
McGlennen, Molly. *Creative Alliances: The Transnational Designs of Indigenous Women's Poetry*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2014. 230 pp.

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In *Creative Alliances: The Transnational Designs of Indigenous Women's Poetry*, McGlennen takes the much-welcomed approach of foregrounding gender and genre in the field of Native American and Indigenous Studies. Best of all, she engages this task as a poet collaborating with the voices of other Indigenous women poets and is deliberate in her choice to take on a “poet-critic lens” in order to “forward more inclusive analytical models so to stave off the anthropologization and ownership that has often framed the work of Indigenous writers” (23). In doing so, McGlennen creates a narrative around the importance of poetry in the everyday of poets whose crafts form alliances throughout Indian Country and often beyond in transnational circles. While the poets she primarily addresses are U.S.-based, she does account for the ways poetic words see beyond nation-state borders, as well as tribal jurisdictions, to make connections with other Indigenous peoples. For McGlennen, poetry works in the service of alliance making between Indigenous peoples and fosters what she refers to as a generative process of pushing boundaries, adjusting margins, and decolonizing colonially-informed knowledge of the spatial and temporal. In her book, McGlennen states that poetry is a “mediating mechanism” between various communities (38) that carries “transformative properties” to see beyond colonial structures that create divisiveness (63), as the “form’s mobilizing and politicizing capacity” (46) is key to resistance. By focusing on Indigenous women’s poetic collaborations, the author also emphasizes how the collaborative nature of poetry enables a “revision of politics” and “transfer and continuance” of Indigenous lifeways. Poetry makes clear, according to McGlennen, that these lifeways are living and do so within and beyond boundaries of the reservation, a point especially made in her examination of “Home Girls” (120) Luci Tapahonso and Kimberly Blaeser. All in all, McGlennen is consistent with her rightly justified emphasis on the importance of creativity and poetry’s ability as a genre to build alliances.

In six chapters, McGlennen speaks to the various places that creative alliances occur and communities are built. In her first chapter, she sets out the relationship between gender and the genre of poetry, focusing primarily on poets’ work that has addressed various aspects of gender’s influence on the everyday. Yet, engagement with the burgeoning field of Indigenous feminism or the inclusion of examinations of gendered colonialism would help to flesh out her arguments and many of the excellent points she makes. While the author, for instance, takes on western science and its “misogynistic undercurrents that stimulate” it, she does not address the array of feminist work in Indigenous studies on this matter. The specific and important work of Indigenous feminist scholars, such as Kim Tallbear, Aileen Moreton-Robinson, J. Kehaulani Kauanui, Sandy Grande, and Maile Arvin, who have examined the discourse of science and effects on nation-building and its gendered forms, would be incredibly beneficial to her argument. This move to include Indigenous feminist scholars inside and outside of Native poets and literary scholarship would support her as she moves out into the specifics of how poetry upsets spatial and temporal logics in her next chapters.

Poetry as “alternative documentation” to colonial writings that erase Indigenous presence in traditional territories and urban settings becomes the subject of Chapter 2, where McGlennen examines Esther Belin and Allison Adelle Hedge Coke’s poetry as a form of knowledge

production. Her examination of the Earthworks site and insight she provides through interviews of the poets is especially illuminating in regards to poetry and the complexity of Native places, as well as relationships to those places through time. Are all processes of making place the same, however? What does the shift from a historic site to an urban site tell us about the varying ways that Native people process place? At times in the book, the quick jumping from different kinds of places from poem to poem or poet to poet left the reader with more questions. At one point, the author speaks to the ways that urban poets “reclaim these territories as Indigenous homelands because of the forms mobilizing and politicizing capacity.” Yet, she does not continue down a path to question what it means that LA and Oakland already and always have had an Indigenous presence of Ohlone, Tongva, Tataviam and other tribal nations complete with expansive trade routes, artistry, and relationships with those who came west with the development of US industrialized cities. This is an important point, and an ethical one, that Belin makes clear in her poetry. McGlennen does, however, upset the urban as a place of force, or dislocation, and loss. She positions poetry and spoken word circles in urban contexts as an assembly of various tribes that “rekindle centuries old systems” that become more than an act of making a “surrogate nation” (52).

McGlennen affirms poetry’s ability to unravel colonial discourses through language that is situated in tribal epistemologies and also its ability to move out from the center or, in her words and title of chapter three, poetry’s ability to “adjust the margins.” I very much appreciated this intervention in her examination of several poets that employ the genre in order to mend the rifts of “limited points of access and spiritual disconnects” (153) caused by colonialism’s on-going effects.

In chapter four, she extends an analysis of the politics of enrollment and blood quantum by exploring Luci Tapahonso and Kimberly Blaeser’s poetry on migration and cross tribal alliance work. This analysis provides a substantial critique of literary nationalism, while not dismissing the crucial work it has accomplished (106), by examining the genre of poetry as “collaboration and celebration of influence” (109). Particularly useful in the approach to privileging poets’ voices, is McGlennen’s use of amendments, that is poems that return to earlier poems and address similar topics, themes, or issues that are on-going but have changed either through politics, awareness, or in the personal lives of the poets themselves. Looking at over thirty years of a poet’s collective work, especially in light of tribal citizenship, has many benefits that could be explored even further in future work. I appreciate this idea and its unfixeness of the knowledge production, particularly in the case where she speaks of the effects of discourses of racial purity. This move is emblematic of the thoughtfulness I associate with Indigenous feminisms. You must return to ideas and revisit in order to, as McGlennen puts it, “chart new directions” forward. I do wish, however, more attention was paid to historical context in these moments as the poets are also reflecting with others around them. For instance, Indigenous women’s interactions with women of color poets influenced these early moments of poetry alliances. This moment also resulted from the need to make room for non-patriarchal and non-racist forms of knowledge production, as Lisa Hall’s Indigenous feminist work makes evident, in both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous communities.

In chapter five, McGlennen examines poets who engage a “land ethics” that is collaborative and a genre that promotes “streamlined methodologies that only a reliance on shared Indigenous

antecedents can bring about” (130). Here she contends that elements of poetry perform the reparative task of thinking through the fragmentation caused by imposed gender and racial hierarchies resulting from Western science. This task, however, requires the collaboration and listening that the genre of poetry demands and McGlennen compellingly asks that we take this seriously for survival and growth of Native communities.

To end her chapters, McGlennen takes up poetry as a gathering place, particularly by examining the space of the anthology, early moments of collaboration, and queer identity. It is a fitting end to examine, in the words of the author, “how one might rethink boundaries as a means to understand *what brings people together* across colonial, tribal, and hemispheric divides—and not just what separates them” (183). The repositioning of the question above to emphasize the creative rather than loss or colonial destruction is representative of the consistent positive relation the author has to poetry and critique. She has definitely written a text where the warmth and sustenance that stems from poetry’s creative alliances shines through colonial quagmires.

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