

Intimate Grammars

An Ethnography of Navajo Poetry

Anthony K. Webster

Seeing the social work of contemporary poetry

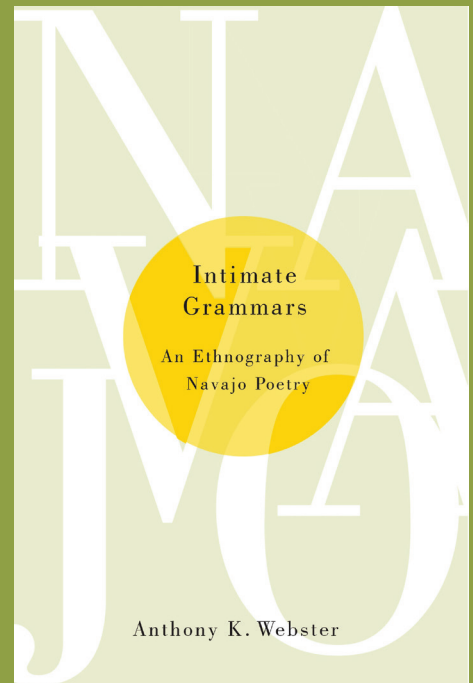
On April 24, 2013, Luci Tapahonso became the first Poet Laureate of the Navajo Nation, possibly the first Native American community to create such a post. The establishment of this position testifies to the importance of Navajo poets and poetry for the Navajo Nation. It also indicates the Navajo equivalence to the poetic traditions connected with the U.S. poet laureate and the poet laureate of the United Kingdom, author Anthony K. Webster asserts, as well as its separateness from those traditions.

Intimate Grammars takes an ethnographic and ethnopoetic approach to language and culture in contemporary time, in which poetry and poets are increasingly important and visible in the Navajo Nation. Webster uses interviews and linguistic analysis to understand the kinds of social work that Navajo poets engage in through their poetry.

Based on more than a decade of ethnographic and linguistic research, Webster's book explores a variety of topics: the emotional value assigned to various languages spoken on the Navajo Nation through poetry (Navajo English, Navlish, Navajo, and English), why Navajo poets write about the "ugliness" of the Navajo Nation, and the way contemporary Navajo poetry connects young Navajos to the Navajo language. Webster also discusses how contemporary Navajo poetry challenges the creeping standardization of written Navajo and how boarding school experiences influence how Navajo poets write poetry and how Navajo readers appreciate contemporary Navajo poetry.

Through the work of poets such as Luci Tapahonso, Laura Tohe, Rex Lee Jim, Gloria Emerson, Blackhorse Mitchell, Esther Belin, Sherwin Bitsui, and many others, Webster provides new ways of thinking about contemporary Navajo poets and poetry. *Intimate Grammars* offers an exciting new ethnography of speaking, ethnopoetics, and discourse-centered examinations of language and culture.

Anthony K. Webster is a linguistic anthropologist and associate professor in the department of anthropology at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of *Explorations in Navajo Poetry and Poetics*, as well as numerous articles on Navajo language, ethnopoetics, and culture.



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