
Gerald Vizenor. *Satie on the Seine: Letters to the Heirs of the Fur Trade*. Wesleyan University Press, 2020. 369 pp. ISBN: 9780819579348.

<https://www.hfsbooks.com/books/satie-on-the-seine-vizenor/>

Gerald Vizenor's latest novel, *Satie on the Seine: Letters to the Heirs of the Fur Trade* (2020), is a historical fiction set on the river Seine in France and is concerned with events leading up to and proceeding through WWII.

It follows a couple of Native Americans...

in France...

between the World Wars...

What injustice. Absurd. This is no way to tell a story of motion. I can't even keep a steady voice. Summary, mannered and grey, may as well be wearing an armband and healing History.

Can you summarize a color?

Can you objectify motion?

Grounded on the fascist-friendly side of the Columbia River across from the staunchy port of socialists, I was struck blind by Vizenor's luminous *The Heirs of Columbus* (1990); stumbling into the deep blue with my inheritance, I drowned. I bobbed up near the headwaters of the Mississippi and was promptly sloshed out to international waters to drown again. I finally flowed into the blue blue Seine, where Eric Satie designates me an heir of the new fur trade. Now, I'm doubly heired.

Blue is the color of motion.

This book is a blue inheritance, not a History.

(One moment, I need to open Eric Satie's *Gymnopédies*.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FS6o3qFimsc&t=2743s&ab_channel=%E2%99%A4BHQClassicalMusic%E2%99%AB)

OK.

The lilt of Satie's blue notes sets the ethos for brothers Basile Beaulieu and Aloysius. No one is safe—not even the icy posers of socialism and communism with twisted shadow-fascist boners—from the renewed fur trade that the brothers breathe into being and exchange through these letters of resistance to stereotype and tragedy. Their history is one of motion on the Seine that sweeps its readers towards *liberté* before and during the fascist occupation of France by Nazis and Vichy French collaborators. The brother artists, one a painter and the other the writer of this epistolary novel, the two self-proclaimed White Earth Nation Natives, resist fascism with paintings, hand puppets, mongrels, friends, poses, music, miming, wine, motion, and teases.

I am an heir of the fur trade.

The Native heirs have teased me.

To tease manifest inheritance is to choose Native provenance over the manifest manners of History. Native provenance is a movement against the betrayal of cultural creativity. It is "transmotion," "a spirited and visionary sense of natural motion" instilling a survivance that resists "the pushy ideologies of nationalism, ethnographic simulations and models" with "totemic stories of creation" in the face of "churchy" separatist creeds (Vizenor 2019, 37). As an heir of the new fur trade, I now know the tease of a fascist inheritance and heart-stories that confirm the pain of pogroms and revenge that have been hidden in the creeping shadows of WWII.

Totems like Nazi puppets teased on French waterways.

The brothers Beaulieu salvage hand puppets from street debris and tease out unlikely conversations, leaving beautiful blue bruises of poetry on the inheritors of History. Herr Hitler and Gertrude Stein debate over a flaming *Mein Kampf* in 1933 while a crowd of moody onlookers, under the deadly spell of booky bonfires in Germany, wake smiling to the Native dream songs of *liberté*, mercy, and hope that suggest Native provenance.

Bright blue bruises on a stark reality.

As an heir of the new fur trade, my History has been loosened again. The furry totems of death—beaver skins, martin, and mink, worn as a sign of ironic posturing over those starving in tattered clothes being scolded for eating city pigeons—are reinstated as

totems of Native provenance in the stories of the new fur trade. Natural motion is restored in each instance of ironic life over serious serious death. The exchange between Vizenor's Natives and the French is renewed in the natural motion of mixing and the heart of human *liberté* is laid bare for each reader as the shadows of nostalgic fascism come to blinding light.

Blue shadows > shadows.

A Native has no right of art and voice within their own country, so say the brothers. The White Earth brothers, war-torn veterans, exiles, Jews, and mongrels gathered on the house-barge *Le Corbeau Bleu*, are all Natives. The White Earth brothers compare their presence in America to the presence of their Native crew in fascist forced France. Even Nathan Crémieux, a more entitled French local, gains a Native ethos as he acknowledges himself an heir of the new fur trade. Though his voice and *liberté* are stifled by fascist frauds, Nathan funds the houseboat on the Seine and provides wine, cheese, and a Ghost Dance art gallery and sends resistance literature, such as Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, to the motley barge crew as he takes up arms against the invaders with the lusty inheritance of separatism and revenge.

Moby Dick motion and Herr Ahab.

Anyheir's Native.

The "*niinag*" (penis) trickster puppet of massive interchangeable shafts (*Satie 14*), the slang "cum" Crémieux name adorning Nathan's person and gifted art gallery, and the boner-killing Nazi doctor of death in this novel all suggest a sort of life in humor directed at the prudish inheritance of separatist chastity. These epistles suggest unfathomable relatedness in tease after tease.

Endless dong zingers.

Open ethos.

A Google tab is a necessary tool on this fluid journey. This history of motion makes more references than *The Waste Land*, but with a presence that suggests the *liberté* of life and Native provenance over the rubble of History. Each reference is recorded by Basile and does not pretend to be "the facts, and nothing but the facts, thank you." The Cubist Picasso is praised for the motion and *liberté* of his art, but no mention is

made of his more unsavory side and fascist abuses of women. Gertrude Stein is called out harshly for her authoritarian betrayals even though she chastises Hitler. Many authors, artists, and figures of *liberté* and against *liberté* are simply evoked. They serve a purpose in the plot, but the reader should provide the rest of the motion.

Drift on *liberté*.

The incentive is to drift, even beyond the narrative and historical resistances, as the various facts and fictions suggested by the letters coalesce in the reader. Music should be played, detours in literature should be made, histories perused, and long walks walked while reading these letters. But, the heart-stories of massacre and the names of the wrongfully dead and rightfully courageous should not be teased. *Sénégalais* soldiers denied the right to victory march in Paris by Supreme Commander and racist Dwight Eisenhower and the slaughtered residents of Oradour-sur-Glane commune are represented in all seriousness.

Blue stories shadowed.

Say their luminous names.

This novel is a totemic beaver pelt busting down the autoroutes of History on the back of a blue raven. I have to ask myself how I can review any work of the elusive Viz and what right I have as white dude American to do so. If I capture the motion of the novel, its ethos and *liberté* as a work and on myself, then I have represented it the best I can.

Native provenance, provenance, provenance.

Vizenor's work is totemic as it reminds us of a Native provenance. As Nathan Crémieux shows, anyone can be in motion. Native provenance isn't separatist, but is the assertion of life and motion that upholds all animal and human *liberté*.

History is fiction.

history is Fiction.

history is fiction.

After watching the comment fascists, anti-Semites, Pepe memers, and bozos on YouTube and in Twitch comments all day, Vizenor's ideas reverberate like a *liberté* bell in my American noggin. The separatists are ever present, present, present, and Vizenor provides us with transformative histories of truth in fiction to fight with. But is this work practical? How many people can bear his style and enjoy the sweep of *liberté* he indulges? Will any of this trickle down to the Twitch fascists and Pepe memers who, unlike the Nazis of this novel, employ a deadly humor instead of a deadly stare?

Headintheclouds reading?

It only takes an *Heirs* or *Satie*, and maybe a teacher of Native provenance, to stoke one's ethos of *liberté*. Vizenor's novels have a special ability to transform the way we think. The capacity of *Satie* stands out among Vizenor's works. It immerses the reader in a sea of being, a way of thinking, and a web of relationships that isn't just suggested and/or tested, as it may be in *Heirs* or elsewhere. Indulge in the motion of *Satie*, encouraging the enjoyment of drowning and drifting to the bone-dry inheritor of manifest destinies and fur trades. Much of it will resonate with and enrich the Native scholar, activist, or pursuer of *liberté*. The penis jokes may resonate with the fascist inheritor of the fur trade. Maybe start there with them. Either way, you won't be the same. And as this novel shows, Native provenance only loses when it no longer has any totems. That's reason enough to read.

Native provenance is *liberté*.

Drift on the *Gymnopedies*.

Become totemic blue.

Idaho State University

Works Cited

Vizenor, Gerald. *Native Provenance: The Betrayal of Cultural Creativity*. University of Nebraska Press, 2019.