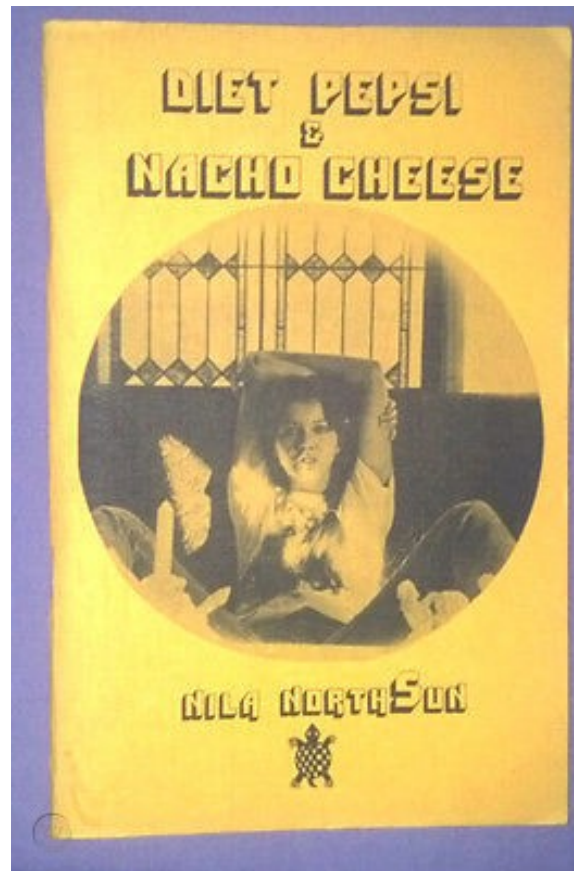


## nila northSun. Vignettes



Nila Northsun, of Shoshone-Anishinaabe descent, was born in Shurz, Nevada, and raised in the Bay Area. She completed her BA in art at the University of Montana-Missoula. Some of her volumes of poetry are *Diet Pepsi and Nacho Cheese* (1977), *Small Bones, Little Eyes* (1981, with Jim Sagel), the anthology *A Snake in Her Mouth* (1997), and *Love at Gunpoint* (2007). In 1980, Northsun also authored *After the Drying Up of the Water: A Tribal History of the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone*. In 2000, she was awarded the Silver Pen Award from the University of Nevada Friends of the Library, and in 2004 she received ATAYAL's Indigenous Heritage Award of Literature. She lives on the Stillwater Indian Reservation in Fallon, Nevada, where she works as a grant writer. Nila has shared the following poems with *Siwar Mayu*. Although "falling down to bed" and "The coat" are renowned among her works (see the video below), here is the first time that they are translated into Spanish. The other four poems are unpublished. A conversational, intimate and sarcastic tone is sustained throughout Northsun's poetics. Her verses question romantic perspectives on indigeneity through day-to-day-life-vignettes in the reservation.

## rez cars

it's always one thing  
or another  
fuel pump out this month  
radiator blown next  
bald tires of course  
paint faded and clear coat peeling  
from no garage  
crack so long on the windshield  
you're afraid to take it  
to one of those car washes  
with the big whirling brushes  
but there is a sweetgrass braid  
on the dashboard  
an ashtray full of sage  
an eagle feather dangling from the  
rear view mirror  
and some sort of native decal  
on the back window  
your ride is 'protected'  
from everything except  
mechanical failure.

## **falling down to bed**

i used to look at with disgust  
these indians laying around  
on the dirt & grass  
passed out drunk  
their bodies littering  
the pow wow grounds  
or city parks  
i'd look at their crumpled bodies  
laying in the noon sun  
still sleeping where  
they fell  
but one time  
i went to the 49  
after the pow wow  
& got shit faced drunk  
then got sleepy  
& fell in the dirt parking lot  
it seemed nice  
the ground was clean in the darkness  
the stars were vibrant above  
the night air was cozy  
'get up get up' they said  
'no no leave me here  
i want to sleep here'  
luckily they shoved me into  
the car  
or i would have been  
the drunk somebody looked at  
with disgust  
at least now  
when i see them  
i understand.

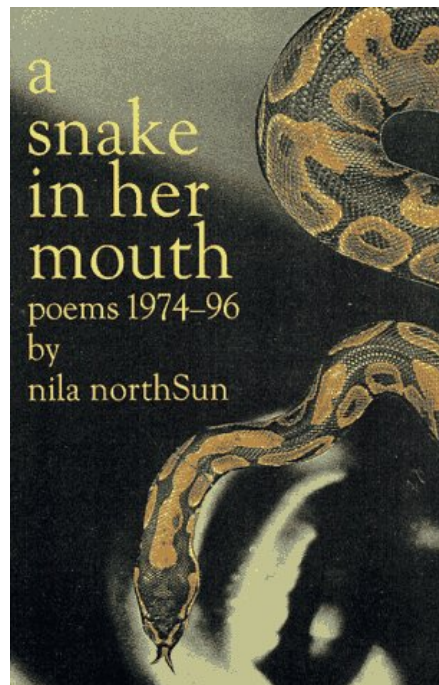
## **The coat**

his coat hung in the closet  
the coat he wore  
for funerals  
and court appearances  
the dark somber coat  
waiting for his return  
as did we  
never really understanding  
his lengthy absences  
in jail  
or just partying in another town  
with another woman  
days became years  
until all we had left  
were faded photographs  
and his coat in the closet

→ nila northSun reads  
"The Coat", "Falling Down to Bed",  
and "The Art of Living Poorly"  
[HERE](#)

## marry me or I'll suicide

I had this friend  
since high school  
that I saw maybe once  
every 5 years  
he was a tribal guy  
and when I last saw him  
in his 40's  
he said he wanted to be  
married before he was 50  
but not to any white women  
that he seemed to attract  
he wanted a tribal woman  
so when he was at ceremony  
there would be his native woman  
waiting for him  
bringing him food  
making him proud  
he said if I don't get married  
by the time I'm 50  
I'm going to suicide  
so  
will you be my bride?



## walmart

it is finally there  
just on the other side  
of the freeway  
located on our tribal land  
our poverty is over  
we get all of the sales tax  
besides the lease on the land  
it is a fact  
our unemployment rates  
will decrease  
an elder is a greeter  
her white hair brilliant  
against the blue of her  
walmart smock  
she smiles at me and  
says 'welcome to walmart'  
minimum wage is  
better than nothing.

## **Medicine bundles.....for cheri**

As we sat around the table making  
Little yellow bundles of tobacco, cedar,  
And sage tied with red string to help her  
With a peaceful passing  
We talked about how she'll be the  
first one of us to find out what death is like  
is it going to heaven and meeting god?  
Is it being reincarnated into something else?  
Is it nothingness?  
Will there be ghosts and spirits?  
Will she be turned into energy that floats  
With the dinosaurs?  
Will she mingle with the stars in the universe?  
And the 10 year old says 'lucky'.

## **More about Nila NorthSun**

- <http://nativeamericanlit.com/northSun.html>