



Blue Horses Rush In: Poems and Stories

Luci Tapahonso

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Wrapped in blankets and looking at the stars, a young Navajo girl listened long ago to stories that would guide her for the rest of her life. "Such summer evenings were filled with quiet voices, dogs barking far away, the fire crackling, and often we could hear the faint drums and songs of a ceremony somewhere in the distance," writes Luci Tapahonso in this compelling collection.

Blue Horses Rush In takes its title from a poem about the birth of her granddaughter Chamisa, whose heart "pounded quickly and we recognized / the sound of horses running: / the thundering of hooves on the desert floor." Through such personal insights, this collection follows the cycle of a woman's life and underlines what it means to be Navajo in the late twentieth century. The book marks a major accomplishment in American literature for its successful blending of Navajo cultural values and forms with the English language, while at the same time retaining the Navajo character. Here, Luci Tapahonso walks slowly through an ancient Hohokam village, recalling stories passed down from generation to generation. Later in the book, she may tell a funny story about a friend, then, within a few pages, describe family rituals like roasting green chiles or baking bread in an outside oven. Throughout, Tapahonso shares with readers her belief in the power of pollen and prayer feathers and sacred songs.

Many of these stories were originally told in Navajo, taking no longer than ten minutes in the telling. "Yet, in recreating them, it is necessary to describe the land, the sky, the light, and other details of time and place," writes Tapahonso. "In this way, I attempt to create and convey the setting for the oral text. In writing, I revisit the place or places concerned and try to bring the reader to them, thereby enabling myself and other Navajos to sojourn mentally and emotionally in our home, Dinétah."

Blue Horses Rush In: Poems and Stories Details

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Bogi Takács says

Mixed short story and poetry collection - I really like those in general. This one was calm and gentle, also very heimish in a good sense (I have no idea how to say this in any language besides Yiddish, I'm sorry). I read quite a few very gut-punching things lately and this was just what I needed after that. Very relatable to me on multiple levels. "I tell Lori we Diné are made of prayers."

I also moved to Kansas from someplace else, like the author, so those bits were especially comforting, too. When I try to read local authors, it can be really hit and miss, but this book was a hit and I want to pick up other work by Luci Tapahonso.

Source of the book: Lawrence Public Library (and a signed copy no less! Thank you)

Debbie Fowler says

Love her poetry and stories. Definitely could relate to many of them, not to mention all the Navajo words.

Rolf says

This is the other awesome book Julia got me for Christmas by a female Navajo author--I like this collection even better than Laura Tohe's, as Luci Tapahonso has an amazing way with words in her poetry. Her writing is much more grounded in traditional Diné living, with some pieces being retellings of traditional myths. Another awesome bit of awesomeness from my amazing sister!

Michelle Boyer says

Blue Horses Rush In is a collection of short stories and poems that delve into the past, present, and future of Dine' (Navajo) identity and life. Tapahonso asserts that one of the most components about Dine' life is the ability to tell and listen to stories, both written and participating in the oral traditions of the community. You can appreciate this collection with or without much knowledge of Dine' culture, although there are elements of Dine' cosmology that are scattered throughout the poems--for example, the four sacred colors in Dine' cosmology are depicted by the horses in the poem "Blue Horses Rush In." Other poems, including one in which the loss of a 5-month-old baby are discussed, can be taken as universal truths and emotions if you're ever experienced significant loss in your own life.

While Tapahonso suggests that readers should not take all of her writings as autobiographical (in her preface, which could come off as slightly judgmental to some readers) it is clear that some of these pieces are very much so based on her own experiences.

If you have the chance, I would recommend hearing Tapahonso read in person. I think the cadence of her voice, read aloud, actually makes these pieces stronger. As a collective group, there are many good pieces, but there are also a few here and there that don't seem to "fit" into the collective whole. That being said, I highly suggest that people give this collection a quick read.

Raechel says

She's Navajo....and a Awesome poet. Listening to her read and write her poetry is an inspiration being from the same tribe.

Katie says

I read this book of poetry and short stories because it was required reading for a Southwestern literature class I am taking. I really enjoyed the read though, which means a lot seeing as how I have never been that big a fan of poetry.

I really enjoyed Tapahonso's optimistic view of the future. Even when she is surrounded by what seems like the overt destruction of her culture she has faith in its overwhelming state.

There is a very touching story about the reaction of her grandmother when her brother died. If you have personally dealt with loss it is an amazingly uplifting story. I believe it is called 'All The Colors of The Rainbow'.

Tristan says

Blue Horses Rush In is a lovely and touching collection that paints a powerful picture of Navajo life--or at least Tapahonso's perception of Navajo life. These pieces are largely in a mixture of English and Navajo--something which I thought was really important and beautiful, but I wasn't well equipped to actually read in places. I never felt like I didn't understand the texts, but I think that the experience would have been even better if I were a speaker of Navajo and had been able to hear and understand those sections as well as the English ones. These poems and stories are deeply concerned with the day to day experience of being--Tapahonso tells of life as it is felt among Navajo (or at least her family and the reservation she has the most experience with). They are not (at least not visibly or on the surface) political program statements, although that does not mean they have no political implications. They are not mystic or fantastical at their core, although their spirituality is strongly felt. They are honest and joyful and tragic. They are the work of someone who is writing for her people as well as for the world. In many ways, this book reminds me of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* in terms of the way it represents a people.

I think my favorite piece in the whole book was "Notes for the Children" which begins

1

Long ago the Holy Ones built the first hooghan for First Man and First Woman with much planning and deliberation;they they started in the east doorway, blessing the house for the protection and use of Navajo people. They moved clockwise from the east and offered prayers

and songs in each direction. They taught us in hope that when we moved into a new apartment or home, we would do the same. They taught us this so that any unhealthy memories the house contained would leave; this was taught us so that the house would embrace us and recognize our gratitude. The Holy Ones knew that houses need prayers and songs, just as we do. To acknowledge a new home in this way ensures that the family will be nourished and protected. You can ask a medicine or clergy person to do this. And the Holy Ones appreciate it if you must perform this yourself. They understand English, too.

The stories balance on the edge of fiction and essay and it is never clear how much Tapahonso is the character in them. She makes a point of mentioning in the preface that in the storytelling tradition from which she comes, everything is assumed to have happened at some point if the story is being told and that she is not necessarily the one these stories happened to--in fact, she says that in many (if perhaps not all) she is not.

The verse is fluid (although I think I probably preferred the prose pieces) and I especially liked "Dust Precedes the Rain" and "This is How They Were Placed for Us". As an example of the sort of sound of the verse, here is a bit from "Dust Precedes the Rain"

"The water from the sink is no good for making pottery.
It just ruins it," my children's Acoma grandmother would say.
Thereafter, she sent the kids to replace the full bowls of rainwater
that had filled since it began to rain.
Her son said that when he was a child, the rain smelled
and tasted so good--he and the other kids played outside,

????? says

Easy, graceful, and often tear-jerking prose. Tapahonso makes writing look easy - which is the best indicator of a talented writer.

Thomas Davis says

Luci Tapahonso was just named the Navajo Poet Laureate, and *Blue Horses Rush In: Poems and Stories* tells why that honor was given to her. This is a brilliant book. Both the poetry and the stories reach into everyday Navajo life and illuminate the closeness of Navajo families and the song of who the Navajo are as a people. The poetry takes common day events and shapes them into stories and intense moments of humanity that creates laughter, sadness, gratefulness, joy. Reading this book, I felt better about myself as a human being upon the planet earth. The Navajo are a poor people economically, but immensely rich in the qualities that grow out of relationships between people and the land in which they live. The stories in the book are short and more like prose poems than short stories, but they shine in the depth of the individual histories they illuminate. Tapahonso is a master craftsman whose craft is so skilled that it transforms itself into art. If you read no other book of poetry this year, this is the book I would recommend.

Claire says

One of the first books of poetry I loved reading from beginning to end... need to find more of these!

Carol says

Poems and stories from a Navajo author. This book brought a flood of memories down on me. Washed out Star Route in Leupp, pointing with your lips, Garcia's in Chinle, the goat at the post office, evening rides to Canyon de Chelly to put the baby to sleep, the smell of pinon pine, fry bread fresh from a Coleman stove, long rides to Gallup...wow. I'm overwhelmed.

Bree says

One of the strongest pieces of Native American storytelling I have had the pleasure of reading. Tapahonso's voice is strong and her words flow in a way that will resonate with generations. The reader is able to see a bit of his or herself in the stories shared by the author.

I highly recommend taking the time to read these beautiful words!

Jessica says

Love this collection. Poems and stories. All wonderful and...seem to wrap the reader in a blanket of calm. Interesting. I've read it a couple of times now. Each time I learn something new. Imagine new stories of my own.

Cal says

I liked this book decently well.. I think it did a good job of introducing some customs of Navajo people. The writing style and poetry style weren't particularly my favorite, but it was good nonetheless and had a nice soothing quality about it.
