original intent of starting a new and better life for herself (lines 16-17). Money is wasted in this viscous cycle in which “[people] made more money than / [they've] ever made before / but felt poorer” (lines 7-9). In the rush of the city-life, the speaker emphasizes the lack of importance in relationships between family and friends because it is intently focused on the material aspect of living. As money drives this society, the simplicity of the reservation life to the speaker becomes more enticing. On the reservation, she concedes that although “we only got one tv channel . . . we visited with relatives more” (lines 30-31). The intimacy between people is long missed. Even though “there was no place to eat on the res / 'cept a pool hall with chips & coke / [and] there was only one movie house in town / & nothing good ever showed,” the cost of living was lower and more of one's time was spent with others rather than on working to get a bit of money that ends up being taken away by the city (lines 32-35). Compared to the city life that always seems to revolve around “income tax / hoping to get a little something back” and high spending, NorthSun admits “how I hated living on the reservation/ but now/ it doesn't look so bad” (lines 1-4,45-47). She admits that after a journey of exploring both worlds, she would rather return to the world she has tried to run away from. The simplicity of the reservation calls her back.

In “Mud Woman,” the two worlds of the confusing city life and the familiar reservation life collide, leaving Mud Woman vulnerable. Mud Woman, who enters this new buisness-world, is ready to share a part of herself with it, looking to start anew and to start her exploration of the world she belongs to. When she arrives to the gallery to start her journey into the business world, immediately the “center of what [she] knew to be real / was shifting with each moment” (Naranjo-Morse lines 28-29). The two worlds begin to collide. The gallery-owner, whom Mud Woman first meets, represents the materialistic business world that cares only about the superficial and profitable importance of a person when it comes to a business venture. Conversely, Mud Woman, in a genuine way through her mud figurines,

represents the unique natural culture and traditions from her reservation life. The business world works in a way that Mud Woman does not understand. In an obtrusive manner, when introducing the rules of society to Mud Woman, the gallery owner arrogantly asks, “First of all dear, do you have a resume? You know, / something written that would identify you to the public” (lines 19-20). As the gallery owner asks Mud Woman about her resume, she plays by the rules of the business world; she only cares about how the public will respond to Mud Woman's artwork. The woman wants “traditional” Indian artwork to sell in her gallery because that is what is profitable—unlike the “strangely different” figurines that Mud Woman makes (line 43). The woman does not believe there is any chance of opportunity for *herself* in Mud Woman's work, yet she buys a few of her pieces “if for some reason [Mud Woman] make[s] it big, / [she] can be the first to say, 'I discovered you' ” (lines 48-49). The gallery owner is purely self-interested and motivated only by profit— ignoring all sense of Mud Woman's feelings. Before she knows it, Mud woman “exchanged her work for the / unexpectedly smaller sum that wholesale prices dictated” (lines 54-55). During the period of this exchange, Mud Woman has no voice—she passively allows the business world to take advantage of her and her artwork. The wholesale prices of the “traditional” Indian artwork that Mud Woman's work is categorized in automatically dictate the value of her work—Mud Woman's unique and careful labor with the way she “concern[ed] herself with the specific curves, bends and / idiosyncrasies, that made each piece her own” is pushed aside for a cheap buy by the business world (lines 4-5). Mud woman, betrayed by this foreign world, realizes that she does not belong to it.

In “Up & Out,” the relative distance between the speaker and each world affects the way she responds to the cultures of each. She is familiar with the customs of each world: the way business is conducted and the way society of the city life revolves around the ideas of money and materialism. The way she knowledgeably lists and weighs the negatives of both worlds and reluctantly concedes to

rejoining the life of the reservation does not motivate one to feel for her individual circumstance because she is not left vulnerable like Naranjo-Morse's Mud Women. This stoic distance that is created between the speaker and both of the environments she reflects on collectively holds an emotionally negative connotation. She creates a negative image of both worlds, bluntly listing the reservation's "government commodities [that]. . . tasted like dog food" and the city that "[had] high rent/ high food [and] high medical" (lines 36-37, 15-16). Her negative tone creates a cold atmosphere and a detachment in the relationship she has with both environments. Even though there is no emotional connection in the way the speaker ultimately decides that "reservation doesn't look so bad," the speaker can easily decide which world she wants to belong to because she is informed (lines 45-47). She has experienced both worlds and knows the truths of each.

Conversely in "Mud Woman," the speaker is vulnerable as she experiences and responds to the business world for the first time. She does not know the harsh realities that the business world holds—so different from her familiar customs on the reservation. She has always sold her artwork to those that know her on the reservation, so the customs in that exchange of business are familiar to her. Now, she is lost—prey to a vicious world that thrives on taking advantage of those who are not informed. The reservation life that she is familiar with beckons her home as "she [leaves] the city / and the world of / money and business behind" (Naranjo-Morse lines 71-73). There is an intimate and emotional connection present with Mud Woman as she delves into this unfamiliar world with her heart held humbly open. When the stringent realities of the business world approach, Mud Woman is left defenseless. Now that Mud Woman has experienced both worlds, she returns home to the comfort of what she knows, realizing that the once promising city life is not for her.

Like the speaker in "Up & Out," Mud Woman begins to regret the decision of entering the foreign city life centered around a money-hungry society. Between these clashing worlds, the

simplicity of the reservation life prevails. Both MudWoman and NorthSun's speaker realize that the focus of the business world in society is out to get the individual. For Mud Woman, the business world intimately and yet harshly uses her beautiful talent and writes her off with a dollar sign amount that tells her how much she is worth. The clay figurines that are made by the very earth she distinguishes and calls herself by are labeled by a price sticker. After she is cast out of the shop, a part of her is gone—away with her clay figurines. NorthSun's reflections are congruently similar in a more distant manner. She grows tired of the fast and manipulative city life that feeds on the monetary expenditures of unnecessary materialisms. Both regret leaving the peaceful simplicity of the reservation. For both of these women, the reservation will always be a place to call Home.

Works Cited

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