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<https://www.kegedonce.com/books/ghost-lake/>

Nathan Niigan Noodin Adler is a Two-Spirit Anishinaabe and Jewish writer from Lac Des Mille Lacs First Nation in Ontario, Canada. He holds a BA in English and Native studies from Trent University, and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of British Columbia. He also earned a BFA in Integrated Media at OCAD (Ontario College of Art & Design University) and works with multiple media, such as audio and video, painting, and even glass. He currently teaches Creative Writing, Indigenous Literatures, and Oral Traditions as Assistant Professor at the University of Toronto Scarborough.

Adler is a laureate of the REVEAL Indigenous Art Awards granted by The Hnatyshyn Foundation. His previous Indigenous horror novel, *Wrist*, won the prestigious Governor General's Award for English-language poetry in 2016, and its companion volume, *Ghost Lake*, won the Published Prose award in the English fiction category at the 2021 Indigenous Voices Awards, a competition focused on works by emerging Indigenous writers in Canada. His short story "Abacus" was part of *Love After the End: An Anthology of Two-Spirit and Indigiqueer Speculative Fiction* edited by Joshua Whitehead, awarded the 2021 Lambda Literary Award for LGBTQ anthology. His first speculative fiction anthology *Bawaajigan: Stories of Power*, co-edited with Christine Miskonoodinkwe Smith in 2019, features icons of Indigenous literature like Richard Van Camp and Lee Maracle but also emerging writers of Native speculative fiction such as Gerald Silliker Pisim Maskwa. As the title, *Bawaajigan*, the Anishinaabe word for *dreams*, indicates, this collection explores the transformative power of stories and dreams; as such, the work is representative of Adler's on-going use of dreams as fundamental in shaping the destiny of his characters and confronting the readers to examine their own impressions of reality.

In both his works of horror and Indigenous futurisms, Adler considers the modernity and diversity of Indigenous cultures and spirituality. *Ghost Lake* not only explores the characters' struggles in navigating a racist, misogynistic, and capitalistic postcolonial society, it also celebrates the diversity of their mixed racial, cultural, and sexual identities. Adler brings up several themes quite common in contemporary Native literature – such as intergenerational trauma, loss, and grief – yet treats family tensions, recovery, and various avenues for healing in a truly endearing way that invites an empathetic response, without any compromise on the spooky, the gore, or the grisly that we expect from a work of horror.

Chapters in *Ghost Lake* are built on a succession of shifts in focalization and types of narrators. The novel opens with Garion, a third-person omniscient narrator who brings the reader with him thanks to a well-executed back and forth between direct and indirect discourses and internal focalization. The stream of consciousness is a stylistic tool that Adler reuses throughout, but the style of discourse adapts to each alternating narrator in fascinating detail. Aanzheyaawin is another third-person omniscient narrator, yet the vocabulary and syntax are beautifully adapted to fit her personality and point of view. Zaude and Fanon take turns giving their internal perspective on the events, one installed as a non-omniscient I-narrator, the other written in an uninterrupted stream of consciousness, pushing the reader closer to the characters with each change of narrator. In a delightful twist, Kylie, Issa, Tolton, or Cadence, previously seen as secondary characters in the various interrelated

storylines, later get their own chapter as protagonists, and with it their own distinctive focalization and perspective. References they make to the events are not always enough to quickly identify the teenagers, and the switches might push an inexperienced reader to flip through previous chapters to verify whose thoughts they are given access to in each new chapter, but the confusion is more enthralling than alienating. *Ghost Lake* is a mystery, after all.

Ghost Lake explores the challenges of navigating intergenerational trauma, cultural identity, and personal healing in a contemporary Indigenous context. Following Anishinaabe cosmology of thirteen moons, the thirteen chapters are organized around complex and multi-dimensional characters at different stages of life. Despite their respective vocabulary, perspective, and references, they are still diverse. Aanzheyaawin and Zaude both mourn the death of a sibling, but one is consumed by her desire for revenge while the other investigates mysterious clues. Fanon and Kyle both face hostile natural catastrophes, yet their respective struggles might have more to do with angry spirits than just bad weather... They all share a common propensity for doubt, constantly questioning their sanity. Adler expertly disguises the past with the present and blurs colonial understandings of imagination versus reality, pushing his characters and his readers to interrogate their instincts. When the characters question their visions to the point of self-diagnosing mental illnesses, the reader has to examine their own propensity for logical fallacy.

The abundance of references to nature and cosmology keeps the characters' debates on superstition in the realm of the possibility for the sublime. Confronting our current postcolonial reality with other understandings of time, *Ghost Lake* hints at examining the simplistic associations between Indigenous epistemologies and nature we continue to see in literature. Following Anishinaabe conceptions of chronology, Adler presents us with cycles of life built on centuries of memories. The characters keep returning to the lake, because the lake remembers, and nothing is lost nor destroyed, but simply transformed or transferred. Frequent references to spiders and butterflies serve as culturally appropriate allegories for cycles and continuation, but it is important to notice that it is the characters who make these associations: they, themselves, are not reduced to creatures of nature. Adler's detailed, vivid descriptions of the natural landscape of northern Ontario surely advertise the beauty of the land and anchor the characters in the physical realm. This should not be misconstrued as romanticization: *Ghost Lake* and its characters are definitely contemporary and embody the multiplicities of today's Indigenous communities, including urban and disconnected Natives. After all, the spirits of the lake do not enforce a hierarchy based on language proficiency or cultural practices: they recognize all the characters as Anishinaabe and will continue to haunt them until they find a way to make amends.

The carefully crafted chronological structure of the chapters could have been confusing or complicated, were it not so perfectly orchestrated, with every detail falling in place when we least expect it. The multi-faceted layers of reality combine, separate, or expand from one chapter to another. No matter how attentive the reader is in spotting the references, they always come unexpectedly, like delicate but bright flowers peeking through snow, creating a sense of wonder more than surprise. Adler plays with repetitions and accumulations, interlocking explicit figures of style like ediploses and anadiploses into a web of references which tie the multiple perspectives into a studded concatenation of points-of-view. He skillfully weaves anaphora with epistrophe in each new chapter to anchor the specific speech of the character serving as a narrator for a section, then surprises us with various symplotes sprinkled throughout the whole novel to link the sections together and bring the various characters together on yet another level, this time linguistically and syntactically.

If the nuanced yet endearing characters are not enough to convince horror aficionados to dive into this unsettling weave of spooky secrets, the combination of Adler's evocative prose and his expert level of stylistic craft should do the trick. *Ghost Lake* is a jewel example of both the booming genres of Native horror and Indigenous futurism, and it deserves its spot in bright sunlight as what Cherokee writer and scholar Daniel Heath Justice defines as Indigenous wonderworks, or stories rooted in Indigenous epistemologies, offering a new space for other meaningful ways of experiencing our and other worlds "through lived encounter and engagement, through ceremony and ritual, through dream" (Justice 152).

Léna Remy-Kovach, *University of Freiburg*

Works Cited:

Justice, Daniel Heath. *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*. Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2018.