POCAHONTAS TO HER ENGLISH HUSBAND, JOHN ROLFE
By Paula Gunn Allen

Had I not cradled you in my arms,
oh beloved perfidious one,
you would have died.
And how many times did I pluck you
from certain death in the wilderness—
my world through which you stumbled
as though blind?
Had I not set you tasks
your masters far across the sea
would have abandoned you—
did abandon you, as many times they
left you to reap the harvest of their lies;
still you survived oh my fair husband
and brought them gold
wrung from a harvest I taught you
to plant: Tobacco. It
is not without irony that by his crop
your descendants die, for other powers
than those you know take part in this.
And indeed I did rescue you
not once but a thousand times
and in my arms you slept, a foolish child,
and beside me you played
chattering nonsense about a God
you had not wit to name;
and wondered you at my silence—
simple foolish wanton maid you saw,
dusky daughter of heathen sires
who knew not the ways of grace—
no doubt, no doubt.
I spoke little, you said.
And you listened less.
But played with your gaudy dreams
and sent ponderous missives to the throne
striving thereby to curry favor
with your king. I saw you well. I
understood the ploy and still protected you,
going so far as to die in your keeping—
a wasting, putrefying death, and you,
deceiver, my husband, father of my son,
survived, your spirit bearing crop
slowly from my teaching, taking
certain life from the wasting of my bones.
Sioux-Laguna and Lebanese-Jewish, Paula Gunn Allen (1939-2008) was born in 1939 in Cubero, New Mexico. Her family spoke five languages when she was growing up. It is to this mixture she attributes her being a poet. She believes that poetry should be useful, and that the use-full is the beauty-full. "Language, like a woman, can bring into being what was not in being; it can, like food, transform one set of materials into another set of materials."

More information