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## Making the Leap: César Vallejo and the Early Poetry of Ralph Salisbury

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Ralph J. Salisbury (1926-2017), a Cherokee-Shawnee-English-Irish-American poet publishing since the 1950s, has all but been ignored by most literary critics.<sup>1</sup> Born in the middle of the residential boarding school push for assimilation in what is now the United States of America (US), Salisbury grew up on a Depression-era Iowa farm and yet still managed to complete an MFA at the University of Iowa working with Robert Lowell.<sup>2</sup> While one might assume that Salisbury would follow in the formal footsteps of his mentor, he did not or, at least, not exactly. By the early 1960s, Salisbury began writing about his background, not just his "personal story and memories," as Lowell would do in *Life Studies* (Axelrod 107, quoting Lowell), but also his Cherokee heritage, including using transliterated ᎠᎯᏍᎩᏍᎩᏍᎩ<sup>3</sup> in his poetry, thereby making an early break from monolingualism in Native American publishing. Yet, neither his name nor work appears in Kenneth Lincoln's influential *Native American Renaissance* (1983) alongside N. Scott Momaday, James Welch, Simon Ortiz, Joseph Bruchac, Leslie Silko, and others younger than him. This oversight is highly problematic, as Salisbury represents an essential part of the history of Indigenous literatures, especially in regards to poetry among Native Nations in the US. Specifically, Salisbury did not find inspiration solely in ethnographies, but rather turned to his own life, as well as other subjects and literary traditions like that of César Vallejo (Galician / Chimú). Robert Bly—fellow poet and sometime translator of Vallejo—associates this Peruvian's work almost exclusively with the Spanish surrealists, but Salisbury also read Vallejo in the original (as Vallejo intended). As a result, while Salisbury's poetry does incorporate "leaping" and some of the other traits ascribed to Vallejo's work by Bly, I argue that Salisbury draws

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additional inspiration from Vallejo, who was interested early on in what he called "'indigenist will' and 'indigenous sensibility'" (Mulligan xxvii, quoting Vallejo). As such, like Vallejo before him, Salisbury goes beyond the "parlor games" of the surrealists to answer the call made by Vallejo for "revolutionary writers," whose "job [is] to move the world with our weapon:" their pens (Vallejo, ed. Mulligan 202, 498).

In her introduction, Mary Hunter Austin declares *The Path on the Rainbow: An Anthology of Songs and Chants from the Indians of North America* (1918) edited by George W. Cronyn, "the first authoritative volume of aboriginal American verse" (xv). She claims that one "will be struck at once with the extraordinary likeness between much of this native product and the recent work of the Imagists, *vers libristis*,<sup>4</sup> and other literary fashionables" (xvi). However, if Imagists believe that their work is "the first free movement of poetic originality in America," Austin suggests they think again, as the anthology demonstrates that Imagism "finds us just about where the last Medicine Man left off" (xvi). Her findings, of course, should be taken with more than a few grains of salt: the poems in the collection were "translated" by well-known salvage ethnographers, such as Frank Boas, who were probably merely mimicking the artists of the time. One example is Pulitzer Prize recipient Carl Sandburg, whose own poetry tended toward free verse, included the occasional Imagist work, and who also contributed a "translation" to Cronyn's project. Yet, as much as one might wish to dismiss the collection outright, *The Path on the Rainbow* sheds light on the literary history of Indigenous poetry and continues to exert influence.<sup>5</sup>

Appearing in the midst of US literary Modernism just as the country was about to enter another period of political isolation in the aftermath of World War I, Cronyn's collection serves a particular and peculiar xenophobic agenda, as Austin's introduction – seeming disdain for the Imagists aside – makes clear. According to Austin, since "[t]he poetic faculty is, of all man's modes, the most responsive to natural

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environments,"

[i]t is the first to register the rise of his spirits to the stimulus of new national ideals. If this were not so there would be no such thing as nationality in art, and it is only by establishing some continuity with the earliest instances of such reaction that we can be at all sure that American poetic genius has struck its native note. (xvi-xvii)

Cronyn's collection, on one hand, suggested that the US did not need to look to Europe or elsewhere for artistic inspiration, as there was plenty "American poetic genius" to be found on native ground. On the other, the anthology was compiled during a time when many in the US supported the growing eugenics movement, and the government was systemically removing tens of thousands of Indigenous children from their communities by force.<sup>6</sup> These children were then held in residential boarding schools guided by the ideology of "[k]ill the Indian in him, and save the man," which frequently resulted in literal death (King 110-111). Consequently, the works found within *The Path on the Rainbow* provide a "natural," romanticized (and cleansed) useable past free from the "last Medicine Man" that the settler colonialists of the US could take and make their own.<sup>7</sup> The fact that these oral histories and songs were committed to the page in English, creating a fixed version that further helped erase Indigenous languages, only adds credence to this assertion.

But, if one were to set aside the historical context of the anthology and adopt Austin's literary analysis, considering the purported importance of *The Path on the Rainbow*, one might be tempted to read Salisbury's work in light of Ezra Pound, among the most recognizable practitioners of the short-lived Imagist movement. However, Salisbury's free verse is not primarily influenced by Imagism's objectivism, which aims, as Charles Olson explains in "Projective Verse," to get "rid of the lyrical interference of the individual as ego, of the 'subject' and his soul, that peculiar presumption by which

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western man has interposed himself between what he is as a creature of nature [...] and those other creations of nature which we may, with no derogation, call objects" (24). As I will show, Salisbury's early verse does not distance itself from the subjective or other characteristics often associated with the lyric.

As it so happens, doing away with the "I"—the subject, the soul, the lyrical interference—is just one of many issues that Robert Bly takes with early twentieth century poetry, which he declares to be "without spiritual life" ("A Wrong Turning" 22). But, Bly does not stop with "Imagism" or, as he calls it, "Picturism" ("A Wrong Turning" 26). He argues that later poets, even those who use "I," have created an impersonal speaker where the "poem is conceived as a clock which one sets going," resulting in poets who "construct automated and flawless machines" (Bly, "A Wrong Turning" 23). One of the leading offenders, for Bly, is none other than Robert Lowell ("A Wrong Turning" 24). Pulitzer Prize or not, unlike the verses found in Lowell's *Lord Weary's Castle* (1946), according to Bly, the greatest poetry must turn inward not just outward, but not *too* inward, otherwise it becomes what he calls "hysterical," as seen in Lowell's *Life Studies* (Bly, "A Wrong Turning" 29). It must contain images that engage the physical senses, explore both the conscious or unconscious mind, and not be afraid to embrace revolutionary feeling, whether in "language or politics" (Bly, "A Wrong Turning" 24-33). Among the poets capable of this true poetry: César Vallejo.

Born in Santiago de Chuco, César Vallejo's mother and father were the result of sexual interactions between Galician priests and their Chimú "concubine[s]," "placing [him] in a typical context of mestizaje in the Andes" (Mulligan xviii). However, "typical" doesn't quite capture all of the connotations that "mestizaje" carried during Vallejo's lifetime (1892-1938). While Indigenous peoples of the US were being subjected to Brigadier General Richard Pratt's solution to "the Indian Problem" and worse, Indigenous peoples in Central and South America also faced familiar stereotypes,

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oppression, slavery, the remnants of an elaborate sistema de castas, and attempts at systemic assimilation as various ideologies of indigenismo took shape.<sup>8</sup> Despite his poor background—both in terms of his social and economic status—Vallejo eventually earned a "*licenciatura*"<sup>9</sup> in philosophy and letters at La Universidad de la Libertad with his thesis 'Romanticism in Castilian Poetry'" (Mulligan xx, italics in the original), which is significant not only in terms of his own verse, but also because formal education was one of the few ways to raise one's status regardless of one's lineage.<sup>10</sup> Shortly thereafter, Vallejo published his first collection of poetry, *Los Heraldos Negros* (1919), quickly followed by his second, *Trilce* (1922).<sup>11</sup> Bly would translate excerpts from these and other works by Vallejo by the early 1960s and hold the Peruvian up as exemplary of the poetry he hoped to see in the US. According to Bly, "Vallejo is not a poet of the partially authentic feeling, as most poets in the English tradition are, but a poet of the absolutely authentic" (*Neruda & Vallejo* 169). Vallejo was filled with "tremendous feeling," yet "[h]is wildness and savagery exist side by side with [a tenderness] [...] and a clear intuition into his own inward directions. He sees roads inside himself" (Bly, *Neruda & Vallejo* 169). Even though, by twenty-first century standards, Bly merely reinforces of the stereotypes of Latin Americans as *deeply* passionate and the Romantic vision of Indigenous peoples as "Noble Savages," Bly would emphasize this reading of Vallejo time and again.

Bly continued to construct his vision of Vallejo by asserting that Vallejo's work was "an extension of the substance of the man, no different from his skin or his hands" (Bly, "A Wrong Turning" 24); as such, there wasn't a speaker or persona, just the poet. Bly further declared that Vallejo's work embraced Spanish surrealism based on what he described as "leaping," a term to explain the juxtaposition of images—usually between the conscious and unconscious. For Bly, "[p]owerful feeling makes the mind associate faster, and evidently the presence of swift association makes the emotions still more

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alive" (Bly, *Leaping* 28). Moreover, unlike the French, Spanish surrealists believed that the unconscious did have emotions. Consequently, "[t]he poet enters the poem excited, with the emotions alive; he is angry or ecstatic, or disgusted. There are a lot of exclamation marks, visible or invisible" (Bly, *Leaping* 28). In Bly's eyes, Vallejo exemplified these highly desirable characteristics: he embraced a subjective "I," had mastered the skill of making rapid and wild associations between disparate images and ideas, as well as tied them to intense feeling. To emphasize this point further, Bly selected poems by Vallejo to translate that seemingly support these exact claims right down to an excessive number of exclamation marks.<sup>12</sup>

As it so happened, in December 1915, more or less contemporaneous with his university thesis *El Romanticismo en la Poesía Castellana* (c. 1915), Vallejo published "Aldeana" in *La Reforma*,<sup>13</sup> which has been identified not only as the earliest poem contained in *Los Heraldes Negros*, but also, according to Alcides Spelucín, as the first poem in which Vallejo's own style and voice emerge (Ferrari, quoting Spelucín, 118 n. 32). Although overlooked by both Bly and Mulligan in their selected writings, Clayton Eshleman includes "Aldeana" in his *The Complete Poetry: A Bilingual Edition*. Eshleman translates the "Village Scene," beginning: "The distant vibration of melancholy cowbells / pours the rural / fragrance of their anguish into the air" (Vallejo, *The Complete Poetry: A Bilingual Edition* lines 1-3).<sup>14</sup> Immediately, one is struck by an image that invokes the senses, while also juxtaposing the concrete with the abstract, as literal "cowbells" may produce sound, but they are unlikely to spread the smell of an agrarian landscape. Even if one were to read this figuratively with a "cowbell" serving as a synecdoche for an animal, "anguish" is not generally associated with a single recognizable scent. These images, to use Bly's word, continue to leap from the air to the sun to a house, barn, and garden, settling on the penultimate image:

Languidly through

the decrepit village  
 rends a guitar's sweet yaraví  
 in whose eternity of deep affliction  
 the sad voice of an Indian dronedongs  
 like a big, old cemetery bell. (Vallejo, "Village Scene" lines 22-27)<sup>15</sup>

In English, the stanza reads as a lament for an Indigenous village that no longer exists. However, some things seem discordant. One word isn't translated: "yaraví," which Eshleman explains is "[a] song in which indigenous and Spanish melodic elements have been fused. The word is a hybrid in tonality as well as spirit and appears to derive from the Incan *harawi*, which was adapted for religious hymns from the time of the conquest until the eighteenth century" (622, italics in original). In other words, it cannot be translated, as there isn't an equivalent in English (or any other language for that matter). But Vallejo's work doesn't stop with a single Quechuan (or Quechuan-derived) word. "Aldeana" also includes the word "dondonea" translated as "dronedongs," which certainly strikes an odd note. Eshelman appears to have meant the neologism as an onomatopoeic word to continue the motif of bells that appears throughout the translation that is fused with "the sound of the Indian's voice" (622-623).<sup>16</sup> However, one might also see it as a play on *dodonea viscosa*, a medicinal plant in Quechua-speaking communities often used to create a poultice or as a covering to treat traumas and other ailments (Gonzales de la Cruz, M., et al. 9). Whatever it signifies, it appears immediately after "un indio." As such, the poem invokes Indigenous peoples, mestizajes / mestizos, and their cultures, which are at the heart of the racial tension in Perú.

The actual speaker of the lyric doesn't appear until the final stanza in which they look out over the scene:

My elbows on the wall,

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while a dark stain triumphs in the soul  
 and the wind sheds in motionless branches  
 tears of timid, uncertain quenas,  
 I sigh a torment,  
 on seeing how in the golden red penumbra  
 a tragic blue of dead idylls weeps! (lines 28-34)<sup>17</sup>

As suggested by the tone from the beginning, the speaker finds no joy in the apparent loss of this ancient village.<sup>18</sup> The speaker describes "angustias" ("agonies"), "gris doliente" ("aching gray"), "pena" ("pain"), and other words connoting similar emotions in nearly every stanza. Moreover, the speaker sighs "una congoja," translated as "torment," but "congoja" can also mean "grief" or "anguish," as the still boughs carry sounds of "timid, uncertain quenas" (Eshleman 31). "Quenas" are Quechuan flutes,<sup>19</sup> which, in the poem, are described as careful and hesitant about whether they should sound loudly so as to be heard. While the metaphorical quenas play throughout the (at least partially eclipsed) village, the "I" also seems to find their voice, as they exhale, then speak. Translated, "I" seems to be grieving the lost village. However, far from being the "last" of something,<sup>20</sup> through this depiction of what is likely an Andean village, the use of languages other than Castilian Spanish, and the inclusion of pervasive spiritual discomfort throughout, the poem attempts to move the reader to see this highland world differently, because the place and Indigenous peoples are still there. As such, "Aldeana" might also be read as playing with the death of "idilios," romantic, idealized, pastoral poems.<sup>21</sup>

Similar topics, tones, and terms are found elsewhere in *Los Heraldos Negros*, such as "Terceto Autóctono"—a series of three Spanish sonnets consisting of two quatrains and two terza rima tercets, a variant of the more common forms—initially titled "[De 'Fiestas Aldeanas']"<sup>22</sup> when it, too, was published in *La Reforma*, this time

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appearing in 1916 (Ferrari 63). As in "Aldeana," the poems are focused on laborers, shepherdesses, and others who are described as "el indio" or "indígenas"<sup>23</sup> individuals perceived by nearly all in Perú—at the time of publication—as being of a lower station, which is signaled by the work that the individuals are undertaking in this poem. Moreover, as in the aforementioned lyric, Vallejo includes more yaraví, quenas,<sup>24</sup> as well as "una caja de Tayanga, / como iniciando un huaino azul," while "el río anda borracho y canta y llora / prehistorias de agua, tiempos viejos."<sup>25</sup> Whether it is the river remembering old times or the Indigenous peoples of the highlands celebrating with Quechuan instruments and dance, even if his poetry does jump from image to image, Vallejo found his own version of native ground through his "indigenist will" and "indigenous sensibility," which he explicitly declares with the title change, even though as Vallejo explains "[a]utochthony does not consist in saying that one is autochthonous but precisely in being so, even when not saying so" (Mulligan xxvii, quoting Vallejo). "Autochthonous" is a word that also doesn't have an exact translation, but "Indigenous" is arguably the closest.<sup>26</sup> As such, he creates a new literature with depth rather than superficial mimicry, which he saw as dominating the Spanish-American literature of the time.<sup>27</sup>

In fact, *Los Heraldos Negros* is considered a "forerunner of literary indigenism," and "received a warm reception for its originality of style and thematic treatments of rural Peruvian life" (Mulligan xxii). Later works, including his various articles on the Inca, as well as *Hacia el Reino de los Sciris* (1924-1928), demonstrate similar thematic concerns.<sup>28</sup> While still a matter of debate among some critics, As José Miguel Oviedo asserts in his introduction to *Los Heraldos Negros*, "[e]l mayor mérito del trabajo es el de ser el único que por entonces hizo referencia al asunto del 'indigenismo' o 'nativismo' de algunos versos del poeta, cuestión que estaba de actualidad en el Perú" (15).<sup>29</sup> However, for those not fluent in Spanish, much is lost either because it isn't

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translated or because it is, thereby erasing the nuance of the language and its various connotations, making a fuller understanding of Vallejo difficult.<sup>30</sup>

Vallejo actually anticipated this issue, declaring: "Pero si a un poema se le amputa un verso, una palabra, una letra, una signo ortográfico, muere. Como el poema, al ser traducido, no pueda conservar su absoluta y viviente integridad, él debe ser leído en su lengua de origen, y esto, naturalmente, limita, por ahora, la universalidad de su emoción" (Vallejo, *El Arte y La Revolución* 62). Ironically, Mulligan, one of many who completely ignored the sonnet forms of "Terceto Autóctono," translates this passage: "But if from a poem one amputates a verse, a word, a letter, a punctuation mark, it dies. *Since the poem, when translated, cannot preserve its absolute vital integrity, it should be read in its original language, and naturally this limits, for now, the universality of its emotion*" (Mulligan 200, emphasis added). However, in his autobiography *So Far So Good* (2013), Ralph Salisbury notes that he "studied Spanish in college and ha[d] memorized poems by Federico Garc[í]a Lorca, C[é]sar Vallejo, and Octavio Paz" (215). Bly and others have repeatedly ignored Vallejo's words. Salisbury did not; he read Vallejo in the original and what Salisbury found there would go on to influence his own writing (Salisbury, *So Far So Good* 230).

Although not published in a collection until *Going to the Water: Poems of a Cherokee Heritage* (1983), Ralph Salisbury began writing about his Indigenous background at least twenty years earlier in "In the Children's Museum in Nashville," which first appeared in *The New Yorker* on 22 April 1961.<sup>31</sup> The speaker of the poem takes his sons to the place named in the title, providing a tour from a different perspective. The poem opens with "rattlesnakes coil, / protected by glass and by placards warning that if teased / they might just dash their brains against apparent air (Salisbury *Lights from a Bullet Hole* lines 1-3). As with all museums, they are filled with curated exhibits and, in the case of those of the "natural history" variety, the objects—

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even if dangerous, terrifying, or rarely seen in actual life—are preserved, tagged, boxed and put safely on display, as they are dead specimens like these rattlesnakes. However, the suggestion of a threat—a rattlesnake striking—though imaginary sets the tone and carries throughout the work, particularly as the next lines declares: "Negros are advised that, if notified in advance, / the Children's Museum in Nashville will take care of them / on certain days" (lines 4-6). Although the Black Civil Rights Movement had been underway since at least 1955, Jim Crow was alive and well in many if not most places in the US, including Tennessee. Consequently, these lines are a statement letting Black families know that accommodations can be made to allow them to visit as patrons, even under Jim Crow. But, for white visitors, the image of the rattlesnake is juxtaposed with that of "Negroes," drawing attention to the racist notion that there is some inherent, lurking danger if the constructed barriers separating the people should fail. However, the lines also carry an ominous message for anyone of African descent, as the Museum "will take care of them / on certain days," the implications of which only become clearer as the lyrical tour continues.

As it happens, "heads of bison," a staple of the Indigenous peoples of the Plains, which were nearly eradicated as a result of settlers and "Manifest Destiny," along with an "eland / (from Africa)" are also on display (lines 10-11). However, the parade of the dead doesn't stop with animals, it also includes "shrunken Jivaro noggins" (line 16). The Shuar ("Jivaro" was the name given to them by Spanish conquistadores), coincidentally or not, are Indigenous peoples, some of whom live in the Andes in what is now Ecuador and Perú. Each new exhibit documents the results of colonialism. Turning away from the human heads, the poem notes animal skeletons and that "[o]n Sundays, children are allowed to look / at electric stars" (lines 19-20). However, one child is always there:

Seen every day is an Indian

child—cured by chance, the signs say  
 in a dry, airless place—still possessed  
 of parchment skin, thought eyeless, and still dressed  
 in ceremonial regalia  
 that celebrates his remove to a better world. (lines 20-25)

While grotesque to say the least, dioramas of Indigenous peoples were (are) not uncommon in the US. Anthropologist Alfred Kroeber captured "Ishi," a Yahi man, and put him on display at University of California Berkeley until "Ishi's" death in 1916; the Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology "still cares for the objects he made during his residency," refusing to acknowledge that he wasn't living there by choice.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, as Robert Lowell's "At the Indian Killer's Grave" found in *Lord Weary's Castle* makes clear, putting Indigenous peoples' heads on display has a long history in the US, as he memorializes King Philip's War (c. 1675-1676), describing how "Philip's head / Grins on the platter" (lines 38-39).

As such, Salisbury's poem not only draws attention to this horrific practice, but also permits the reader to view this tableau through the eyes of individuals of Cherokee descent—actual, living Indigenous people. Moreover, his play with words and images jabs at US policies, such as boarding schools, to "solve the Indian problem." Here is a child who was "cured by chance:" "cured" as in "preserved," as well as "cured" of his Indigenous ways, although this was only accomplished through death. Yet, in death, the child is doing what would not have been allowed in life: he is dressed "in ceremonial regalia," albeit for the entertainment of a predominantly white audience (the museum is segregated after all). But, the speaker describes the donning of regalia as celebratory, as the child has moved on "to a better world," free from the actual dangers that he faced from places like the Museum (Salisbury, *Light from a Bullet Hole* line 25).

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Although it appears in a collection more than twenty years after its initial publication, "In the Children's Museum in Nashville" suggests that Salisbury, like Vallejo, began exploring what it mean to be Indigenous in his contemporary society early on and was not afraid to make politically conscious art in an attempt to disrupt the status quo. Salisbury's first book-length work, *Ghost Grapefruit and Other Poems* (1972), however, does not appear at first glance to have the same "indigenous sensibility" to use Mulligan's phrase for Vallejo. The influences of "canonical" poems presumably encountered at some point in Salisbury's education and Vallejo do leave their mark though. Salisbury includes "After Whitman's: 'There Was a Child Went Forth'" (obviously referring to Walt) and "Beyond the Road Taken" (a more indirect allusion to Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken"). With each of these poems, Salisbury invokes the original and then challenges it in various ways in terms of style, form, and content. In a letter to Mona van Duyn dated 4 September 1964 referring to another poem, this time drawing on Percy Bysshe Shelley's "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty," Salisbury asserts: "though I imitate and relate, I do not echo."<sup>33</sup> He considered that poem a "disputation" with Shelley. His debates with the major (white) figures of poetry continue, in *Ghost Grapefruit*, as seen in "Boyhood Incident Recollected in Tranquility."<sup>34</sup>

In what is often considered a turning point in western literary history, in *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1800), Wordsworth envisions a new "I" for lyric poetry. Rather than "the frank, uncovered, tumultuously melodious canto whipped out, the image of emotion" that Vallejo suggests José de Espronceda and his "hermano" Byron embraced (Vallejo, *Selected Writings* 7), Wordsworth contends that while "Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility [...] In this mood successful composition generally begins" (266). He famously calls for an embrace of the "[l]ow and rustic life," and the use of "plainer and

more emphatic language," as it will purportedly make poetry easier to understand and enable it to become more democratic (245).<sup>35</sup> Salisbury's "Boyhood Incident Recollected in Tranquility" clearly alludes to the *Preface* and views nature—that of the world and himself—in his own way.

For the boy in Salisbury's poem, nature is neither tranquil nor safe. Similar to Vallejo, Salisbury ostensibly draws upon visions from the rural areas where he grew up, then proceeds to take these images through a series of quick and twisting associations that transforms their meaning into something larger. Salisbury begins this work by switching the image of "[a] snake with the head and foreflippers of / a frog" to "a frog with enormous snake-stern" (lines 1-3); while neither is "incorrect," the view changes depending upon whether one is looking at it in terms of the head or the tail. The boy is then introduced, "at the brink of Eden," suggesting that he is metaphorically at the Tree of Knowledge about to learn the secrets of good and evil, which presumably comes to pass:

stoned—  
 Stephen-Saint—snake-frog—God  
 in that moment, saw: a halo of red rim  
 stretched jaws, sash black-spreckled-green  
 and whitish middle—  
 human-scientist in that instant verified:  
 murder of fellow fauna two-fold... (lines 4-10)

Very rapidly, the poem moves from "a boy at the brink of Eden stoned—" to "Stephen-Saint," considered the first Catholic martyr who, just before being stoned to death, looked up to see "the glory of God" (Acts 7), and then leaps to "snake-frog—God / in that moment," suggesting that the boy learned of the power to take life and killed the serpent-amphibian in the manner that befell Stephen, since the "halo" that

he sees does not invoke heaven, but the mouth of a serpent. This assertion is "that instant verified" by the boy, now "human-scientist" who investigates what he realizes were just "fellow fauna two-fold," a "murder" that will not yield food for his "empty belly" (lines 10, 12). However, the boy with his newly gained knowledge comprehends that the killing occurred as a result of "ignorance / and monstrous fear of what seemed monstrous" (lines 14-15). Because it isn't simply that he killed the snake-frog, but through language and association, it implies the fear of a beast with two backs, as what he saw was "against / nature, boy-man, man-woman in dread of the / hand's doing," an appetite not driven by the hunger, but generally the insatiable want for more, as the boy

cring[es] from knowing, simply:

the size of a snake's mouth, the size of a

frog's waist,

the appetite of the world's meat

so much more than the mouth can ever

encompass

although compelled by emptiness to try. (lines 17-25)

The boy understands that there are times when basic necessities may not be met and that the pure desire to consume more and more cannot fully satisfy, but may destroy.

While this piece invokes Wordsworth, it avoids the lyric "I" and plain syntax, opting instead for free-form associations and jumping from image to image that Bly suggests is so characteristic of Vallejo. Salisbury himself acknowledges that, in his mid-twenties, he "follow[ed] the example of [...] surrealists" and, like Vallejo, explored "the land between sleep and waking" (*So Far So Good* 230). I would argue that this poem embraces this mode, deliberately countering Wordsworth's democratic lyric with Spanish surrealism. However, in an oblique way, Salisbury also ties "Boyhood Incident

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Recollected in Tranquility" to Cherokee culture, which, according to James Mooney, regards all snakes as "'supernaturals.'" They are to be feared, revered, and "every precaution is taken to avoid killing or offending one, especially the rattlesnake. He who kills a snake will soon see others" (Mooney 294). The boy plainly states his "monstrous fear" of this snake being, and, of course, rattlesnakes were the first items on display in "In the Children's Museum in Nashville."<sup>36</sup>

Although only his second collection of poetry, by *Pointing at the Rainbow: Poems from a Cherokee Heritage* (1980), Salisbury had been publishing give or take for twenty years. Consequently, his aesthetic and thematic concerns remain relatively consistent thereafter. More often than not, the poems will be a lyric, open form, and filled with leaping images. Similar to Lowell, it will incorporate autobiographical experiences and family, but like Vallejo it will also include political commentary and, as suggested by the subtitle of this chapbook, most will include references to Cherokee life, culture, or history.

Along those lines, as it so happens, according to Mooney, if one kills a second snake, "so many will come around him whichever way he may turn that he will become dazed at the sight of their glistening eyes and darting tongues and will go wandering about like a crazy man, unable to find his way out of the woods" (294): Another snake appears in this collection. However, in "These Sacred Names," the speaker explicitly identifies the being, beginning:

A monstrous Uktena,  
writhing from Georgia to Oklahoma,  
this super-highway's bright scales hurl  
new bones over those White soldiers saw  
as trail-markers for return... (1-5)

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There are multiple stories concerning the "monstrous" Uktena (echoing the word used in "A Boyhood Incident"); however, many characteristics (at least as documented by Mooney) remain the same. Uktena "is a great snake, as large around as a tree trunk, with horns on its head, and a bright, blazing crest like a diamond upon its forehead, and scales glittering like sparks of fire" more than that "it is certain death to meet the Uktena" and even "to see the Uktena asleep is death, not to the hunter himself, but to *his family*" (Mooney 297, 299, 298). In the case of this poem, the speaker isn't referring to a literal snake, but rather to the interstate that winds its way across Georgia to Oklahoma, causing a type of death to the land. It is here that the stories of Uktena are merged not only with the highway system of the US, but also to history. The speaker references "new bones," lives lost in car accidents, that are added to bones of individuals who perished during "The Cherokee Death March," as the US military forcibly removed the Cherokee from "The Carolinas, Kentucky, Tennessee and Georgia" (Salisbury, *Pointing at the Rainbow* lines 7, 37). Although the cause for the speaker's trip is the demise of a relationship, the images jump from Uktena to the Trail of Tears to racial tensions to Vietnam War protests to generalized Cold War fears, as the speaker discovers that there is "Nothing / to fight / beyond drowsiness at the wheel" (lines 19-21). The speaker, ostensibly close to that liminal state between sleeping and waking fights to stay alert, reflects on history, the various troubles facing the country, and presumably night, suggesting that Uktena, who kills on sight, is exerting its power by threatening the life of the speaker should he drift off behind the wheel.

This darkness continues as the speaker drives, when he realizes that he is tracing his "ancestors' 'Trail of Tears'" until the poem jumps, revealing that this same road is leading to a "reunion with wife and child." At this moment dawn breaks and:

Lake Texoma blazes like Uktena's mountainous head's gem.

Its medicine springs up  
 in the veins of green corn  
 and in my veins... (lines 25-28)

As the speaker approaches the reservoir that shines like the Ulûñsû'tî in Uktena's head, the gem is said to bring "success in hunting, love, rain-making, and every other business" to anyone who possesses it (Mooney 298). Although initially seen as a glimmer of hope, the connection to Uktena also brings the specter of death, in this case, in the form of Lake Texoma, the result of the Denison Dam, which, like many such projects in the US was built under the policy of eminent domain often taking more Indigenous lands, flooding existing towns, hunting areas, and agricultural land in the process.<sup>37</sup> But, the speaker also invokes the medicine of the green corn, which was a main festival prior to forced removal that included a ceremony for cleansing away impurities or bad deeds and permitted the start of a new life.<sup>38</sup> The speaker begins to "chant against sleep, / against death" (lines 29-30). "These sacred names" include:

Chief Guwisguwi (John Ross) Tsali (Charlie)  
 Sequioa (George Guest, Guess, or Gist)  
 Tagwadahi (Catawba-Killer) Itagunahi (John Ax)  
 and Ayunini (Swimmer). (lines 30-33)

Each of these figures—named in transliterated Cherokee, as well as English—played a key role in Cherokee history, its culture, or the preservation of it, as, among other things, they were Principal Chiefs, an individual who resisted removal, one who created the Cherokee syllabary, or were sources for Mooney, who left his ethnographic works behind. While the speaker chants as a way to remember and honor his Cherokee heritage, by including it in this poem, Salisbury uses his pen as the revolutionary weapon that Vallejo mentions: "In these people (The Aniyunwiya) come / back against bayonets, against extinction" (lines 34-35). The speaker suggests that as long as there

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are those to carry on the stories and the language, the Cherokee Nation will survive. But, the poem ends with a caution, as there will be a reunification if the Aniyunwiya come back "to join / in a sacred dance in Echota, the holy city, the maiden / whose death dooms us all, / the beautiful daughter of the sun" (lines 37-40). However, in 1980, New Echota was in the middle of being turned into a museum as part of a Georgia State Park;<sup>39</sup> meanwhile, according to Mooney, the daughter of the Sun was killed by none other than a rattlesnake (254).

In his autobiography, Salisbury declares "[f]ree association, spontaneity, a wholeness of the moment, a union of past and present, of childhood and after—these are what I seek..." (*So Far So Good* 4). During the course of his prolific career, spanning over six decades, Salisbury succeeded in finding a poetic form that generally enabled him to do just these things. He all but ignores the assertions of Mary Hunter Austin, whose work he may or may not have known, although one cannot help but read some of his titles—*Pointing at the Rainbow* (1980), *A White Rainbow* (1985), *Rainbows of Stone* (2000)—as a "disputation" of Cronyn's *The Path on the Rainbow*. And while there is always the chance that one might find a poem that fits the Imagist mode—as I have tried to imply—if one does, it has far less to do with anything asserted by Austin than Salisbury's education at the University of Iowa, career as a professor, and life as an artist / scholar / reader. Robert Lowell—Salisbury's mentor at Iowa—and his shift to a confessional mode, which was more emotive and personal, can certainly be seen in the content of Salisbury's work, as can "spontaneity," which Salisbury mentions himself. But rather than follow a US poetic tradition that some, like Bly, felt didn't embrace a spiritual life, the use of a feeling unconscious, or that remained politically aloof, Salisbury found the Spanish-speaking authors that he read in his twenties could show him a different way (*So Far So Good* 230). Consequently, Salisbury's poetry fully embraces the subjective, returns time and time again to events that shaped who he

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was—his hand-to-mouth existence on the family farm in Depression-era Iowa, his experiences surrounding World War II, and his views on war generally. Although he recollects these memories at a distance, they neither lack emotion nor substance, as the images engage the senses. Moreover, because he did embrace what Bly describes as the "leaping" methods of César Vallejo, not to mention a desire to produce if not "revolutionary" then at least "socially responsible" art, Vallejo becomes central to understanding Salisbury's work both in terms of form and content. Seeing few, if any, contemporary Indigenous poets using their own voices and backgrounds in the US, he turned to those that did, like Vallejo. As a result, Salisbury also began to show an "'indigenist will' and 'indigenous sensibility'" in his work by connecting to his Cherokee heritage before many authors who are credited with starting the so-called "Native American Renaissance." As a result, to overlook the contributions of Ralph Salisbury to Indigenous literatures (and just literature) in what is now the United States is to omit an author who began to challenge the monolingual narrative and settler colonialism earlier than most.

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### Notes

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<sup>2</sup> See "Obituary: Ralph J. Salisbury, January 24, 1926- October 9, 2017" available at <https://crwr.uoregon.edu/2017/10/30/obit-salisbury/> accessed 23 February 2019. While he was drafted and trained, he did not see active combat in WWII, but did receive educational funds for his service in the Air Force. Although a specific date isn't given, his time at the University of Iowa is likely sometime in 1950 or 1953 when Lowell was teaching at the Iowa Workshop. See Axelrod, p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> "Cherokee language" as written using the syllabary invented by Sequoyah; transliterated, it would appear as Tsalagi Gawonihisdi. For more information see the

Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma's language resource page, <https://cherokee.org/About-The-Nation/Cherokee-Language>.

<sup>4</sup> French for "a writer of free verse."

<sup>5</sup> In the introduction to *New Poets of Native Nations* (Graywolf 2018), editor Heid E. Erdrich notes that "Internet searches for best-selling anthologies under the category of 'Native American' or 'American Indian' poetry return books published in 1918, 1996, 1988, and 1984, in that order" (xiii). Presumably, the work referred to by 1918 is none other than *The Path on the Rainbow*. Moreover, "Rainbow" continues to appear in the title of anthologies of Indigenous poetry, for example, *Voices of the Rainbow: Contemporary Poetry by Native Americans* (Arcade, 2012) edited by Kenneth Rosen. Although not mentioned by Erdrich, Salisbury also edited an anthology, *A Nation Within* (Hamilton, NZ: Outrigger, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> As the *Harvard Law Review* notes in "Regulating Eugenics:"

Negative eugenics commonly took the form of compulsory sterilization laws in the United States. Starting with Indiana in 1907, twenty-nine states enacted compulsory sterilization laws, and a majority of states still had such laws as of 1956. Eugenacists even wrote a model eugenic sterilization statute. All told, states sterilized over 60,000 "unfit" Americans up through the 1970s. Though some courts invalidated these sterilization statutes, the Supreme Court upheld their constitutionality in the infamous case of *Buck v. Bell* (1580).

*Buck v. Bell* is, of course, the US Supreme Court decision from 1927 in which Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes infamously stated that "three generations of imbeciles are enough," making forced sterilization constitutional (1581). The case has never been overturned and remains legal precedent in the US. After *Buck v. Bell*, according to "Eugenical Sterilization Map of the United States, 1935" found in *The Harry H. Laughlin Papers*, similar laws were passed in much of the US.

<sup>7</sup> See Thomas King, especially pp. 110-120, for a more in-depth discussion.

<sup>8</sup> Perú, roughly around the same time as *The Path on the Rainbow* appeared (1921-1926), became embroiled in a complicated and contradictory struggle for Indigenous rights that pitted cuzqueños against limeños in a debate between "*regionalismo*," defined as the Andean highlands (especially those around Cuzco the pre-colonial center of the Inca) versus "*centralismo*" (epitomized by the coastal area of Lima founded by Spanish conquistadores) with mestizos / mestizajes almost always in the conflicted middle (De la Cadena 45, italics in original). The details of this period are beyond the scope of the present argument; however, please see Marisol de la Cadena, *Indigenous Mestizos: The Politics of Race and Culture in Cuzco, Peru, 1919-1991* (Duke UP, 2000).

In English, sistema de castas translates to "caste system." For more on the caste system in Latin America, see "Transatlantic Quechuañol: Reading Race through Colonial Translations," by Allison Margaret Bigelow (*PMLA* 134.2 [2019], pp. 242-259) or *Bound Lives: Africans, Indians, and the Making of Race in Colonial Peru* by Rachel Sarah O'Toole (U of Pittsburgh P, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Spanish for "bachelor's degree."

<sup>10</sup> See de la Cadena, pp. 44-85.

<sup>11</sup> *Los Heraldos Negros* is translated from the Spanish by Robert Bly as *The Black Riders* and by Joseph Mulligan as *The Black Heralds* with Mulligan's being the most direct. *Trilce* appears to be a word coined by Vallejo, which is untranslatable.

<sup>12</sup> Vallejo thus heavily influences Bly's own work and vision of what would become known as "Deep Image" in the 1960s and beyond, which focused on making subjective connections between the physical and spiritual realm, thereby creating an American poetry with spiritual life, revolutionary feeling, and images ("A Wrong Turning" 22-27). Jerome Rothenberg, coined the phrase "deep image." Rothenberg would begin "translating" Indigenous poetry by the late 1960s in what he would call "total translation" and also "ethnopoetics." See *Pre-Faces and Other Writings*, especially pages 76-92.

<sup>13</sup> "Reform" in Spanish.

<sup>14</sup> In Spanish, the poem appears:

Lejana vibración de esquilas mustias  
en el aire derrama  
la fragancia rural de sus angustias. (lines 1-3)

<sup>15</sup> In the original this stanza appears:

Lánguido se desgarras  
en la vetusta aldea  
el dulce yaraví de una guitarra,  
en cuya eternidad de hondo quebranto  
la triste voz de un indio dondonea,  
como un viejo esquilon de camposanto. (lines 22-27)

<sup>16</sup> According to Eshleman, dondonea appears twice in the body of Vallejo's poetry, the second time as "dondoneo" in "[La punta del hombre]." Eshleman and Ferrari opt for different translations. In *César Vallejo: The Complete Posthumous Poetry*, Eshleman and José Rubia Barcia coin "zazhay," asserting that "'dondoneo' appears to be a neologism, based on 'contoneo' (strut). To match Vallejo's sound distortion, we take the word 'sashay' and replace the two s / s with two z / s" (310). Later, Eshleman changes the translation to "stirrut" continuing to play with "contoneo (strut)," but this time "adding 'ir' to strut, (drawing forth stir and rut), [he] hope[d] to match the

strangeness of the original" (*The Complete Poetry*, 652). Mulligan follows Eshelman's "stirrut." Eshleman notes earlier that González Vigil "does not comment" on *dondoneo* (622).

<sup>17</sup> In Spanish, the poem ends:

De codos yo en el muro,  
cuando triunfa en el alma el tinte oscuro  
y el viento reza en los ramajes yertos  
llantos de quenás, tímidos, inciertos,  
suspiro una congoja,  
al ver que en la penumbra gualda y roja  
llora un trágico azul de idilios muertos!

<sup>18</sup> "Ancient" arguably being a more accurate translation of "vetusta" than "decrepit," as it appears to be derived from the Latin "vetustus" ("vetust," adj.).

<sup>19</sup> Eshleman defines "quena" as "a one-hole Indian flute that accompanies the yaraví songs in some parts of South America. Legend has it that it is carved out of the shinbone of a dead beloved" (*The Complete Posthumous Poetry*, 307). According to *Diccionario Quechua-Español-Quechua / Qheswa-Español-Qheswa Simi Taqe*, quena is a hispanicized version of "qena" defined as "Instrumento musical aerófono, oriundo de la cultura andina hecha de caña hueca, hueso o metal. Tiene varias aberturas o huecos para pulsar y una boquilla, bisel o abertura en la boca para soplar. Carece de lengüeta. Tiene un timbre muy expresivo y peculiar" (457). In English, roughly translated, it is a flute-like instrument of the Andean culture made of hollow cane, bone, or metal that has a very expressive and peculiar sound.

<sup>20</sup> A discussion of the "lasting" of a group of people is beyond the scope of this paper; however, for more see *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians out of Existence in New England*, Jean M. O'Brien, Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 2010, especially pp. 105-143.

<sup>21</sup> Defined by the *Diccionario de la lengua española* as "[c]omposición poética que recreaba de manera idealizada la vida del campo y los amores pastoriles."

<sup>22</sup> "Terceto Autóctono" is translated by Mulligan as "Autochthonous Tercet." "De 'Fiestas Aldeanas'" translates roughly to "Parties of the Village," specifically a sparsely populated village that may not have the authority to govern itself. This assertion is based on the definition of "Aldea," a "[p]ueblo de escaso vecindario y, por lo común, sin jurisdicción propia," found in *Diccionario de lengua española*, Real Academia Española; however, admittedly, this does not account for the passage of time and the Aldean Spanish dialect.

<sup>23</sup> Ferrari, "Terceto Autóctono (I) " 6; "Terceto Autóctono (II) " 1.

<sup>24</sup> Ferrari, "Terceto Autóctono (I)" lines 7, 9. In "Terceto Autóctono (I)," line 9, "aquenando hondos" is translated by Mulligan following Eshleman as "Quenaing," another neologism (22, 571 n. 17).

<sup>25</sup> Ferrari, "Terceto Autóctono (III)" lines 12-13 and 10-11, respectively, translated by Mulligan as "a *caja* from Tayanga sounds, / as if initiating blue *huaino*" and "the river flows along drunkenly, singing and weeping / prehistories of water, olden times" ("Terceto Autóctono (III)" lines 12-13 and 10-11, italics in original). Mulligan directly quotes Eshleman's translations of the Quechuan words: "'The *caja* is a musical instrument combining a kind of drum with a ditch reed (from which *quenas* can be made). Tayanga is a northern Peruvian town specializing in the fabrication of *cajas*'" (Mulligan 571, n. 19m italics in original). Mulligan does the same for *huaino*: "'The most well-known representative indigenous dance of Peru, with happy, flirtatious movements (and sometimes words)'" (Mulligan, n. 20, quoting Eshleman).

<sup>26</sup> "Dicho una persona o del pueblo al que pertenece: Originarios del propio país en el que viven" ("autéctono," 1. Adj).

<sup>27</sup> His contemporaries attempted to "keep to the naturalist novel, in purebred style, in rubendarionian [referring to Ruben Darío, considered the father of Spanish-American modernism] verse and realist theater," but they were not able to pen anything of substance, leading Vallejo to declare in 1926: "[a]mid this dearth of spiritual command, new writers in the Castilian language don't show their outrage over an empty past, toward which in vain they turn for direction [. . .] If our generation manages to break its own trail, its work will crush the previous. Then, the history of Spanish Literature will leap over the past thirty years as over an abyss" (Vallejo, ed. Mulligan, 151). Vallejo jumps over the perceived void created by the result of ventriloquizing previous Spanish and South American literary movements and cuts to more contemporary issues. For the Spanish version of this work, see "Estado de la Literatura Española" ("The State of Spanish Literature").

In an essay solely on Vallejo, one could trace the impact of one of Vallejo's stated aesthetic inspirations: Soviet film director Sergei Eisenstein. However, that is beyond the scope of this currently project. Unsurprisingly, Eisenstein and Vallejo's Soviet connections remain unacknowledged by Bly, as his translations were published in the midst of the Cold War, and reprinted during the height of the Vietnam / American War.

<sup>28</sup> Translated by Mulligan from Spanish to English as *Toward the Reign of the Sciris*. This work has been called a novella of American folklore (Vallejo, *Narrativa Completa*, 47 n107) and focuses on the Quechua.

<sup>29</sup> Loosely translated from Spanish, this passage states: "The greatest merit of Vallejo's poetry is that he was the only one at the time who made reference to 'indigenismo' or

'nativism,' which were contemporary issues in Peru." The same can be said of some of his prose, like *Hacia el Reino de los Sciris* and others.

<sup>30</sup> Reading Vallejo only through the eyes and translations of Robert Bly or others also limits Vallejo's work, According to the *National Observer's* review of Bly's 1962 translations, the work of Vallejo (and Neruda) exemplifies "poetry of masculinity and strength," which was perfectly suited for Bly's "Deep Image" movement (Galvin 361, quoting the *National Observer*). However, as Rachel J. Galvin explains in "Poetic Innovation and Appropriative Translation in the Americas" (2014), this aesthetic was achieved by disregarding accepted ways of transforming Spanish to English, as well as adding language to poems that doesn't appear in the original (361).

<sup>31</sup> The image of Museums reoccurs with relative frequency in Indigenous poetry, for one contemporary example, see *Nature Poem*, Tommy Pico, New York: Tin House, 2017.

<sup>32</sup> See The Hearst Museum of Anthropology website on the history of Ishi, available at <https://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu/ishi/> accessed 10 March 2020.

<sup>33</sup> Salisbury, Letter to Mona van Duyn, 4 September 1964. Mona van Duyn and Jarvis Thurston were the co-founders of *Perspective: A Quarterly of Literature and the Arts*, which was among the little magazines to publish Salisbury's work. The archive contains correspondence dating back to the mid-1950s.

<sup>34</sup> This poem also appears in *Light from a Bullet Hole: Poems New and Selected 1950-2008*. The line breaks used here reflect those in *Ghost Grapefruit*, which vary from those in *Light from a Bullet Hole*. Also, "spreckled" in line 7 in the *Ghost Grapefruit* version appears as "speckled" in revision found in *Light from a Bullet Hole*.

<sup>35</sup> Byron, of course, had a contrary view, often preferring a more formalist approach.

<sup>36</sup> From "The Snake Tribe:" "The generic name for snakes is indädû'. They are all regarded as anida'wehĩ [...] having an intimate connection with the rain and thunder gods, and possessing a certain influence over the other animal and plant tribes" (Mooney 294). Whether the Cherokee stories incorporated into these poems were those told to Salisbury by his father's family or are from sources such as James Mooney's *History, Myths, and Sacred Formulas of the Cherokees*, or some combination is unknown; however, Mooney will be used here.

<sup>37</sup> See, for example, "The History of the Denison Dam," from the US Army Corps of Engineers, Tulsa District, available at <https://www.swt.usace.army.mil/Locations/Tulsa-District-Lakes/Oklahoma/Lake-Texoma/History/> accessed 4 March 2019.

<sup>38</sup> See Mooney, pp. 420-423. Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma no longer posts information about the Green Corn Dance on their website, the Nation's statement is available at <https://www.cherokee.org/about-the-nation/culture/> accessed 29 February 2020.

<sup>39</sup> See the New Echota Georgia State Park website: <https://gastateparks.org/NewEchota>

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