

Tillett, Rebecca. *Otherwise, Revolution!: Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2018. 208 pp. ISBN: 9781623567873.

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Due to the inherent challenges posed by such a project, there is a small list of monographs devoted exclusively to the examination of one singular work of fiction. Jane Hafen's *Reading Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine* and Robert M. Nelson's *Leslie Marmon Silko's Ceremony: The Recovery of Tradition* are two examples of such works in the context of Native American literature. We can now add Rebecca Tillett's book, *Otherwise, Revolution!: Leslie Marmon Silko's Almanac of the Dead* to the list. Tackling Silko's 1990 novel, once described by Joy Harjo as "an exploded version" of *Ceremony*, is no easy feat (Tillett 7). The novel centers on people living on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border – smugglers, drug dealers, politicians, and police officers, to identify some – on the precipice of the revolution foretold in the titular almanac. Its international scope, fragmented structure, and brutal depictions of racial and sexual violence have long made the novel a difficult read, as the initial reviews excerpted in Tillett's book illustrate. Responding specifically to Sven Birkerts, whom the author quotes to indicate the type of unfavorable reviews *Almanac* received upon publication, Tillett argues that while the book may have been belittled as "nothing less than a paper apocalypse" at first, it has become increasingly relevant following Donald Trump's presidential election win in 2016 (Tillett 6). *Otherwise, Revolution!* thoughtfully examines how Silko's novel contests the neoliberal world that first inspired it as well as the rise of authoritarian regimes in 2018.

Despite these real-world – or what the author terms "extra-textual" – connections, Tillett argues that *Almanac* avoids despairing for the current state of the world or our prospects for the future. Rather, it continually forges a sense of hope through its emphasis on our responsibility to one another, drawing on Glen Coulthard's notion of "grounded normativity." Quoting Coulthard, Tillett defines "grounded normativity" as a conceptual framework where "'our ethical engagements with the world and our relationships with human and nonhuman others' are both 'inform[ed] and structure[d]' by 'the modalities of Indigenous land-connected practices and long-standing experiential knowledge'" (16-7). In other words, at its root, *Otherwise, Revolution!* follows a growing trend prioritizing and promoting Indigenous practices and knowledges in a field, Literary Studies, that has historically neglected them. *Almanac* itself speaks directly to the importance of "land-connected practices" when one of its main characters, Zeta, who smuggles people and weaponry across the border, thinks to herself that "There was not, and there never had been, a legal government by Europeans anywhere in the Americas... Because no legal government could be established on stolen land" (Silko 133). Here, Zeta questions (as many characters in the novel do) the nature of personal relationships based on national identity, especially when these nations are the result of genocide and theft.

But Tillett's analysis exceeds the scope of violent uprising that is implied in Zeta's thoughts and expertly unpacked by previous scholars like Channette Romero and Elizabeth Ammons. The revolution that Tillett promotes as central to Silko's concept of worldwide change pertains to ideology. In each section of Part 1, "Oppression and Dispossession," Tillett tackles various aspects of settler colonialist ideology that we must overcome before any worldwide movement –

the one of Silko's novel or recent examples like *Idle No More*, *Standing Rock*, or the Arab Spring of 2010 – can succeed. Chapter 2, for instance, explores the analogy between vampires and capitalists in that both have become something other-than-human. Tillett explains, “*Almanac*'s capitalists must eliminate the human; they must, like the vampire, become inhuman” (35). Only in this greedy consumption reminiscent of vampires, as well as the dehumanization of the human into labor (or food upon which the system feeds), can capitalism persist. Tillett argues that Silko's *Almanac* shows us that we must shift our focus from a system based on exploitation to one based on obligation: “The correct relationship between humans and Earth, then, is one of mutual respect, support and obligation: a living with and for the land that engages directly with the workings and epistemologies of Indigenous cosmologies and cosmopolitics” (Tillett 28). Chapter 3 extends the book's critique of capitalism to patriarchal violence in a way that is worthwhile for scholars and students of Literature and Gender Studies alike. She writes, “patriarchal power is established and consolidated via the construction of gendered and sexualized hierarchies,” up to and including the feminization of the Earth, a tactic that allows its exploitation and ruin (63). In Chapter 4, the final chapter of this section, Tillett illustrates how these ideologies permeate the intellectual discourse under the guise of objective knowledge: “scientific and academic discourses are put to use as tools for oppression, acting – both consciously and unconsciously – to support and facilitate misogyny and racial and social discrimination in the wider societies governed by vampire capitalism and homosocial patriarchy” (91). These discourses, she explains, have historically objectified and belittled the cultures and practices of marginalized communities, contributing to the racist and misogynistic narrative of settler colonialism that first compelled Silko to compose the novel.

In addition to her succinct examination of how scientific and academic discourses are deployed to perpetuate oppression, Tillett departs from the majority of scholarship on *Almanac* in her focus on the novel's portrayal of ecological resistance. Ecological resistance forms the foundation of the book's emphasis on hope in Part 2. Citing sources as varied as Angelita La Escapia's indigenization of Karl Marx's methodology in her revolution efforts to the elusive figure of Geronimo – who, Tillett explains, “continues to represent the outlaw and that which is outlawed [as well as] an embodiment of the very concept of Indigenous resistance and *Revolucion*” – Tillett argues that the possibility of a better future hinges predominantly on the promotion and practice of Indigenous worldviews (147). In particular, Tillett points to the *Idle No More* movement in Canada as exemplary in its focus on Indigenous sovereignty and an Earth-centric approach. Stemming from her ecofeminist framework, Tillett expands the scope of ecological resistance in Silko's book to include human and non-human agents alike, representative of Indigenous methodologies of resistance and care. That last word, “care,” is especially important, as Tillett shows in her examination of the militant group *Green Vengeance*, whom she criticizes for replicating “patriarchal capitalist paradigms” instead of fully challenging them in the novel (139). *Otherwise, Revolution!* thus shows *Almanac*'s increased relevance not only to scholars in the Environmental Humanities but to students and readers more generally as we face our own climate challenges and concerns in the twenty-first century. In no small way, as well, *Otherwise, Revolution!* shows the value of the humanities to answer pressing questions about racism, misogyny, and ecological catastrophe at a cultural moment when such humanistic (and humane) approaches are often questioned, dismissed, or outright attacked.

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