
The Columbian Moment: Overturning Globalization in Vizenor's *The Heirs of Columbus*

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I. The Columbian Moment and the Meanings of Globalization

At the end of Gerald Vizenor's 1991 novel *The Heirs of Columbus*, one of the aforementioned heirs, Admire, punctuates a deadly game of chance (a moccasin game) played against a cannibal Wiindigo by whistling a tune from Antonin Dvořák's *New World Symphony* (*Heirs* 183). Not surprisingly, for readers familiar with Vizenor's work, this is not the only reference to that particular piece of music in the novel. Admire whistles the same tune earlier in the narrative to commemorate the founding of the sovereign tribal nation of Point Assinika (located in the Strait of Georgia between Vancouver Island and the mainland of British Columbia), which forms the primary setting for the novel's second volume (123-4). Former international model and repatriation expert (the book designates her a "trickster poacher") Felipa Flowers also whistles Dvořák as she enters a churchyard at Gravesend on a mission to recover the remains of Pocahontas (115). This takes place just before she is murdered by a vengeful mixedblood artifact collector, Doric Michel. And the symphony is also played over casino loudspeakers at the end of a successful hearing concerning the repatriation of remains (90), a hypothetical example of what Vizenor has termed elsewhere a "Bone Court." In these ways, then, Dvořák's masterwork provides a leitmotif to Vizenor's subversive meditation on the Columbian quincentenary.

As one might expect from Vizenor, however, the repeated invocation of Dvořák in *Heirs* goes well beyond some form of playful narrative ornamentation. I would suggest that we view the *New World Symphony* as a keynote figure that introduces us to a central tension in the novel, one that will be the focus of my discussion here. *The Heirs of Columbus* is a meditation on the ambiguous nature of *modern* globalization for American Indian people. In making this distinction between "modern" globalization and a more general definition of the concept, I am influenced by both economist Amartya Sen's and political philosopher Giacomo Marramao's writings on this topic. In his 2006 book

Identity and Violence, Sen has argued that today’s globalization is, in fact, part of a larger historical movement or pattern that can take different forms. Much contemporary scholarship on globalization, of course, holds that the phenomenon is *essentially* a product of Western capitalism and modernity and thus should be viewed either (1) positively, as a marvelous contribution of the West to the rest of the world or (2) negatively, as an extension and continuation of Western imperialism. In contrast, Sen maintains, globalization is neither particularly new nor necessarily Western. This qualification makes considerable sense, if one understands globalization to refer to the emergence of networks of exchange where goods, ideas, and symbolic systems circulate in ways that bring about an intensified consciousness of the interpenetration of the local and global.

When seen in that broader perspective, as Marramao’s work suggests, globalization can be reimagined as a force structuring human experience in a manner not necessarily overdetermined by the exploitative mechanisms and systems of capitalism and imperialism. (This is not, of course, an authorization to blithely ignore the ways that such systems have in fact functioned in such a manner.) Globalism, for Marramao, can involve a “passage to the Occident of all cultures,” by which he means, not an experience of universal colonial absorption into a hegemonic west, but rather the radically transformative experience of a mutual penetration of “alterity” that affects all cultures in more positive ways (14). A similar utopian sensibility regarding the political and artistic possibilities of a retheorized globalization appears in much of Vizenor’s work, particularly in *The Heirs of Columbus*. At two specific points in *Heirs*, Vizenor deploys Dvořák’s New World Symphony in a manner that suggest his awareness of the kind of tensions surrounding the concept of globalization that we can track through the work of thinkers like Sen and Marramao. At the start of the book, he incorporates the piece into the fabric of the novel and the collective history of the Anishinaabeg trickster-heirs by reimagining its very composition. Vizenor places the genesis of the work “at the headwaters” of the Minnesota River (a sacred place for his own Anishinaabeg people) and notes further that the Czech composer “heard tribal music in the stones” as he brought his great work into being (10). In this way, he reinscribes the symphony as a highly positive (albeit fictionalized) image of transcultural inspiration and artistic

production, one reflecting a dynamic of mutual recognition between Europeans and indigenous people coming into contact in a “global” setting.¹ In the epilogue to *Heirs*, however, Vizenor also offers us a rather different take on Dvořák’s masterpiece, one that is grounded in the actual historical experience of colonial modernity rather than in imaginative fancy. There, he reminds us both that Dvořák was the director of the Conservatory of Music in New York City when he composed the New World Symphony and that the work was written expressly for the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. That event, of course, stands as one of the more retrograde examples of the history of cross-cultural mediation and representation of American Indian people in the United States (187).² In pointing out the historical link between Dvořák’s piece and an exhibition that trumpeted the cultural and technological superiority of American modernity while offering sad tableaux and patronizing recognition of the “vanishing” Indian tribes in the United States, Vizenor highlights the fact that there is no guarantee that the moments of mutual discovery and reinvention characteristic of globalization (Vizenor sometimes calls these “imagic moments”) will lead to reciprocal altruism.³ The history of western dominated modernity often suggests, quite to the contrary, that such moments lead to colonial domination, cultural appropriation, and genocide.

The Heirs of Columbus is not about Antonin Dvořák, of course; it is about Columbus. But much of the same dynamic and tension that I have been discussing thus far also pervades the novel’s treatment of the “Admiral of the Ocean Sea” and his Indian heirs. In that treatment, I would argue, Vizenor tries to open up an imaginative space between (1) the historical reality of a form of globalization overdetermined by colonization and conquest, and (2) a fantastic reimagining of the encounter with the other that offers alternative, utopian possibilities for what globalization *could* mean. In the end, then, I would refine my earlier statement and suggest that it is the “Columbian moment” of mutual discovery between Europeans and indigenous peoples that is Vizenor’s primary subject matter. Columbus, in this respect, becomes the central signifying figure in the novel (as opposed to merely a historical personage) standing in some sense for the divergent meanings and functions of globalization.

Vizenor makes his intention in this regard fairly explicit at several key points in the text. In the epilogue, he indicates that *Heirs* is not to be read as a direct study or

literal critique of the historical Columbus: “Columbus arises in tribal stories that heal with humor the world he wounded; he is loathed, but he is not a separation in tribal consciousness. The Admiral of the Ocean Sea is a trickster overturned in his own stories five centuries later” (185). “Overturning” here represents something different from parody, and in my reading Vizenor is engaged in something much more complex than merely mocking the explorer. Having been remade as a trickster in this particular “tribal story,” Columbus the man is available to be allegorized or transformed in other ways. Lappet Tupis Brown, a private investigator hired by the tribal government within the novel, speaks for Vizenor in this regard when she testifies at the “Bone Court” hearing that tricksters are not real people, but “figures in stories” or “language games” (80). Remade by Vizenor into an element in a fictional language game, then, Columbus becomes a tool for the analysis of the ideology of discovery, which initiates the modern phase of globalization that turns away from the more positive possibilities of global encounter. Quoting Steve Woolgar’s book *Science: The Very Idea* in the epilogue to *Heirs*, Vizenor notes that “the sense of discovery is mediated by social conditions, [persisting] as a ‘process rather than a point occurrence in time.’” Significantly, too, “the discovery process extends in time both before and after the initial announcement or claim” (188). Following this line of thinking, “the Columbian moment” of discovery is not represented in *Heirs* as a discrete one, something limited to a specific set of events taking place in 1492. 1492 is one particular instantiation of a much larger force moving through human history and imagination, in other words. Vizenor’s contribution to the quincentenary, then, is not to create another monument to conventional western history and its linear sense of time, nor is it to offer a simple critique and deconstruction of that history. Instead, he engages his readers in a mediation regarding the ongoing structural and imaginative effects that not only *did*, but hypothetically *could*, both emerge from the experience of mutual discovery and from the interpenetration of the global and the local.⁴ The Columbian moment represents an archetypal experience of encounter and “glocalization” (the interpenetration of local and global self-awareness described by Roland Robertson in his 1992 book *Globalization*) rippling through time. And Vizenor’s narrative techniques of reiteration, irony, and inventive signification provide a mechanism both to critique its instantiations and to explore its effects. When read in this

manner, we can better make sense of what might otherwise seem a puzzling decision made by a major American Indian writer—the decision to observe the Columbian quincentenary, in part, by reimagining a figure largely reviled throughout the indigenous new world as somehow, himself, being “Indian.”

II. The Globalizing Mirror: The Columbian Indian/The Indian Columbus

The Heirs of Columbus abounds with narrative threads that establish a pattern of resemblance linking Christopher Columbus, his Anishinaabeg trickster-heirs, and other indigenous figures. The first of these appears right away, in the opening chapter’s initial introduction of the contemporary Anishinaabeg trickster, radio host, and political leader Stone Columbus.⁵ Christopher Columbus, we are told, began his life as an “obscure crossblood,” whose fame was based on his efforts to found and extend an empire (3). One might note, here, that the narrative takes seriously the hypothesis advanced by some scholars that Columbus might have had Jewish ancestry, while also presenting his nomadic career as a kind of archetypal diasporic experience. In this, he and his modern namesake Stone resemble each other, for the latter is a typical Vizenorian “crossblood” trickster with a similar career path. Stone achieves his own renown through the founding of, not one, but two “nations,” which stand, at least for a time, as extensions of Anishinaabeg sovereignty. These are the “Santa Maria Casino” of the first half of the novel and “Point Assinika” (part casino and part genomic research facility) of the second. We might also take note of other coincidental details, such as Stone’s wearing of a golden-eyed, blue mask of Columbus and Columbus’s own record of his delight at receiving a golden mask from a local Taino leader when he founded his first settlement in what is now Haiti on Christmas day in 1492, La Villa de la Navidad. Through these, and other examples, Vizenor makes clear that he is interested in exploring a connection between these two figures that goes well beyond a mere nominal echo. The strong parallels between the modern trickster and the early modern explorer make it difficult, then, to read Stone simply as a parody of his ancestor, and to read the novel simply as a piece of satire. Put in typical Vizenorian parlance, *Heirs* represents not mockery, but rather a *tease* of Columbus. And teasing, for Vizenor, always emerges from, and expresses, a deeper sense of relationship.

It is worth remembering, in this context, that Vizenor has frequently written of his sense of the existence of a pan-Indian or indigenous inclination toward exploration, discovery, and reinvention through encounter. Vizenor opens his essay “Ontic Images” with the following claim: “Native American personal and cultural identities have always been strategic maneuvers, and in that sense, *modernist*, names and singularities that arise from and are created by both communal nominations, collective memories, and by distinctive visionary experience” (159). This modernist “maneuver” of identity formation is effected through the processes of “analogical thinking,” a term Vizenor adapts from Barbara Maria Stafford’s book *Visual Analogy*. Analogical thought may be characterized by both its “uncanny visual capacity to bring divided things into unison or span the gap between contingent and absolute” and its “move to *tentative* harmony” in that process (159). This “tentative,” transformative, gap-spanning process is “modernist” in so far as modernity signifies *any* moment in which our reality is altered as a result of an encounter that induces a shift in our paradigms for organizing/thinking about it. In this respect, the “Columbian moment” represents an archetypical example of modernity, provided we understand that the latter term has been transformed from a chronological marker into a signifier of a transhistorical structure of human experience.

Vizenor sees the modernist impulse of globalization as deeply embedded in native traditional cultural practices, noting that Indian stories “have always been the imagic moments of cultural conversion and native modernity” (“Ontic” 161). He makes this point explicitly through the example of Crazy Horse. In the spirit of Crazy Horse, Vizenor notes, Native storiers have always evinced an openness to encounter the new and to move towards a “tentative harmony” with it in a way that allows for a perpetually modernizing sense of self. Most suggestively, Vizenor grounds this claim in a general ethnographic assertion regarding the customary globalization of tribal peoples: “natives have always been on the move, by necessity of sustenance, and over extensive trade routes. Motion is a natural right, and the stories of visionary transformation are a continuous, distinctive sense of sovereignty” (162). Significantly, here, we begin to see how Vizenor indexes sovereignty to the ability to create one’s stories/identity through a process of analogical encounter with others. The phrase “Native identities are stories that arise from the common tease of cultures” becomes a Vizenorian creed (163).

With this critical context in mind, it is less surprising to find that the numerous connecting threads between Christopher and Stone Columbus in *Heirs*, including actual bloodlines linking them, consistently interfere with the reader's ability to maintain an entirely comfortable sense of imaginative distance between them. Indeed, *Heirs* offers a number of details that emphasize Christopher's "Indianness" and his Indians descendants' "Columbian" natures. One of the most striking of these is the depiction of Columbus's relationship to the Mayan people. "The Maya created Columbus," Stone declares matter-of-factly, though this assertion can be construed in a number of ways (20). Stone could be suggesting that the Maya foretold Columbus's coming through their own prophetic traditions. Taken further, he might even be suggesting that those stories made Columbus happen, in a ritually performative manner. This would not be surprising in a text that clearly takes seriously and represents the power of story and storytelling, tellingly represented in the novel through the figure of "stones." But in another sense, the novel also suggests that the Maya *begat* Columbus, in both figurative and literal senses, through their own prior migrations to Europe.

Vizenor imagines that in the ancient past Mayan shamans and "hand talkers" actually voyaged to the Old World, providing evidence of a pattern or structure of global migration and encounter (of indigenous modernism) dating far back into ancient history. The novel imagines a long historical trajectory of globalization and "Columbian moments," in other words. Readers of *Heirs* are also told that the Mayans produced a "Bear Codex" describing themselves and their journeys. This book came into the possession of the Emperor Ptolemy, who ordered it to be translated and included in the collection of the Great Library of Alexandria. From there, before it was lost in the great fire that destroyed that ancient wonder, we are led to suppose that it exerted an imaginative influence on the thought of the ancient western world. Perhaps the Bear Codex was co-influential, along with the ancient Greek authorities referenced by explorers of Columbus's era, in reshaping the western understanding of the spherical world and their place in it? In this way the novel implies that the self-awareness and self-understanding of Old and New World peoples were entwined from the earliest periods of history.⁶ And even if those connections became muted or forgotten over time, a potent enough trace of them remained to reappear in future manifestations of globalized

consciousness. In this way, Vizenor recontextualizes and reimagines the significance of the way that Columbus writes in his own journals of the inspiration of ancient authorities (like Ptolemy) who reinforced his own intuition that a passage to the east could be found by traveling west. The fact that the Mayan “radiant presence” is also linked in the novel to the global spiritual cause of Christ (as an aspiring world religion) and, later, to the diasporic movement of the Sephardic Jews serves to reframe the seemingly discrete moment of Columbian exploration as a manifestation of a larger force and pattern in human history (28).

As the preceding discussion suggests, then, like all of the other major elements in *Heirs*, the Maya function in the novel as a figure, offering evidence of an earlier phase of globalization that is intended to liberate our thinking to allow us to reconceive its nature and possibilities. Vizenor’s Maya represent one indigenous instantiation of the “Columbian moment” that is meant both to structurally resemble and also literally plant the seeds for future imaginative manifestations of the impulse for discovery. The novel’s assertion of a Maya-Sephardic genealogical line that includes Columbus himself is suggestive in this respect. The book presents Columbus as being maternally Mayan, with his mother, Susanna di Fontanarossa, as the bearer of a “signature” of survivance—a “blue radiance” passed down to her through her Mayan ancestors. There is a clear intimation, here, that the echoes of the globalizing impulse of his Mayan past represented a key driving force behind Columbus’s own aspirations and journeys, influencing him through this line of blood memory. Columbus recalled the New World before he had even seen it, through dreams. In this respect, he appears to have inherited the Maya gift for prophetic storytelling and imagination. And this trace of a Maya past within him literally guided Columbus toward the fulfillment of his ancestor’s prophetic anticipation of him. The novel opens by quoting from, and then reinterpreting, a passage from the *Journal of the First Voyage* as evidence of these traces of Maya cultural memory. Columbus remembers seeing a blue light in the west, though “‘it was such an uncertain thing,’ as he wrote in his journal to the crown, ‘that I did not feel it was adequate proof of land’” (*Heirs* 1). Vizenor characterizes Columbus’s perception in that moment as a half-formed insight that he is, in fact, part of a larger world historical process whose meaning and trajectory he only vaguely understands. “That light was a torch raised by the silent hand

talkers, a summons to the New World” (3). The historical tragedy that subsequently unfolded, though, was tied directly to Columbus’s only partial recognition of the significance of the experience in front of him.

It is at this point, then, that we need to step back from a discussion of how *Heirs* works systematically to depict strong lines of connection between the indigenous world and the western world, in order to also acknowledge that Vizenor does not collapse all sense of difference between them. Indeed, if I am correct in seeing part of the novel’s subject matter to be an exploration of the manifestations of a globalizing impulse that can be mutually and positively constitutive, it is nevertheless clear that Vizenor also wants readers to be aware that not all forms of globalization are equal. The different forms that the Columbian moment takes in historical time must be considered critically, in other words. We can turn back to the connections between Stone Columbus and Christopher Columbus to begin to illustrate this point, for these two central figures in the novel are presented as imperfect replicas of one another, as opposed to being pure doppelgangers. Frequently the patterns of repetition and coincidence in *Heirs* are slightly off. This sometimes creates a sense of dissonance, and at other times a literal form of mirroring built on reversal. Take, for example, Columbus’s founding of La Villa de la Navidad, mentioned earlier. Columbus was forced into that act—the first moment that fully transformed his voyage of trade and exploration into a voyage of colonization and conquest—when his flagship, the Santa Maria, was wrecked on a reef, due to the inattentiveness of a crewman. With much of the foundering ship’s goods and material saved, largely through the assistance of a local Taino leader, however, Columbus interpreted this apparent disaster as an act of providence. He chose to cannibalize his vessel in order to build a permanent settlement, in which many of its crew would reside until he was able to make a return voyage. La Villa de la Navidad failed to survive the period between the first and second voyages, however, owing in large part to the acts of violence and predation on the part of its Spanish occupants toward the local Indian population. They elected to manifest the globalizing impulse in an early form of colonialism, imperialism and incipient genocide, rather than experiencing imagic moments of analogical recreation.

Looking forward, we find that Stone Columbus has his own “Santa Maria,” too,

and that this also experiences a wreck. His floating casino, a replica of the Spanish carrack that Columbus sailed, lies anchored at the international border between Minnesota and Ontario, near Big Island in Lake of the Woods. Stone presides over the Santa Maria Casino from its sterncastle and cabin, like the “Admiral of the Ocean Sea,” and he watches the decks for signs of exuberance that mark the discovery of sudden wealth (another echo of Columbus’ long wait for signs of the rich lands of Cathay). Stone’s “flagship,” too, is wrecked, in this case by a violent storm that causes it to crash on a reef and sink near the Big Island. But unlike the earlier disaster off the coast of Haiti, Stone’s shipwreck marks only the temporary collapse of a *legitimate* space of sovereignty, as opposed to the founding or extension of an imperial one. The loss of the Santa Maria casino brings to an end four summers of casino operation (echoing the four voyages, perhaps?) carried out “in the name of the great explorer” (11). Significantly, though, where Columbus’s accident represented the inauguration of a global system of violence and depredation, the modern wreck of the trickster’s casino-state leads to a peaceful reiteration and extension of the Anishinaabeg nation, this time into the Pacific Northwest (with the founding of Point Assinika). The trajectory of Stone’s career (and of that of his fellow heirs) suggests that it is possible to experience a de-territorialization, extension, or relocation of tribal sovereignty that somehow avoids Columbus’s path towards empire. The vector of the Columbian moment is fundamentally different in each case. As readers, though, we are encouraged to ask why this is the case.

III. Global Survivance versus Global Empire

As I have suggested, Columbus bears the mark of an indigenous (Maya) past that represents one form that the globalizing impulse might take, but in his historical enactment of that impulse he clearly turns towards another form, with dire consequences for the indigenous peoples of the new world. Vizenor’s novel seeks to analyze these two forms of globalization with an eye toward developing a critical sensibility that allows the positive to overcome the negative. To fully illuminate this point, we need to look a bit more closely at the novel’s depiction of these two instances of the “Columbian moment,” beginning with the Maya-indigenous one. *Heirs* represents the spirit of Mayan globalization through a series of repeated symbolic figures—among them “blue radiance”

and the moccasin game mentioned above. Throughout the novel, the color blue stands in general as a sign of the power of “survivance.” Many people bear its “signature,” including the Maya, the Sephardic Jews, the Moors (“once a nomadic people”), as well as the modern Heirs/tricksters (34). But what does it mean to be marked by “survivance” in the context of a narrative focused on voyages of discovery and global encounter? Despite being one of Vizenor’s most familiar neologisms, “survivance” is a word that defies straightforward definition. As I have argued elsewhere, though, one of the central meanings embedded in the concept is the ability to be “recognized” (see Carlson, “Trickster”). In this respect, we might understand those who carry with them the “blue radiance” of survivance as those who are able to endure over time and whose endurance is tied both to their assertion of autonomy and their ability to have that autonomy acknowledged by others—a process that involves mutual or reciprocal recognition which allows for change and growth.⁷ Survivance, in this respect, is an integral component of sovereignty. And for Vizenor, interestingly enough, the moments that seem to provide both the clearest indices of survivance, as well as their most vigorous tests, are journeys of exploration and mutual encounter (along with the stories that commemorate and disseminate them). We might remember how, in the opening lines of his essay “Postindian Warriors,” Vizenor describes the journals of the Lewis and Clark expedition of 1804-6 as “the most notable literature of tribal survivance” (1).

Developing an awareness of these kinds of associative links surrounding the “blue radiance” of survivance allows us to perceive another interesting pattern underlying the novel’s symbolic use of the moccasin game. Felipa Flowers’s signature *blue* moccasins set up a basic link between that symbol and the concept of survivance through mutual recognition. Felipa’s work as a negotiator who effects the repatriation of tribal remains is an expression of this sense of survivance, for that work is built on negotiations that only succeed when they take place in legal, cultural, and personal frameworks that allow for mutual recognition and respect that also acknowledges cultural difference. The theft of Felipa’s moccasins from her own body when she is murdered by agents working for Doric Michel (the artifact poacher and member of a colonialist “Brotherhood of American Explorers” that meets regularly in a “Conquistadores Club” in New York City) is deeply suggestive in this regard. For that criminal act represents quite clearly a

distinction between two models of how the global human encounter might take shape. For one heir of Columbus, Felipa, the experience of globalization is built on the reciprocity of survivance. For the other, Doric Michel, it is built on exploitation, dehumanization, and colonialism.

The novel’s use of the moccasin game as a recurrent plot motif goes even further in elaborating this idea of contrasting forms of the Columbian moment. Here, again, we see Vizenor using a recurrent symbol to explore two different sides to the global encounter with the other. On the negative, imperialist side, interestingly enough, we have a figure from *inside* the tribal world, the Wiindigo, whose ongoing predatory game against the Anishinaabe forms the centerpiece of one of Vizenor’s most frequently invoked traditional cultural narratives. (Vizenor relates the story of the contest between the Wiindigo and tribal tricksters in many of his books, both fictional and nonfictional.) The Wiindigo, of course, might be thought of as a person who has become a monster through the failure to recognize his commonality with other people; this is one of the symbolic meanings of his cannibalism. Consequently, his encounters with tribal peoples, in relation to whom he has become an alien other, take the form of predatory games— attempts to dupe, defraud, and destroy the people in whom he should see “relation.”⁸

If the Wiindigo’s moccasin game metaphorizes the dark side of the Columbian moment (its negative instantiation), *Heirs* also includes a suggestive counter-example in the ‘Bone Court’ hearing in the novel. The Bone Court is presided over by Judge Beatrice Lord, a character whose sympathetic responses to tribal claims of sovereignty and autonomy and whose ability to fully imagine the Indian other suggests a great deal about the utopian potential of the experience of mutual recognition. During the hearing, which focuses on the ongoing contest between Doric Michel and the heirs over the right to possess the remains of Columbus (a trope for Vizenor’s own engagement with the legacy and meaning of the Columbian moment, perhaps), the trickster and technologist Almost Browne offers Lord the chance to experience a “Virtual Moccasin Game.” Putting on a pair of electronic moccasins and other equipment enables Lord to “enter the shadow realities of tribal consciousness” (84). Figuratively, then, this section of the novel offers an illustration of the way that an openness to the direct realization and experience of the power of stories of the other creates the possibility for the mutual recognition of

commonality and difference that would characterize a positive encounter between differing localities within the framework of global space. In the virtual global environment of *Almost's* technological system, Lord is able to bring a range of narratives, localities, and perspectives together in a manner that enhances her respect for tribal sovereignty without leading her to totally abandon or repudiate her own traditions. As she plays the game, she comes into contact with an intense experience of Anishinaabeg locality (visiting the sacred headwaters), feels the power of intersubjective identification (observing shamanic bear-to-human transformations), and gains insight into the larger political and colonial contexts surrounding the criminal issues involved in the specific repatriation case before her (witnessing a reenactment of the disappearance of Columbus's bones from Doric Michel's vault). Through this process, she discovers that "the legal issues of standing in federal court could be resolved through simulations," and she thus learns deeper lessons about the importance of the interpenetration of imagination and of mutual recognition in ensuring that the Columbian moment becomes one of survivance (87). The experience of a moment of global encounter becomes, for Lord, an opportunity for ethical breakthrough and a chance for self-reinvention.

My reading here of the figural presentation of the elements involved in overcoming the imperial form of the Columbian moment is also reinforced, I believe, when we consider Vizenor's reimagining of Columbus' initial moment of encounter with the New World. Building upon those elements discussed earlier regarding the traces of blue radiance within him, Vizenor tellingly depicts Columbus as having been presented with an opportunity to choose between different paths in the first phases of his career as an agent of globalization. And by allowing us to re-read that moment against the matrix of symbols and figures that run throughout the text, Vizenor encourages his readers to view that choice as a paradigmatic one that speaks to the broader history and potentiality of global encounter. Traces of the potential for Columbus's New World encounter to mimic and recreate the positive legacy of his indigenous ancestors are thematized in the form of a series of references to blue puppets. Early in his life, Columbus witnesses and is moved by a group of Sephardic Jewish women puppeteers he sees on the Island of Corsica. He is haunted by this memory, which the novel ties to his early experiences of the call of the ocean. That relationship is further explained as an older Columbus

encounters the blue puppeteers again, this time at the Convento dos Santos in Lisbon. This is the place where, historically, Columbus first saw a well-born nineteen-year-old, Felipa Moñiz, whom he would later marry, but Vizenor transforms that fairly mercenary encounter with an other into something more prophetic and potentially transcendent. It is at this stage, too, that Columbus discovers that the blue puppets have been carved out of the wood of trees carried from the New World before wild storms, washing up on the Azores. Echoes of blood memory and the pull of a voyage promising self-recognition through an encounter with the other thus lay the foundation for what *might have been* in those fateful months and years after Columbus boarded his Santa Maria.

The moment of truth in the novel is marked by the third appearance of the puppets, which by this point in the narrative clearly represent the trace of something hidden underneath the bloody actuality of the history of conquest, something that might be recovered through an act of imagination. Columbus hears the voices of the puppeteers at the moment of his encounter with “Samana” (37). Here is another complex and interesting example of linguistic and imaginative play on Vizenor’s part. At this point in the novel, the literal event he (through Stone) is reimagining is Columbus’s landing on October 28, 1492, at Bahia de Bariay in what is now Cuba, the first moment he set foot on New World soil (10). Vizenor changes this history in a variety of suggestive ways. He plays with the historical controversy regarding whether Columbus first landed in Cuba (which he called San Salvador) or at Samana Cay (an island sixty five miles south of there). For the novel both names his landing place Samana Cay and posits an erotic meeting between Columbus and an Indian woman of the same name (whose descendant, not surprisingly, is one of the moderns heirs). This represents both a witty joke evoking the notion of Columbus’s fundamental lack of understanding of his location as a global subject and an imaginative means of opening up a space to reconstruct an alternate history. Vizenor multiplies that effect by having Stone immediately change the date of the event he has just described, because “Columbus is ever on the move in our stories” (10). In the end, we have a series of potential Columbian moments, some historical, some imagined, that took place somewhere between October 28, 1492, at Bahia Bay or Samana Cay, and October 29, 1492, at Rio de la Luna (11).

Wherever and whenever Columbus landed, *Heirs* does maintain that his encounter

with the Indian woman Samana represented a historical crossroads and a choice between two types of globalizing moments. Samana, who is also described as a tribal hand talker (both an imaginative link to the earlier blue puppeteers and a clever evocation of the likely dynamics of communication that persisted between Columbus and *los indios* in this period of first contact when they spoke “through signs”) swims out to the Santa Maria and makes love to him. Part of Vizenor’s intent here, of course, may be satirical, playing with standard iconographic depiction of the New World as exotic Indian woman in European travel literature and the later colonial trope of Virgin land. In this case, though, both a figure of the Indian subject and the land (she pulls together both the human and cartographic elements of global encounter), Samana has considerable agency and a capacity for survivance (5). The novel explicitly suggests how Columbus’s brief encounter with her represented a missed opportunity for an experience of mutual self-discovery that might have been justly celebrated by both worlds. It is worth recalling that, generally in Vizenor’s fiction, sexual and erotic pleasure also signifies the imagination, imaginative pleasure, and liberation. Clearly, then, Columbus’s night with Samana can be read allegorically. Columbus’s family curse of a “twisted penis” makes perfect sense in this context (30). The novel suggests that it is a curse laid on (old world) men as revenge by women who were burned along with the bear codex in Alexandria. That burning, within the narrative framework of the novel, would represent a blindness to the existence and equal subjectivity of the other, a denial of key parts of the universality of human experience (for example, the fact that the globalizing impulse can manifest itself in others besides western man), and a foolish castration of imaginative capacity.

Columbus’s twisted penis, then signifies more than persistently painful erections. It represents the move by western man to define himself through the subordination and then the erasure of the indigenous world. This fundamental act, which underlies the colonialist form of globalization, represents a colossal failure of imagination, one that in the case of our novel costs Christopher Columbus dearly as well. His night with Samana represented a moment of breakthrough where the mental structure of colonialism gave way to an alternative form of global encounter. Columbus experienced release with Samana, whom the novel (recalling the Codex) describes explicitly as a bear shaman possessing a healing touch and as characterized by that familiar symbolic blue radiance

(12). The text repeatedly references the idea that she healed Columbus. Regrettably, though, the healing did not last (19). Despite the emotional and existential pull he feels towards her (Vizenor invokes the Journals’ most positive and enraptured descriptions of both the people and land of the new world at these points in the novel), Columbus turns away from this type of modernizing encounter of self-recreation. Instead, he soon founds his first colonial settlement (Navidad), initiating a system of slavery and murder while continuing to chase gold throughout the Caribbean. In a touch of wonderful lyricism, though, Vizenor notes that Columbus hears the voice of the blue puppeteers one last time on the deck of his ship during the stormy winter return to Europe at end of the first voyage (44). He will remember them many times after that, up to his death, by which time most of his honors and wealth had been stripped from him by his own people.

So what might have happened if the Columbian moment of 1492 had taken another shape, the shape it takes, imaginatively, in the indigenous world of this novel? We get a hint of an answer to this in Stone Columbus’ reenactment of his ancestor’s career. It is significant that *Heirs* presents Stone’s nation-building activity, both at the Santa Maria Casino and at Point Assinika, as expressions of tribal sovereignty built on reciprocal altruism and expansive networks of cross-cultural relations. Initially, it would seem, Stone opens his casino as a kind of provocation and a parody of the European law of discovery. He asserts his “right to operate a casino as a new reservation moored to an anchor as long as the waters flow in the New World,” in a manner that clearly plays off of the language used by Ferdinand and Isabella in granting title to his ancestor Christopher at the time of the first voyage (7). This is an absurd claim, of course, but its very absurdity raises the obvious point that the basis for non-Indian title claims under the law of discovery is equally strange. In the end, though, I think the key point to realize is that Stone’s act of global legal consciousness here leads to the kind of liberating reinvention characteristic of Vizenorian survivance.

It is no surprise that Stone’s initial formulation of, and claim to, sovereignty would be challenged, but the end result of that challenge is to trigger some important reformulations of the concept, with positive implications for both tribal and non-tribal peoples. On July 4th, three years after the first launching of casino, Stone is arrested for violation of state tax and gambling laws. Subsequently, the question of the nature of the

sovereignty of the Santa Maria Casino ends up in federal court, in a case presided over by Beatrice Lord. In the end, Lord sanctions the “reservation on an anchor,” in no small part because she admires the imagination involved in its creation. Even more suggestively, though, in announcing her decision from the casino’s sterncastle (on Columbus Day), she redefines tribal sovereignty in a way that detaches it from formulation of title rooted in discovery law. “The notion of tribal sovereignty is not confiscable, or earth bound,” Lord writes. “Sovereignty is neither fence nor feathers. The essence of sovereignty is imaginative, an original tribal trope, communal and spiritual, an idea that is more than metes and bounds in treaties” (7). Following this logic, “The court...ruled that an anchor and caravel is as much a tribal connection to sovereignty as a homestead, mineral rights, the sacred cedar, and the nest of a bald eagle” (7).⁹ In this way, Lord signals that, despite its western legacy and baggage, the concept of sovereignty remains valuable because it can be stretched and adapted, imaginatively, in a way that takes it out of the realm of possessive property law (the reference to “metes and bounds”) and into a larger sense of relation and intersubjectivity.¹⁰

Lord’s experience of legal globalization (her opportunity to preside over a Columbian moment of contact between the U.S. legal system and Stone Columbus’s innovative assertions of tribal autonomy) allows her to continue forward with the process of deterritorializing and reframing the concept of sovereignty. She recognizes, of course, that Stone’s sovereignty claims exist in a political framework that, at present, limit them. In a nod to U.S. Indian law and the Marshall Court’s use of the law of discovery in defining Indian communities as “domestic dependent nations,” she comments that “The *Santa Maria* and the other caravels are limited sovereign states at sea, the first maritime reservations in international waters...” (8-9). And yet, the fact that Stone has created a “sovereign casino” that does, in fact, function surely highlights the idea that a tribal nation need not be synonymous with a sovereign state in the post-Westphalian sense of the term. The “new casino tribe” is more like what political scientist Nina Caspersen calls an “unrecognized state,” a kind of sovereign entity that relies on support from outside of itself and is characterized by its economic and cultural permeability (8). A “casino nation,” in other words, cannot exist without a constant dynamic of exchange between itself and those outside of it. It cannot stand alone or imagine itself in a way that cuts it

off from the broader totality that surrounds it. It must embrace the dynamic of global encounter in a way that sends its people down a very different historical and political path from that of the Europe of Christopher Columbus. And in doing so, Vizenor suggests, with his characteristic hopefulness, indigenous people might offer guidance on how the modern world can redeem the Columbian moment and overcome the bloody legacy of its instantiation five centuries ago. Judge Lord’s observation regarding the wisdom and imagination that led Stone to placing his sovereign casino on an international border is wonderfully suggestive, for it urges the reader to consider how currently emerging international legal norms and a redefinition of the relations of power between local and global bodies are becoming increasingly important tools in the work of decolonization. Through Lord, Vizenor teases us into a recognition that the imaginative relocation of the “nation” and its claims to sovereignty into a globalized space might, in fact, be liberating. Reimagining the nation as something constituted in the exchange between global and local, then, can create the political conditions that allow for new definitions of legal status, new claims of sovereignty, and new ways in which those claims might be recognized. Indeed, Vizenor’s work on the recently ratified revised Constitution of the White Earth Nation highlights the “real world” applicability of that idea (see Carlson, “Trickster”). If such change can be broadly achieved, the Columbian moment might indeed be worthy of global commemoration.

Notes

¹ This idea, incidentally, forms a central theme in Vizenor’s more recent novel *Shrouds of White Earth*, in its depiction of a narrative triptych composed of Marc Chagall, the fictional Anishinaabeg painter Dogroy Beaulieu, and Vizenor himself.

² For a general overview of the Columbian Exhibition, see Bolotin and Laing.

³ See Vizenor, “Ontic Images.” Examples of other critics who have begun to take up Vizenor’s terminology would include Martinez and Schweninger.

⁴ This idea can be usefully connected to Jodi Byrd’s concept of “transit.” Byrd explicitly links her work with Vizenor in *The Transit of Empire*.

⁵ There are many other versions of this pattern of imperfect reiteration and echoing throughout the novel. The part of the plot focused on Felipa Flowers, for example, makes a great deal out of the similarities between her experiences and those of Pocahontas, down to the fact that both meet their end at Gravesend. Stone is also compared to the Métis leader Louis Riel, who is likewise recalled in the form of another character, a retired military intelligence officer, now turned private-investigator and double-agent named Chaine Riel Doumet. American Indians are compared to the Sephardic Jews, who

are, in turn, linked to the Mayans. However, in order to contain the complexity of the narrative a bit, for the purpose of the present argument, I want to maintain a narrow focus on Stone Columbus as the primary heir and to consider, through him, what the significance of this representational patterning in the novel might be.

⁶ In this respect, Vizenor gives readers an imaginative extension of historical realities explored recently by Jace Weaver in his book *The Red Atlantic*.

⁷ Vizenor offers another formulation of this idea in the second half of the novel, in his discussion of the (metaphorical) work being done at the Genome Pavilion at Point Assinika. There he writes that "...the chemical of genes can be touched in meditation and memories, that blue radiance is a wondrous instance in human creation, *and those who can imagine their antimonies and mutations are able to heal with humor*" [my emphasis] (Heirs 134).

⁸ It is no wonder that many contemporary indigenous writers invoke the Wiindigo-figure as a trope for colonialism and empire. Louise Erdrich does so in her novel *Tracks* in her characterization of Pauline Puyat, who turns on herself and her own people in a fury of misrecognition and assimilationist-driven self-hatred. Joseph Boyden explores wiindigo sickness in his WWI novel *Three Day Road*. Jack Forbes has also suggestively linked the Wiindigo with the origins and spread of imperialism and colonialism in *Columbus and other Cannibals*.

⁹ Vizenor clearly signals the importance of this definition by reiterating it later in the book. When Almost Brown is celebrating the repatriation of Columbus's remains with a laser show, the loudspeakers on the casino mask boom out the following words: "The notion of sovereignty is not tied to the earth, sovereignty is neither fence nor feathers...The very essence of sovereignty is a communal laser. The *Santa Maria* and the two caravels are luminous sovereign states in the night sky, the first maritime reservation on a laser anchor" (Heirs 62).

¹⁰ On this type of dialectical transformation of sovereignty, see my forthcoming book *Imagining Sovereignty* (2016).

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