

# *Transmotion*

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## CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

*Transmotion* will publish new scholarship focused on theoretical, experimental, postmodernist, and avant-garde writing produced by Native American and First Nations authors, as well as book reviews on relevant work in Vizenor Studies and Indigenous Studies.

The broad use of Vizenor-created theoretical terms in many different academic fields (e.g. law, literature, anthropology, sociology, museum studies, etc.) highlights the fact that Vizenor Studies represents a significant interdisciplinary conversation within the broader field of Indigenous Studies. As such, the editors of *Transmotion* will look for submissions that do any of the following:

- Look at Vizenor's work directly, as well as the work of related authors and theorists in the field
- Employ Vizenor's theory to look at other writers
- Continue Vizenor's project of bringing together traditional indigenous knowledges and Asian or European continental philosophy
- Explore the inter-relation of image and text, art and literature, in Vizenor's work
- Contribute to recent developing conversations in contemporary Native American art and literature, in relation to questions of visual sovereignty, visuality, and ethics.
- Offer innovative, surprising, unexpected and creative critique of American Indian literatures or other creative arts
- Emphasize experimental, theoretical, and avant-garde Native North American work

The journal will also accept creative or hybrid work, provided that such work aligns aesthetically with the aforementioned editorial emphasis. The editors particularly welcome submissions of innovative and creative works that exploit digital media.

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Enquiries regarding submission are welcome and may be sent to the editors at [transmotionjournal@gmail.com](mailto:transmotionjournal@gmail.com). Scholarly articles should be 20-25 pages in length,

prepared according to the MLA Style Manual. Creative work can be of any length. We are also very keen for scholars to put themselves forward as potential book reviewers and to volunteer to be anonymous peer reviewers.

Information regarding on-line submissions of full drafts can be found at:  
<http://journals.kent.ac.uk/index.php/transmotion/about/submissions#onlineSubmissions>

To contact the editors: [transmotionjournal@gmail.com](mailto:transmotionjournal@gmail.com)

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## Editorial

With the publication of Volume 6.2, the editors of *Transmotion* are thrilled to be able to continue to highlight the diverse range of scholarly and creative work being produced in the field of Indigenous Studies today. The scholarly articles included in this issue engage with older, dare we say “canonical,” novels by Gerald Vizenor and Louis Owens, while also holding up exciting new work by Cherie Dimaline in Indigenous YA fiction. We also feature an interview (posthumously published) with poet Janice Gould, a cento (employing the Ishakkoy language) by Jeffrey Darensbourg, and our always robust collection of book reviews.

In “Spiralic Time and Cultural Continuity for Indigenous Sovereignty: Idle No More and *The Marrow Thieves*,” Laura De Vos connects Cherie Dimaline’s post-apocalyptic YA novel with the consciousness-raising work of the Idle No More movement. Focusing on the centrality of round dancing to Idle No More participants, De Vos highlights the ways the experience of time central to the movement’s activism serves to counteract or respond to the underlying assumptions of a Canadian national temporality of reconciliation that is linear and progressive. Unlike the dominant ideology of the Canadian state, which thinks of historical redress through the process of reconciliation as in and of itself, Idle No More focuses on the spiralic (cyclical, but transformed for the moment rather than mere repetition) resurgence of cultural traditions and ancestral knowledges, an experience of time that is better able to intervene in the work of decolonization. De Vos further argues that Dimaline’s *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) does similar consciousness raising work on radical relationality, charting Indigenous youth’s power to build their futures in the now. The novel’s organizing principle of spiralic time puts Indigenous youth at the center, a move that helps further highlight the temporal aspect central to the Idle No More movement. Similar to round dancing, *The Marrow Thieves* offers a counter reality to that of Canadian settler “progress” and “reconciliation.” Writing directly to Indigenous youth to invite them to see themselves as part of a continuing spiral of Indigenous presence going back to when time began and continuing into a time when they themselves will be ancestors, Dimaline emphasizes Indigenous youth’s central role in resurgence, both within and beyond Idle No More.

Francisco Delgado’s article, “Sordid Pasts, Indigenous Futures: Necropolitics and Survivance in Louis Owens’ *Bone Game*” examines the link between racial subjectivity and death continuing a conversation that began with the publication of Achille Mbembe’s 2003 article “Necropolitics” and which has been extended into the field of Indigenous studies most notably by Jodi Byrd (Chickasaw). Elaborating on Mbembe’s and Byrd’s frameworks, Delgado offers a necropolitical reading of Louis Owens’ 1994

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novel *Bone Game*, arguing that the book prompts readers to discuss and reconcile the historical relationships between death and subjectivity and, more importantly, explore the possibilities of Indigenous futures and sovereignty. Delgado also draws on other Indigenous scholarship, such as Leanne Betasamosake Simpson's concept of "Indigenous freedom," Vine Deloria Jr.'s critique of anthropology, and Gerald Vizenor's notion of "survance," in his analysis of the struggles and survance strategies of Owens' characters, all of whom emphasize Native agency and sovereignty over the predominant, mainstream narrative of Native tragedy. Hogan Schaak's "The Physical Presence of Survance in *The Heirs of Columbus*" highlights the importance for critics of recognizing that Vizenor's fiction often represents a space where theoretical concepts developed in his non-fiction essays acquire new layers of sophistication and complexity. Focusing in particular on the concept of "survance," Schaak argues that *Heirs* (1991) does not simply deploy Vizenor's pre-existing framework, but surpasses it, crafting and testing a new definition of this key critical term. Schaak maintains that, particularly through the character of Stone Columbus, Vizenor adds a new dimension to survance, extending the concept beyond its generally agreed upon definition as personal and intellectual liberation from identity constraints to encompass physical and communal healing as well.

We are honored to be able to include Lisa Tatonetti's interview with Koyoonk'auwi writer and scholar Janice Gould (1949-2019), which was completed shortly before Gould's death. In "Poetry, Activism, and Queer Indigenous Imaginative Landscapes," Tatonetti first contextualizes Gould's work and career and then discusses it in three sections: Questions on *Seed* (2019), Gould's latest poetry collection; Questions on California; and Questions on Queer Indigenous History. The insightful discussion here serves as a fitting tribute to the work of a wonderful writer, whose work deserves continued critical attention. Finally, we also offer an illuminating interview between *Transmotion* editor, James Mackay, and Ktunaxa poet, Smokii Sumac. Sumac, whose first volume of poetry, *you are enough: love poems for the end of the world* grew out of the online poetry practice that led to his being awarded the 2017 Indigenous Voices Award, discusses transitioning, Facebook poetry, influences and inspiration, and much more.

**Conference:** please note the call for papers for the 42<sup>nd</sup> annual *American Indian Workshop* to be held online and in association with *Transmotion*, July 12-17 2021. The theme is "The Sovereign Erotic". The cfp and further details can be found here: <https://journals.kent.ac.uk/index.php/transmotion/conf>

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David Carlson  
Theodore C. Van Alst  
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December 2020



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## **Spiralic Temporality and Cultural Continuity for Indigenous Sovereignty: Idle No More and *The Marrow Thieves***

LAURA MARIA DE VOS

In *The Winter We Danced: Voices from the Past, the Future, and the Idle No More Movement* (2014), Tanya Kappo (Sturgeon Lake Cree) details a round dance flash mob at West Edmonton Mall, describing how the “people were glowing” and how, even if the dancing itself was only a moment, “it was powerful enough to awaken in them what needed to be woken up—a remembering of who we were, who we are” (Kappo and King 70). Cree elder John Cuthand tells the story of how the round dance was a gift from an ancestor who was unable to find rest because her daughter would not stop grieving her death. The mother brought “*something from the other world to help the people grieve in a good way*” and taught her daughter the round dance ceremony; the round dance ceremony creates a space where the ancestors can join the dancers and all are “*as one*” (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 24, italics in original).

Idle No More’s round dancing in malls, public squares, and legislative buildings as such thus directly calls up support from and involvement of the ancestors; round dancing is powerful in part thanks to its expression of cultural continuity and relations across many generations. Through the round dance, the ancestors were brought in to connect with the people, and the dancers imagined themselves as future ancestors, creating a space for those not yet born. As a result, the “people were glowing.” This physical, circular movement, which connects the future ancestors dancing in the present with their ancestors invited into the space, is adaptable to different settings,

and will never be exactly the same twice. The power in the round dance ceremony can be better understood if we see how it is informed by a worldview organized according to an experience of time we can describe as spiralic: cyclical, but transforming for the moment rather than merely repeating. Idle No More's focus on the spiralic resurgence of cultural traditions and ancestral knowledges are exemplary of a new generation's experience of spiralic time. This is an experience of time that is better able to intervene in Canada's national temporality of reconciliation.

"Spiralic temporality" refers to an Indigenous experience of time that is informed by a people's particular relationships to the seasonal cycles on their lands, and which acknowledges the present generations' responsibilities to the ancestors and those not yet born. This complex of relations to the land, lived in an embodied manner on that land or in diaspora, together make up the Indigenous concept of *place* as explained by Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene). By his formulation "land" and "place" in this way do not just refer to territory, but are expressions of an "ontological framework for understanding relationships," i.e. the terms *land* and *place* are used to refer more broadly to all the relations in that place, which includes rivers, rocks, and mountains, animal and plant nations, who all have agency (Coulthard 79-80). In such a worldview, *when* things happened in time becomes less important than *where* they happen(ed) and to which relations; the past and the future are all relevant in the now, what matters is how the events or actors are related to a particular *place*.

The Canadian nation sees historical redress through the process of reconciliation as an end in itself, rather than a continuing spiral. In the same way young people in this movement are experiencing time through round dancing, we can come to understand how they are able to counteract or respond to the underlying assumptions of a Canadian national temporality of reconciliation that is linear and progress-oriented.

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Writing about Idle No More in the conclusion to his 2014 book *Red Skins, White Masks*, Coulthard describes the movement as “what a resurgent Indigenous politics might look like on the ground” (160). In an interview with Leah Gazan, Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs Derek Nepinak (Minegoziibe Anishinabe) explains the essential role younger generations play in Idle No More and Indigenous resurgence more broadly. New generations of leaders did not personally experience the residential schools, Nepinak claims, so they do not suffer as much from the negative connotations settler colonizer violence attaches to Indigenous cultures (Nepinak 84). Residential schools taught Indigenous students, at the risk of severe punishment, not to speak their languages, not to practice their spiritualities. In short, they were told to assimilate the best they could, or else. This new generation is freer to look back, says Nepinak, and to discern what Indigenous knowledges are helpful and essential to build the thriving future older generations have been working for.

In this article, I argue that a heuristic of spiralic temporality helps us see how Métis author Cherie Dimaline’s (post-) apocalyptic young adult novel *The Marrow Thieves* (2017) does similar consciousness-raising work on resurgence and Indigenous youth’s power to build their futures in the now as the Idle No More Movement. Like other Indigenous futurist texts, *The Marrow Thieves* employs a temporality which refuses the common dismissal of tradition as outdated, by imagining futures that are “intimately connected to the past” (Cornum). Grace L. Dillon (Anishnaabe) coined the term “Indigenous Futurisms” based on the existing “Afrofuturism,” which Dillon describes as “weav[ing] in traditional knowledge and culture with futuristic ideas and settings” (Muzyka). Indigenous futurism is centrally about bringing traditional knowledges into faraway futures, privileging traditional values like sustainable, balanced relationality over so-called progress (Cornum). Lou Cornum further explains

the project of Indigenous futurisms as the "profound deconstruction of how we imagine time, progress, and who is worthy of the future" (Cornum). In this way, the genre pushes back on the limited vision offered by linear settler temporality—where Indigenous people can only ever be "authentic" in some faraway past—and instead evidences the possibilities for Indigenous futures informed and embraced by their relations across time.

Through *The Marrow Thieves*' organizing principle of spiralic time, which puts Indigenous youth at the center, the novel reveals a temporal aspect to the Idle No More movement that otherwise might go unnoticed. Round dancing is also about bringing a future into the present, one that pushes back against the temporality of a progressive narrative where the Canadian state seeks to remake the Indigenous. The novel offers a counter reality to that of Canadian settler "progress" and "reconciliation" and emphasizes Indigenous youth's critical role in resurgence, within and beyond Idle No More. Writing directly to Indigenous youth, Dimaline invites them to see themselves as part of a continuing spiral of Indigenous presence going back to when time began and continuing into a time when they themselves will be ancestors.

*The Marrow Thieves* responds to the Native youth suicide epidemic by inviting youth to see the central role they play in the spiralic history of their nations and how thriving futures can be lived in the present. The novel models Indigenous alternative ways of being in relation despite of or against settler colonizer oppressions, emphasizing the importance of conceiving of a different world, and living in it in whatever ways that one can (even though limited by settler colonizer violence). The novel's spiralic temporal structure invites a heuristic of spiralic temporality to see the communities in *The Marrow Thieves* in relation with historic and contemporary Turtle Island Indigenous communities and the issues and values they have been and are

currently experiencing, defending, and living. The novel illustrates how the spiral of Indigenous life is still moving into the future, settler violence and oppression be damned.

I first detail how we might theorize and experience spiralic temporality; this discussion considers spiralic temporality not just as a heuristic, but also as an organizing structure. Then, I discuss how seeing spiralic relations across time helps us better understand Idle No More's focus on Indigenous resurgence not as a "moving backwards" to "archaic" tradition, but as participating in a continuing history of cyclical return, with essential transformations, rather than repetitions. From there, I address how Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* takes up the themes from Idle No More to illustrate how spiralic temporality informs Indigenous resurgence and resistance. In this sense, what the novel in relation to the movement reveals, is how using a heuristic of spiralic temporality can support thriving Indigenous futures through making visible the larger spirals of Indigenous cultural continuity, as well as Indigenous youths' central role in them.

### **Indigenous Resurgence & Spiralic Time**

The Kino-nda-niimi Collective's edited collection of writings on Idle No More, *The Winter We Danced*, begins with an emphasis on this spiralic continuity, making clear that "most Indigenous peoples have never been idle in their efforts to protect what is meaningful to our communities—*nor will we ever be*" (21, my emphasis). This relationship to what came before is not merely one of repeating a sterile past, but one of an unstoppable continuation of peoplehoods, transformed in and for each moment, always with an eye on creating a thriving future for Indigenous peoples. Spiralic time emphasizes the relationships across time between related, transformed experiences

and allows for a dynamic return and rebirth of the past into the future.

In order to think spirally, one might need to start with undoing the lock Western teleological temporality has on the structure of their thinking. The settler colonial project limits Indigenous nationhood to either something from a long ago past that is no longer relevant—as such their treaties become “archaic premises and promises, from another time, which are not applicable in modern American time,” or something that is always limited to traditional practices: any participation in so-called “modern American time” is considered evidence of the fact that the nations are no longer authentically Indigenous, and as such they also should not/do not have sovereignty (Bruyneel 172; 203). Both options evidence a settler obsession with “progress,” which makes Indigenous sovereignty unthinkable in the present, let alone the future (See also O’Brien, Rifkin). Settler time limits Indigenous peoples to either a noble past or an inauthentic present: there is no Indigenous future in a settler temporality.

Syilx scholar and author Jeanette Armstrong explains how in her Syilx worldview, “physical-earth time is conceived of as cyclic, as in a spiral. Day becomes night and returns to day *but never to the same day*” (167, my emphasis). She is clear that cyclic or spiralic do not mean repetition or routine, but instead point to cycles of transformation, cycles where new iterations return transformed. She explains that “[w]ithin that stable spiraling from one year to the next,” physical beings on this earth change, “are born, grow, reproduce and die,” while the cycles themselves, of the seasons, of the moon, of the days, do not change (167). The only thing for sure in her worldview is the spiral: the endless cycles of transformations, or of “continuous physical changes” (167).<sup>1</sup> Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks has theorized the spiral as “embedded in place(s)”, allowing both for a deep grounding in a particular land or water, while also allowing for movement

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(309). Thus, Indigenous peoples are not prisoners of their traditional lands —many peoples have always moved around seasonally, traded across large territories, and fought or built kinship relations with other tribes (Vizenor *Manifest Manners* ix).

Vanessa Watts (Mohawk and Anishnaabe) thinks through Indigenous relationships to the land (and the central role of the feminine), in an onto-epistemological model of “place-thought” which assumes a non-linear temporality that allows the past to always also be the future. Starting from the Indigenous worldviews of the Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee (of which the Mohawk are part), and moving through the story of Sky Woman’s body becoming the land, Watts explains how going back to traditional knowledge is also listening to what is currently being said as well as leading us to imagining a transformed future, and a path to starting to live that future in the present. She emphasizes this is “not a question of ‘going backwards,’ for this implies there is a static place to return to” when, instead, traditional knowledges have always adapted and changed through time (Watts 32). Since Anishnaabe and Haudenosaunee never understood time as linear, they can connect with their traditional teachings also through dreaming, shapeshifting, and premonition.<sup>2</sup> Thus, resurgence is not an attempt to access something otherwise confined to the past, but rather “simply to listen. To act” (Watts 32). Through remembering traditional practices, relations across time are strengthened and perhaps rebuilt.

These renewed relations then bring also renewed responsibilities with them, responsibilities to maintain continuity. In *The Sacred Hoop*, Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo) describes that

this is the reason traditionals say we must remember our origins, our cultures, our histories, our mothers and grandmothers, for without that memory, which implies *continuance rather than nostalgia*, we are doomed to engulfment by a

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paradigm that is fundamentally inimical to the vitality, autonomy, and self-empowerment essential for satisfying, high-quality life. (214, my emphasis)

Resurgence is not about reminiscing about an "authentic" past, but rather about the ways that, despite the interruptions by settler violences of land theft; residential schools; violence against Indigenous women, girls, and Two-Spirit people; commodification of the environment, of Indigenous cultures, and of Indigenous people; Indigenous cultures persist. This cultural persistence is key to maintaining thriving lives and resisting the settler colonizer attempts to swallow Indigenous peoples whole.

Culture can still be traditional, even when it must resurge transformed in the present, for example through expression in a colonizer language. We learn this from Joy Harjo (Mvskoke) and others in the edited collection of Native women's writing *Reinventing the Enemy's Language* (1997). In the introduction, Gloria Bird (Spokane) explains how Indigenous peoplehood lasts despite of all of the attacks by colonization. Despite the loss of language, Indigenous worldviews continue (Bird and Harjo 24). Bird describes an example:

my aunt once, when we were looking at what was left of Mt. St. Helen's, commented in English, "Poor thing." Later, I realized that she spoke of the mountain as a person. In our stories about the mountain range that runs from the Olympic Peninsula to the border between southern Oregon and northern California our relationship to the mountains as characters in the stories is one of human-to-human. (24)

Despite the take-over by English—the enemy language—the worldview where non-human peoples have agency as much as human peoples do persists. Joy Harjo reminds us that the war on Indigenous peoples has not ended, but that to use "the enemy



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language” in a way that expresses Indigenous worldviews, be it in a necessarily limited way because of the use of English rather than the appropriate tribal language, is a practice of “decolonization” (Bird and Harjo 25, emphasis in original). According to her tribal worldview, language is a tool for healing, to express yourself through words, through song, is “to remember ourselves during these troubled times.” She writes that “to speak, at whatever cost, is to become empowered rather than victimized by destruction” (Bird and Harjo 21). The power of language to help Indigenous people “remember themselves,” to be a tool for healing from colonizer violence, to be a path to cultural continuance, explains why story, poetry, and even long-form writing such as novels are so important to Indigenous resurgence. *The Marrow Thieves* is a clear part of this work.

The spiralic Syilx temporality that Armstrong describes resonates with Aymara scholar Silvia Rivera Cusicanqui’s description of Aymara Indigenous time as moving in circles and spirals, not stretching taut in a linear sense of history. In her critique of how the North American academy has taken up postcolonial studies and the decolonial, Rivera Cusicanqui emphasizes the need to be responsible to the Indigenous worldview those ideas developed in, and to remain responsible to the Indigenous social movements on the ground. This spiralic conception of time and responsibility to place—and the relations it requires—demands a fundamental change in colonizer worldviews, one necessitated if there will be “a ‘radical and profound decolonization’ in its political, economic, and, above all, mental structures” (Rivera Cusicanqui 97). Rivera Cusicanqui explains, within her Bolivian context, how colonizer attempts to reconcile and include Indigenous peoples through “the rhetoric of equality and citizenship” eventually just “allow for the reproduction of the colonial structures of oppression,” where everyone in power remains firmly entrenched (97). These words might as well

describe the Canadian linear epistemology of "reconciliation," which Idle No More organizers understood as limited in this way. They call for a shift in worldview (informed by spiralic temporality) which is needed to understand Indigenous resurgence and resistance against colonizer oppression.

Spiralic temporality is made not just invisible but also *unthinkable* by a hegemonic settler temporality which is palimpsestic: settler time aims to obscure the past and replace it with its own settler ideals. Yet, this process can never be completed, and as such, the settler colonial is always in tension with the Indigenous presence it aims to replace. Settler time is a fiction that is always in the process of being uncovered for its deceit. Instead, a heuristic of spiralic temporality helps us see how the settler temporal structure obscures the genocidal processes of settler colonialism, and it foregrounds the Indigenous ways of knowing and being that inform Indigenous social movements and literatures. I want to emphasize that I am not suggesting an *analytic* of the spiral that is always one-hundred percent perfectly applicable across the board. I rather suggest that it is a useful *heuristic* to understand some of the values, relations, and transformations in one place across time, to make visible the complexity of Indigenous worldviews, the absence of absolutes and universalisms, and to make legible just one way of relating, theorizing, and practicing at work in Indigenous social movements and literatures which a Eurocentric analytic does not allow for.

**"When the circle is made, we the ancestors will be dancing with you and we will be as one."**

The Idle No More movement started out of a one-day workshop organized by four women in Saskatchewan: Sylvia McAdam (Nehiyaw), Jessica Gordon (Pasqua), Nina

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Wilson (Nakota and Plains Cree), and Sheelah McLean (non-Native). Their aim was to educate both Native and non-Native communities on how the 457-page Bill C-45, a proposed measure to modify a number of laws, would directly affect First Nations in Canada (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 21).<sup>3</sup> The “teach-in” was in direct response to this newly proposed Canadian governmental policy that would endanger Indigenous peoples and non-human relations and the land and water. It focused on the legislation’s clearing space for further commodification of all relations, through scaling back consultation requirements with Indigenous communities, undoing prior protections to lands and waters, and allowing access to First Nations territories without proper consent (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 21). Building on existing community struggles for cultural continuity and against settler colonizer encroachment, the one-day event sparked into a large-scale, eventually global movement collectively named “Idle No More,” which brought people together through a focus on “three broad motivations or objectives” (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 22).

The first of the three demands was the repeal of many sections in the new “omnibus legislation (Bills C-38 and C-45)” pertaining to “the exploitation of the environment, water, and First Nations territories” (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 22). The second addressed the need to alleviate the emergency conditions in many First Nations—related to “self-sustainability, land, education, housing, healthcare, and others”—most notoriously Attawapiskat (known for its high youth suicide rate), in respectful collaboration with First Nations communities (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 22). The third objective was for the Canadian government to commit to a reciprocal nation-to-nation relationship between Canada and Indigenous communities. These “mutually beneficial” relationships should be informed by the “spirit and intent of treaties” and the related “recognition of inherent and shared rights and responsibilities

as equal and unique partners," instead of unilaterally making decisions harmful to Indigenous (First Nations (status and non-status), Inuit, and Métis) nations such as the proposed omnibus bill (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 22). At the core of all the demands is a demand for respect for Indigenous sovereignty and an end to Canadian legislative violence against Indigenous peoples.

The focus of Idle No More was shared and purposely without central leadership. Instead, myriad local groups addressed their own issues in ways that were suitable for their place and time. In his book *#IdleNoMore: And the Remaking of Canada* (2015), Ken Coates (non-Native) describes the movement as one "of mothers and children more than warriors and activists," naming Idle No More's purpose as being more about culture than about politics (xi). A closer look at the movements' concerns and actions makes clear that on the ground, it was a movement of mothers and children who also were warriors and activists, with concerns that were cultural as much as political. Idle No More was Indigenous families fighting for Indigenous families, i.e. for continuity of their peoples as *peoples*. In order to secure cultural continuity and Indigenous sovereignty, matters of governmental policy needed to be addressed head on. Modeling the world they were fighting for in the process of the struggle, actions took the shape of "flash mobs" of round dancing. This embodied practice and ceremony that connects generations across time, reclaimed space for Indigenous continuity often in spaces usually controlled by settler colonizers, such as malls, city centers, and Canadian legislative buildings (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 24).

Describing the origin of Idle No More's 2012-2013 winter of actions, The Kino-nda-niimi Collective emphasizes the relation of Idle No More to Indigenous history and future, describing it as "an emergence of past efforts that reverberated into the future" (21). In Sylvia McAdam (Saysewahum)'s words, "Idle No More resistance began long

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before in different names, different locations through the generations since the arrival of Europeans” (65). Naming the relations of Idle No More’s actions with “the maelstrom of treaty-making, political waves like the Red Power Movement and the 1969-1970 mobilization against the White Paper, and resistance movements at Oka, Gustafson Lake, Ipperwash, Burnt Church, Goose Bay, Kanostaton, and so on,” The Kino-nda-niimi Collective suggests a vision of Idle No More as one flashpoint that received a lot of attention in an expansive spiralic history of continued Indigenous resistance to Canadian encroachment on Indigenous lands, languages, and lifeways which often goes unnoticed (21).

Kahnawake Mohawk activist Russ Diabo’s 2012 article “Harper Launches Major First Termination Plan: As Negotiating Tables Legitimize Canada’s Colonialism,” reprinted in *The Winter We Danced*, makes clear how Canadian “reconciliation” efforts continue to happen on settler colonizer Canadian terms. Diabo’s dissection of Harper’s 2012 termination strategies shows how the current “reconciliation” is built on efforts to “negotiate” with tribal leadership in order to diminish Indigenous sovereignty, turn Indigenous nations into Canadian municipalities, and always work toward the goal of legitimizing the settler state through this disappearance and assimilation of Indigenous nations (55).<sup>4</sup> Both example of and metaphor for Canada’s vision for Indigenous Peoples, Canada originally rejected the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2007 because of its incommensurability with “Canada’s domestic policies, especially the articles dealing with Indigenous Peoples’ Self-Determination, Land Rights, and Free, Prior Informed Consent” (Diabo 57). Canada eventually signed the UNDRIP in 2010, but treats it as subordinate to its own federal domestic policy (despite it being an act of international law) and continues to make unilateral policy decisions concerning First Nations. Sylvia McAdam describes

how despite Idle No More's global traction and the many "resounding 'no consent' protests, rallies, and teach-ins" it provoked, most of the proposed measures "aimed at privatizing Treaty land, extinguishing Treaty terms and promises as well as Indigenous sovereignty" were accepted and turned into legislation (66). Notwithstanding a supposed commitment to reconciliation, Canada continues to make unilateral decisions that negatively affect the Indigenous peoples whose territories it occupies in an apparent attempt to fold Indigenous peoples into its progress narrative.

Idle No More defied this attempted erasure by centering and practicing Indigenous resurgence and continuity. The movement and its legacy refuse(d) to "reconcile" away Indigenous sovereignty. In *Red Skin, White Masks*, Coulthard summarizes resurgence as theorized by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig) and Taiaiake Alfred (Kanien'kehá:ka) as "draw[ing] critically on the past with an eye to radically transform the colonial power relations that have come to dominate our present" (157). Correspondingly, considering resurgence through spiralic temporality renders legible the ways that reclaiming the past does not mean being limited to an infinite repetition of the same cycle of traditional knowledge, but rather signifies the fluidity of the continued relevance of the core values of Indigenous ways of knowing (156). Speaking from a Nishnaabeg context in her 2017 book, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, Simpson conveys the "real urgency of resurgence" as continued settler encroachment on treaty lands and treaty rights makes it increasingly important for Indigenous peoples to exercise their treaty rights and to continue to embody the systemic alternatives to the settler colonial structures, as Nishnaabe people "have always done" (5-6).

The urgency is real, as Simpson argues, because the violent erasure of Indigenous peoples by settler societies is real and ongoing. In its hunger for land,

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settler colonization disrupted Simpson's relationship to her lands, her history and thus what her life could have been, and is also the cause for the ongoing Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two Spirit People epidemic (7). Describing her first experience learning from Nishnaabe Elders, Simpson explains how her reconnecting to Nishnaabewin through the Elders' practice "was a returning, in the present, to [her]self. It was an unfolding of a different present" (18).<sup>5</sup> Spiralic temporality allows us to see how embodied experiences of Indigenous cultural continuity are related across moments in time, and how these relations (embodied in practices) can structure the present and inform the future to ensure Indigenous thriving.

Sylvia McAdam explains in *The Winter We Danced* how the Cree elders she consulted were on board with Idle No More's efforts and offered their prayers, and underscored the need to use their own laws, particularly "nahtamawasewin" which, "invoked in times of crisis and great threat... means to defend for the children," including the non-human children of the plant, animal, and other nations (McAdam 66). Through invoking place-based traditional knowledges to inform Indigenous resistance, Indigenous organizers and activists are revealing how their actions *in their time* are in relation with those that came before and those that are still to come. Idle No More is just one contemporary iteration of a spiral of Indigenous resistance rooted in cultural continuity.

### **"To Set the Memory in Perpetuity": Spiralic Temporality in *The Marrow Thieves***

Full of metaphors and different tools to help interpret the present day colonial context in what is currently the U.S. and Canada, Cherie Dimaline's *The Marrow Thieves* explicitly models how Indigenous resurgence is continuity, and that traditional Indigenous ways of knowing are—quite literally in the novel's case—the key to

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Indigenous thriving. In *The Marrow Thieves*, Dimaline shows how the colonial, capitalist progress narrative is embodied through environmental destruction and imagines a further development where the issues with "progress" are reflected in colonizers' loss of their ability to dream, or their ability to imagine a thriving future for themselves. Rather than addressing the settler colonizer anti-Indigenous policies and treaty-breaking habits directly, *The Marrow Thieves* is set in a future which echoes contemporary concerns by Indigenous people regarding reconciliation discussed above. This future contains a (post-) apocalyptic world where all of the Canadian government's termination and so-called "reconciliation" efforts have paid off in favor of the settler colonizer state. There appear to be no strong Indigenous nations anymore, tribal leadership has very limited power, and Native people have been forcibly assimilated into Canadian society in a way that detached many from their languages and cultures. The novel uses the familiar images of "blood memory" and bone marrow to embody Indigenous ways of knowing and being in ways they can be passed on.

*The Marrow Thieves* itself appears to take the shape of a spiralic transformation of an earlier iteration of this blood narrative in Native literature: White Earth Ojibwe author Gerald Vizenor's *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991). Chadwick Allen, in his 2002 book *Blood Narrative*, describes how Vizenor's humorous story takes the concept of "blood memory" coined by N. Scott Momaday (Kiowa), and turns it into a tangible substance that can be extracted from Indigenous people's DNA in order to literally, physically heal Indigenous children (Allen 192). Transforming Vizenor's satirical take on "blood quantum politics" through the empowering qualities of Indigenous memory physically present in the blood, Dimaline starts from the other side of the same idea. That is, she imagines the ways settler colonizers, perhaps through the process of reconciliation, could learn how to turn that into a tool to help themselves (and) further



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destroy Indigenous people and peoples. *The Marrow Thieves* addresses the histories and present of anti-Indigenous capitalist violence, which is also violence against the non-human world, and centers Indigenous radical relationality and cultural continuity as the guides to building thriving futures in spite of and against this violence.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, non-Natives lose their ability to dream, and thus their vision for living. Dimaline describes how the changing earth gave all the signs that the human peoples neglected their obligations towards it and cried out in devastation (“she went out like a wild horse, bucking off as much as she could before lying down” (Dimaline 87)). Nevertheless, settler governments would not and did not change their linear “progression” towards total destruction; millions of people died; melting polar ice changed climates and caused violent weather, tsunamis, tornados, and earthquakes; oil and gas pipelines “snapped like icicles and spewed bile over forests, into lakes, drowning whole reserves and towns” (Dimaline 88). Despite all this tumult, settlers would not change their ways. Dimaline writes,

But the powers that be still refused to change and bent the already stooped under the whips of a schedule made for a population twice its size and inflated by the need to rebuild. Those that were left worked longer, worked harder. And now the sun was gone for weeks at a time. The suburban structure of their lives had been upended. And so they got sicker, this time in the head. They stopped dreaming. And a man without dreams is just a meaty machine with a broken gauge. (Dimaline 88)

The progress-oriented settler temporality and worldview preclude futurity through their “miscalculation of infallibility” (Dimaline 87). Because settlers use up every resource until they are all gone and do not honor reciprocal relations, they have little to guide them, and thriving futures are hard to imagine (or “dream”). Thus, they reach for

Indigenous people to ensure their own futurity. However, much like their extractive relationship to the land, settlers did not attempt to enter in reciprocal relationships with Indigenous peoples; rather, they treat them like another resource to exploit.

The novel takes up the issue of settlers finding themselves through the foil of the Native in the most literal way;<sup>6</sup> it connects the driving plot point of colonizers taking Native people's dream-holding bone marrow for themselves with earlier iterations of appropriation and extraction. Dimaline writes how, at first, non-Native people looked to Native peoples for teachings and guidance, in a way Native people had experienced before: "the way the New Agers had, all reverence and curiosity" (88). However, also "like the New Agers," they swiftly changed course and started trying to appropriate traditional knowledges to better serve themselves, without taking on the according obligations. The settlers asked themselves, "[h]ow could they best appropriate the uncanny ability we kept to dream? How could they make ceremony better, more efficient, more economical?" (88). This commodification of traditional ways led directly to the commodification of Indigenous peoples, and as a result of these developments, Indigenous bodies are turned into resources to serve settler "progress."

In the novel, colonizers lost their ability to dream, but their Church and their scientists figure out that Native people still can dream and that they hold their dreams in their bone marrow (89). In the new residential schools, non-Native people leech the bone marrow out of the Native people they have been able to catch, in order for those stolen dreams to sustain non-Native life. The new iteration of these "schools" takes up the original project of disrupting traditional kinship relations and forbidding Indigenous languages in order to disappear the Indigenous in a new way, while continuing "the theft of memory, growth, and dreams" (Zanella 8). Using the same term is a powerful way to make that connection clear and comment both on the past of residential school

violence and the present of superficial Canadian reconciliation attempts that are a violence in their wish for easy “progress” and erasure of past harms, despite their current reverberations.

The colonial violence and racism Dimaline describes in the hellscape of a future in which the story is set is not hard to believe, because this future society she imagines builds on what we have already seen happen in the past and which we continue to see happening in the present. In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee Nation) emphasizes that “[w]hen apocalypse appears as an overt theme in Indigenous writing, it’s more than speculation – it’s experiential, even in its most fantastical, because in a very real way it hasn’t ended” (168). Through a depiction of what the world might look like if the current threads of colonial power imbalances and violences are allowed to develop further, the novel shows it all has come to pass in different iterations before: through the residential schools, through different waves of genocide, through the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit people epidemic.

The violence Native people are subjected to in the text builds on what we have seen in the past and continue to see; it appears as a vision of a spiralic transformation of settler colonizer anti-Indigenous violence.<sup>7</sup> Yet, the alternatives Dimaline posits, the new world building possibilities as well as the way people survive through the hardships, are also not new; they are rooted in long histories of survivance and relations across time and space, cultural resurgence, and traditional knowledges. Indigenous strength lies in their spiralic relations across time.

In *The Marrow Thieves*, we follow a teen boy, Francis, or French(ie), a nickname inspired by his Métis identity. We first meet him when he loses his family to the marrow thieving colonizers (specifically to their police-like force called “Recruiters”). He soon

encounters a new, complex family, created out of different people who were on the run separately and came together for safety and for community, and starts to build relations with them (15). We learn about Frenchie's experiences in his voice, but it is Miigwans, the father figure in the new family Frenchie becomes a part of, who tells "Story," the complex of narratives which holds Indigenous knowledges and experiences all should know to be able to live and thrive in the post-apocalyptic world of *The Marrow Thieves*.

The novel itself uses a thematic spirallic structure, which allows transformation to come to pass. We learn that Frenchie's new composite family is attempting to run away to safety, on foot through the snow and the woods, with only what they can carry on their backs. They are headed north, away from a new wave of residential schools. Stories from survivors who ran away, like Miigwans himself, taught them that colonizers are locking up and killing Native people. In the beginning of the text, we are told that Frenchie's father, when they were still together, had already told him to walk north:

"North is where the others will head. We'll spend a season up by the Bay Zone. We'll hole up in one of those cabins up there and I'll try to find others. We'll find a way, Frenchie. And up north is where we'll find home."

"For sure?" [Frenchie asks, and his dad responds,]

"Hells yes, for sure. I know so because we're going to make a home there. If you make something happen you can count on it being for sure." (Dimaline 6)

In an experience of time as spirallic, the knowledge of the victories against oppression gained by earlier generations helps lend confidence in their own generation's ability to endure and succeed in turn.

Eventually, Frenchie does find a thriving Indigenous community up north, and he is reunited with his father who turns out to be a part of it. Through the central role

of cultural continuity and relations across time, both to the ancestors and to those not yet born, spiralic time is evidenced to be a central trope in the text, essential in the struggle against settler colonizer violence. Frenchie's father's confidence in the future underscores both the importance of this image of a thriving future to motivate the struggle that is happening in the current moment, and the knowledge that this future can and will exist, no matter how hard settler colonizers work to keep Indigenous people(s) confined to the past and outside of the contemporary experience.

*The Marrow Thieves* places Indigenous youths' ability to thrive not in a future of Indigenous liberation but in one of a renewed iteration of the constant state of emergency of Indigenous apocalypse (Canadian "reconciliation" claims notwithstanding). In this way, the novel models resurgence, existing, resisting, loving, surviving, and thriving in a way which can be related directly to our current moment, which is one of an apocalypse in progress since 1492. The novel emphasizes the importance of intergenerational relationality, of cultural continuity, of building relations (blood and otherwise), and both to live fully as Indigenous youth and also to resist the violences and the pressures of the settler colonizer structures. The text is not one where Indigenous youth live happily ever after in a world that appreciates them; rather, it is a story about Indigenous youth figuring out how to still live happily while the apocalypse is everywhere around them. The aim is to show Indigenous youth that there is a future in which they can thrive, and that they already have the power to create it.

*The Marrow Thieves* engages with an Indigenous temporality and imagines an Indigenous future which is not quite like the next step in the settler colonizer teleological "progress" narrative. It is a future which is, instead, still deeply grounded in the relations to the lands and the stories and histories of the pasts and present times. In a 2017 interview with *The Star*, Dimaline explains that she sees her young

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adult novel functioning as making visible the spirallic relations between the ancestors, the youth today, and those not yet born:

We have a suicide epidemic in our communities. I've done a lot of work in the past with Indigenous youth and one of the things I realized is that they didn't look forward, they didn't see themselves in any kind of a viable future. And I thought, what if they read this book where they literally see themselves in the future, and not just surviving but being the heroes and being the answer, then that's it. (Dundas)

The novel traces a route to cultural continuity despite of and in spite of the contemporary experience where "[t]he end of the world is every day right now" (Dundas). While imagining this future of struggle, Dimaline's characters all still get to enjoy life, too. The story is about more than survival in the face of violence. There is also much room for reconnecting to traditional knowledges as they exist transformed in the novel's future present, as well as for teen angst and joy about love and sex and family. Despite the violence of commodification of their literal beings, the characters remain strongly connected to their relations, old and new, and to their own humanity. Surviving is more than just physically making it to the next day: it is also about building "a life worth living," a life where Indigenous people can thrive (Dimaline 152).

The epigraph of the novel reads, "*For the Grandmothers who gave me strength. / To the children who give me hope,*" firmly placing *The Marrow Thieves* into relation with both those who came before and those who are yet to grow or even to be born. This relationship across generations is evidence of the spirallic relations going from when time began into the future, as well as a call to attention and action of the need to strengthen these intergenerational relations, for the well-being of Indigenous children (both alive today and those not yet born) and, by extension, of Indigenous nations and

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their sovereignty. Michael Chandler and Travis Proulx (both non-Native)'s 2006 research on First Nations youth suicide suggests that "cultural continuity" is a core factor in youth suicide. Chandler and Proulx refer to the discussion of time in Western philosophy, from Heidegger and Kierkegaard to Ricoeur to Gallagher, to establish that a human's daily choice to keep living despite hardship is decided by the person's ability to imagine themselves in a future (127). For humans, our lives only make sense when we can understand ourselves as part of larger story, when we can see our pasts and our presents in a way that helps us anticipate our futures (Chandler and Proulx 127). A second important aspect of this continuity in time is that, for Indigenous youth specifically, this *self-continuity* is keyed in to cultural continuity. Chandler and Proulx demonstrate that "persistent peoples require access to *shared* procedures and practices (cultural tools, if you will) that allow them to imagine and sustain a *shared* history and a *common* future" (136, emphasis mine, brackets in the original). Their research with First Nations in what is currently British Columbia, Canada indicates that those communities with strong cultural continuity have low or zero rates of youth suicide, while youth suicide rates are "many hundreds of times higher than the national average" for nations that so far have been less successful in maintaining cultural continuity and political sovereignty (138). Chandler and Proulx conclude that projects that support the continuation or redeveloping of ties to their past and future "work as protective factors that shield [Native youth] from the threat of self-harm" (140).

Lisa Wexler (non-Native) similarly posits "that a historical understanding of and affiliation with one's culture can provide Indigenous youth with a perspective that transcends the self," which can help them see themselves as part of their nation's story and "offers young people a collective pathway forward" (272). Her research shows that Native American children who know more about their cultural identities and about their

communities' histories have a stronger sense of belonging and identity. This supports their self-continuity: when the youth know more about their past and their connections with their ancestors and their place in the community, these are "cultural tools" that they can use so that they can more easily imagine a successful future for themselves in this community (Wexler 272). The focus on the relational aspect of this experience is essential here. For Indigenous people, self-continuity requires cultural continuity, the belonging in the larger story of the nation and larger sets of relations with traditional lands.

Dimaline reflects this drive for self-continuity through cultural continuity in the younger generations' wish to re-learn and live the traditional ways of knowing, embodied in cultural practices they only sort of know. Frenchie relays how during their family's travel north,

Us kids, we longed for the old-timey. We wore our hair in braids to show it. We made sweat lodges out of broken branches dug back into the earth, covered over with our shirts tied together at the buttonholes. Those lodges weren't very hot, but we sat in them for hours and willed the sweat to pop over our willowy arms and hairless cheeks. (Dimaline 21-22)

Even though they are on the run for the marrow-thieving Recruiters forever on their heels, the youth desire to make space and time to re-learn and practice as well as they could those traditional knowledges that teach them who they are, how to relate, and how to be. Healing and meaning are found through these resurgence practices, by creating connections between the present generation and all those who have come before. Through these practices, the youth actively work to participate in the spiral of Indigenous sovereignty of which they are a part.

Thinking of the past as always present, and of the current self as that of a future



ancestor—and thus of the present as also a future past—informs the living of the future in the now. There is a present potential to actively choose to make the future that we strive for real in our present. Not only does one need to be able to imagine a future to see purpose in living in the now, we need to work on making that future our current reality. Through making the spiralic movements and relations visible, *The Marrow Thieves* models the many small ways in which we can do that now and speaks directly to Indigenous youth to invite them into these spiralic relations. Re-centering Indigenous ways of knowing is one of the key ways to strengthen self- and cultural continuity.

In a 2017 interview with Trevor Corkum (non-Native) for 49<sup>th</sup> Shelf, Cherie Dimaline herself explains how *The Marrow Thieves* grapples with settler colonizers violences such as “residential schools and the danger of shallow reconciliation efforts, commodification of culture,” and she emphasizes that “[i]t's crucial at this time that we accept that the Western way of thinking about our world is a broken theory, that Indigenous Traditional Knowledge is vital to any forward movement” (Corkum). One moment in *The Marrow Thieves* that illustrates this lesson is when it describes a Council, led by Frenchie’s father, setting off to the capital to try and convince the people in power that a whole new world grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing was necessary for a future where everyone could thrive to be possible (Dimaline 141). The Council recognize that the key to ensuring a futurity on the dying Earth is to unlearn Eurowestern settler logics and to start from the land. It is crucial to reconceive of the world in a way that will not inevitably lead to another repeat of violence like the coming of early explorers and settlers, like the residential schools, like the destruction of the environment.

Miigwans, who takes on the role of the family’s mentor and guide, was the guide

on Frenchie's father and his Council's journey to the seat of the settler government, and describes the reasoning for the attempt:

They had this crazy notion that there was goodness left, that someone, somewhere, would see just how insane this whole school thing was. That they could dialogue. That they could explain the system had to die and a new one be built in its place. Like that wasn't scarier to those still in the system than all the dreamlessness and desert wastelands in the world. (Dimaline 141)

David Gaertner (non-Native), in a blog post titled "Welcome to the Desert of Reconciliation," concurs that this moment is one of the most essential in *The Marrow Thieves*. Gaertner, referring to the same 2017 interview with Dimaline by Corkum, understands Miigwans' analysis of the moment as Dimaline's refusal of "shallow reconciliation efforts." The call to take Indigenous ways of knowing seriously, and to acknowledge their incommensurability with capitalist settler colonizer societal structures, sets up an understanding of Canadian reconciliation as always limited by the state's own settler colonizer worldview, a worldview which leads Canada directly to its own as well as larger planetary destruction. Instead, in order to break out of the system non-Native people are committed to because of how it solidifies their own position of power, the settler colonizer political economy needs to be thoroughly transformed, starting from Indigenous worldviews (Gaertner, via Coulthard, Aug. 2018). *The Marrow Thieves* models what centering Indigenous ways of knowing during a state of constant, settler colonizer imposed emergency looks like, and, importantly, shows them to be the key to liberation.

The novel itself is a story about how things came to be how they are at the end of the narrative, offering teachings on how to understand the world we live in today, and modeling ways to use Indigenous ways of knowing to transform the future. We

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begin with Frenchie, who never learned his language, and who loses all of his remaining family members at the beginning of the novel. We follow him as he makes a new set of relations, learns some of the language, works to reconnect with ancestral knowledges (with some stumbling, like when he at first does not recognize the importance of the elder Minerva's teachings (38)), and then chooses a path which catalyzes a renewed empowerment of both his new family and larger Indigenous communities. He does this so successfully that he even reconnects with his father. This does not, however, mean Frenchie is confronted with a choice between the two sets of relations: the story models how he can hold all of his complex relations at once, and remain in reciprocal relations of responsibility with both his blood and chosen relations (Zanella 13). The fact that the narrative is told in the past tense by someone who participated in the events suggests that they survived, that they made it, that they are in a situation where they have the time to tell this story which makes up the novel.

The story of the novel is a continuation of the "Story" that is being told in the novel, the "Story" of how the world of the novel came to be how it is. "Story" in the novel serves as teachings and guidance for Frenchie's complex new family while they try to find a way to escape the mortal danger of the Recruiters. Miigwans explains that they all need to know "Story,"

because it was imperative that we know. He said it was the only way to make the kinds of *changes that were necessary to really survive*. "A general has to see the whole field to make good strategy," he'd explain. "When you're down there fighting, you can't see much past the threat directly in front of you." (Dimaline 25, my emphasis)

"Story" are teachings from past iterations of both anti-Indigenous violence and Indigenous cultural practices. This knowledge is shared so as to allow the listeners of

"Story," the members of the new family, to make the necessary transformations rather than have repeat experiences.

It is through the knowledge of "Story" and the earlier iterations of settler violence and Indigenous resistance and resurgence that Frenchie and his new family know that, if they work to continue their traditional practices, they too can survive this violence. And not only can they survive, but perhaps lessons can be learned from the previous generations' experiences to ensure Indigenous futurity for good. Miigwans starts "Story" by explaining "Anishnaabe people, us, lived on these land for a thousand years," and when the newcomers "who renamed the land Canada" came, the Anishnaabe people welcomed them. He goes on to explain how war and disease brought the Indigenous peoples to their knees, despite the fact that they were supported by their traditional knowledges. Miigwans tells the family, "We were great fighters — warriors, we called ourselves and each other — and we knew these lands, so we kicked a lot of ass." ... "But we lost a lot. Mostly because we got sick with new germs" (Dimaline 23). Because they did not yet have the knowledge needed to defend themselves against these "new germs," Indigenous peoples suffered immense loss.

Miigwans explains how settler colonizers doubled down on these losses and opened the first residential schools, striving to eradicate Indigenous ways of knowing, languages, and even lives. He describes the painful experiences of the earlier generations with a previous iteration of residential schools. These schools might not have been bone marrow factories, but they too were destructive: "We suffered there. We almost lost our languages. Many lost their innocence, their laughter, their lives" (Dimaline 23). However, the insight Miigwans wants the youth to take away is that despite all of the violence and the great losses, as a people, Anishnaabe not only survived, but got the schools to close. He explains, "we got through it, and the schools

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were shut down. We returned to our home places and rebuilt, relearned, regrouped. We picked up and carried on" (23). Miigwans family, too, can rebuild, relearn, regroup, and carry on. This is what "Story" teaches them.

While struggles continued and many years were lost to the deep hurt caused by all the losses ("too much pain drowned in forgetting that came in convenient packages: bottles, pills, cubicles where we settled to move around papers" (Dimaline 23)), the resurgence of traditional practices, of education within the appropriate cultural contexts ("classrooms we built on our own lands and filled with our own words and books" (24)) is what made the people, the people again. They regained their strength and their inherent sovereignty through remembering their spiralic relations across the generations which informed their identities. Miigwans emphasizes that "once we remembered that we were warriors, once we honored the pain and left it on the side of the road, we moved ahead. We were back" (24). The "we" here is the people, his people, yet of many generations ago. It was by reestablishing relations with the earlier generations and the resurgence of traditional knowledges embodied in practices that the earlier generations' eventual victory was brought into the present, Indigenous self- and cultural continuity was strengthened, and sovereignty was rebuilt. An attentive listener to "Story" can learn from their ancestors, reach for their traditions, and let them be guides in their own struggle for survival.

Through a reflection of time as spiralic, "Story" explains how the thieving of the marrow began: "It was like the second coming of the boats, so many sick people and not enough time to organize peacefully," and it describes how Native people "were moved off the lands that were deemed 'necessary' to that government, same way they took reserve land during wartime" (Dimaline 87-88). So that the violence of earlier iterations might not return to finish the job, it is important to remember its "Story" and

"set the memory in perpetuity" (25). Importantly, traditional knowledges can and should be transformed to fit the new conditions, as a full understanding of history and culture is needed "to make the kinds of changes that were necessary to really survive" and build thriving futures (25).

Crucially to the novel's plot and concerns, "Story" shows how not just anti-Indigenous violence reiterates through spirallic movements in time; the key to ending all the violence does too. Dimaline locates this key in Indigenous cultural continuity, personified by the character of an elder named Minerva who speaks the language, practices the culture, and knows how to use herbs for healing (38; 152; 93). When the core family we follow loses Minerva, they find her collection of jagged-edged jingles, made from lids taken off with the "camp can opener and stamped with expiry dates and some with company names: Campbell's, Heinz" (152). One of the younger ones is confused because jingles are meant to produce noise, which they are told not to do in this current world in which they are being hunted. When he voices this confusion the response is powerful, even though at that point it is still unknown that the jingles are exactly what holds the key to their liberation. One of the older family members explains how "[s]ometimes you risk everything for a life worth living, even if you're not the one that'll be alive to live it" (152). This is one of the many moments where the relations across time, across generations, are shown to be central to the characters' way of conceiving of the world and of their place in it. They are led by their awareness of their roles as future ancestors.

Not only are their traditional cultural practices essential to their survival as a people, they can be transformed in the moment without losing value (using Campbell's & Heinz lids, for example). The jingles connect the people we are following in the story with their ancestors through the continuation of the healing cultural practice of the

jingle dress dance, born during a previous apocalyptic time, the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918-1919, transformed for their present (Child 126). At the same time, the jingles also connect them to a future where their descendants are thriving, as they are cause for the people to imagine themselves as future ancestors continuing the culture transformed. Frenchie's new community consider themselves not just in relation with their ancestors, but also conceive of themselves as future ancestors to those who are not yet born. In this way, the jingles represent spiralic time through their cultural meaning and the connection across time they represent.

When Minerva is taken, and the jingles she secretly had been collecting are found, Frenchie's new family decides to stop running. At that point, the new family had lost both their youngest member (Riri) to Native people collaborating with the Recruiters, and their elder (Minerva) to the Recruiters themselves. Having lost their most direct links to the future and the ancestors respectively (Zanella 16), and struggling with what it means that he killed a man involved in Riri's murder, Frenchie comes to the painful realization that the only way to ensure their continuity is by standing up to their oppressors. He urges his family to stop running away from the danger and instead to charge towards it:

The rest of my little family looked at me with curiosity. Something had changed. Whether it was this second huge loss or the life I'd taken with all the speed of vengeance back at the cliff, I wasn't sure. But there was no more north in my heart. And I wasn't sure what I meant to do until I said it out loud.

"I'm going after Minerva." (Dimaline 153)

Minerva might have been stolen from them, but the jingles she left them are a strong reminder of the power the family has in their shared knowledges and spiralic relations across time, as well as of the central importance of Minerva herself as holder of so

much knowledge. Even without having been sewn onto a dress to perform the healing jingle dress dance, the jingles already carry cultural power to remind the family of their inherent sovereignty and the strength in their relations.

Once they change direction, the family find another, bigger community made up out of Native people from all over. This bigger community is leading a fight against the marrow thieves, and in the process, or as a basis, created a safe-haven for Native refugees north of the existing residential schools. Hidden behind a cave, their camp, smells of "[t]obacco. Cedar. And the thick curl of something more, something I thought I'd only ever smelled with the memory of smell" (Dimaline 168). This memory of a smell suggests that the knowledge of it was passed on through the generations, without Frenchie ever having been able to experience it himself until he gets to this camp.

This memory could be interpreted as a "blood memory." This recurring trope suggests a kind of memory of a knowledge that is passed on through the generations, without actually ever having been taught. We see it, for example, when Frenchie tries to hunt by himself in the very beginning without ever having hunted before. He describes he hopes it will somehow come to him, as some kind of "blood memory" (Dimaline 10). The use of "blood memory" here emphasizes the connections across time, even when people were forced to skip the practice of cultural continuity for one or more generations. We learn that the smell of the camp which is known without ever having been smelled before is the smell of sweetgrass, a traditional herb (168).

Other traditions guide the Indigenous community as well: right when Frenchie's family first enters the camp, the Council of that camp just ended a sweat to welcome a new Council member (Dimaline 168). We learn that it is the same Council that Frenchie's father traveled with to try and change the world's leaders' minds, but with some new members as well. The Council members are described to be seven people



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all from different nations, Frenchie's father still with them (169). Frenchie finding his father, and the smaller complex family finding this culturally strong and resilient community, is interpreted as proof that the decision to stop running and to take matters in their own hands was a good one (177). From this community, Frenchie and his family learn what happened with Minerva.

The moment Recruiters try to take Minerva's bone marrow in the so-called "school," her singing in the language explodes the whole system. This resurgence of traditional knowledge relies on her "blood memory:"

The Recruiters would later be identified through dental records... Minerva hummed and drummed out an old song on her flannel thighs throughout it all. But when the wires were fastened to her own neural connectors, and the probes reached into her heartbeat and instinct, that's when she opened her mouth. That's when she called on her blood memory, her teachings, her ancestors. That's when she brought the whole thing down. She sang. She sang with volume and pitch and a heartbreaking wail that echoed through her relatives' bones, rattling them in the ground under the school itself. (Dimaline 172)

As a result, the whole building is blown up, ending the operations there. The comment on dental records suggest all workers present were killed in the explosion, but Minerva survives. Through her singing in the language, she connects with the ancestors who are buried underneath the building. This connection through land, through language, through ceremony, and through kinship across time, is what transforms the cultural teachings into the power to bring down the destructive so-called school, and into an opening for a future where Indigenous people's fates are transformed. Other Native refugees camped in the woods in the area use the smoke of the burning building to smudge. The "campers made their hands into shallow cups and pulled the air over

their heads and faces, making prayers out of ashes and smoke. Real old-timey," and so they make ceremony out of the end of the violence there (Dimaline 174). The power of cultural continuity is in Indigenous self-determination and transformation. Minerva's cultural knowledge, some of it passed on through blood memory and thus despite the oppression by settler colonizers, is shown to be the key to the possibility for a thriving Indigenous future.

Another essential aspect of the work for thriving Indigenous futures is the relationship with place, with the land and all its relations as the people and the land share their experiences with violence as well as their healing capacities. The newly created diasporic community in the north exists out of Indigenous people from all over Turtle Island. Nonetheless, while they come together in their new configurations and in new locations in order to protect their families from the marrow thieves' settler colonizer violence, this does not mean they have given up their relationships of responsibility with their original homelands.

Much of what was the United States has been completely destroyed, either flooded by the rising sea level, or turned toxic from environmental degradation. Clarence, a leader Frenchie meets at the camp up north, explains to him: "Closer you get to the coasts," ... "the more water's left that can be drunk. The middle grounds?" ... "Nothing. It's like where the bomb landed and the poison leached into the banks, everything's gone in all directions till you get further out" (Dimaline 193). The water and the land were made unlivable. The suffering of Indigenous peoples in this apocalypse caused by a linear settler temporality's obsession with so-called progress and development is directly related to the suffering of the land and its other relations.

For the people who belong to those lands, true healing on Turtle Island requires the healing of the land. Clarence explains this to Frenchie:

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“All we need is the safety to return to our homelands. Then we can start the process of healing.”

I was confused. “How can you return home when it’s gone? Can’t you just heal out here?”

Miig and General gave each other knowing looks, and Clarence was patient with his answer. “I mean we can start healing the land. We have the knowledge, kept through the first round of these blasted schools, from before that, when these visitors first made their way over here like angry children throwing tantrums. *When we heal our land, we are healed also.*” Then he added, “We’ll get there. Maybe not soon, but eventually.” (Dimaline 193, my emphasis)

The traditional knowledges, passed on through the generations, guide Clarence to knowing that the lands are as important as the cultures. Clarence explains that essential knowledge about the land and how to care for it was passed on across the previous iterations of settler violences. It is that knowledge that informs Indigenous ways of knowing and being even in their apocalyptic future present. They know that “[m]aybe not soon, but eventually,” the land to whom they belong will be healed and future generations of Indigenous peoples will live healed and thriving lives. Trusting on the futurity promised in a temporality that is spiralic, their actions are motivated by the idea (discussed above) that “[s]ometimes you risk everything for a life worth living, even if you’re not the one that’ll be alive to live it” (Dimaline 152).

### **“Our history is still unfolding”**

While not literally in the grip of a bone marrow extricating machine, Indigenous people in Canada *are* in the grip of Canadian genocidal violence, the commodification of Indigenous cultures, and the disruption of their relationships with their lands and

waters. In response to the death grip of the settler colonizer nation on their lands, Idle No More emphasized the central role of culture and continuity for Indigenous sovereignty. Round dance flash mobs were an essential part of Idle No More's actions; centering culture and Indigenous people being Indigenous people (rather than centering the interaction with settler colonizers and/or the settler colonizer state), the round dances were a powerful experience for the drummers, singers, and dancers who participated.

Evidenced by Idle No More, and illustrated by *The Marrow Thieves*, the power of relations, language, culture is in their not being static but living, even as the situations in different moments in time vary. *The Marrow Thieves* offers possibilities of healing in the future. It presents a spiral of relations through writing and telling story that center resurgence, relationality, and a plurality of futures where Native people do more than merely struggle to survive: they find ways to build community, create new relations, and fight for what matters, while still being honest to the experience of violence and other trauma that Native people exponentially have to live through. Recognizing the working of spiralic time as a non-linear temporality that allows the past to also always be the future emphasizes continuity and intergenerational relations.

"Story" within the story of *The Marrow Thieves* models the cyclical churning of time that loops around itself in this imagined future of the novel that is also the present. It models living in good relation and offers cultural resurgence as a key to ending the violence. This resurgence is always also cultural continuity, even if the continuity is one only accessible through "blood memory," rather than being purposely passed on through living relations. *The Marrow Thieves* provides that key through

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making its critique on superficial reconciliation and through its embodiment of continuity of culture transformed.

This approach to modeling a possible Indigenous future and to giving space to teen angst, love, and joy in the midst of struggle, as *The Marrow Thieves* does, is essential, because as Aman Sium (Tigrinya and Eritrean) and Eric Ritskes (non-Native) write, “[i]f we are waiting for the dismantling of colonial structures before we focus on rebuilding Indigenous and decolonial alternatives, we will always be too late” (viii). Instead, through the resurgence of embodied practices that rebuild the relationship with the land, both the peoples and the lands to which they belong can be healed. In Sylvia McAdam’s words (speaking about Idle No More’s purpose):

it is in the lands and waters that Indigenous people’s history is written. Our history is still unfolding; it’s led by our song and drums. (67)

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Armstrong gives an example of how the cycles of change inform how Syilx tell time as “change relative to other things” (167). She cites her father’s reference to the 1818-1819 Spanish Flu pandemic as “the-winter-people-died.” She relays that the “great flu epidemic killed over two-thirds of our population, when my father was in his puberty. That change was what happened, not the number of years counted from some point one thousand nine hundred and nineteen years past. The count of years is irrelevant” (167).

<sup>2</sup> These and other experiences of and perspectives on time are also reflected in the different texts that make up the 2012 anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction *Walking the Clouds*, edited by Grace L. Dillon.

<sup>3</sup> These are listed as “the Indian Act, the *Fisheries Act*, the *Canadian Environmental Assessment Act*, and the *Navigable Water Act* (amongst many others)” (The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 21).

<sup>4</sup> Diabo reveals how the 2012 Termination policy was a direct extension from earlier legislation such as the Indian Act and the 1969 “White Paper on Indian Policy which set out a plan to terminate Indian rights,” of which the original 5-year timeline to achieve the goal of termination was extended to a slow, “long-term implementation” (55).

<sup>5</sup> Simpson admits it took her many years to realize that the stories the Elders she was learning from told her were of a practice that also embodied a theory, and that she was only able to get to this transformed understanding "through deep engagement with the Nishnaabeg systems inherent in Nishnaabewin... including story or theory, language learning, ceremony, hunting, fishing, ricing, sugar making, medicine making, politics, and governance" (19). Nishnaabeg knowledge is embodied knowledge, which enables a transformation of worldview and of being in the world that strengthens Nishnaabeg nationhood despite, or regardless of, settler colonial structural violence (7).

<sup>6</sup> For more on this common settler trope, see Philip J. Deloria (Yankton Dakota), *Playing Indian*, Yale University Press, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Where a heuristic of spirallic temporality keeps us focused on the ways Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing and being are always in relation to those who have come before and those who are yet to come, we notice how settler colonial time is a temporality weaponized to obscure the spirallic reality of intergenerational relationality and cyclical returns with transformations. Despite its own attempts to hide the continuous recurrence in different forms of its genocidal project, settler colonial violence, too, participates in Indigenous spirallic temporality, because it is part of Indigenous lived experiences.

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## Sordid Pasts, Indigenous Futures: Necropolitics and Survivance in Louis Owens' *Bone Game*

FRANCISCO DELGADO

In *Mixedblood Messages: Literature, Film, Family, Place*, Louis Owens (Choctaw/Cherokee/Irish) describes California as “a place where [he] never stopped being a stranger” (233). A sense of belonging, not just for Owens but for many of his Native protagonists, appears to be as illusory as the Hollywood narratives (like the 1992 production of *Last of the Mohicans* referenced by the narrator) that many of his characters ridicule and rebel against. California embodies the United States’ settler colonialist genocide as much as its steadfast refusal to truly reconcile with its history.<sup>1</sup> In its capacity to estrange, as well as to seduce with promises of new beginnings, the state provides more than a setting for Owens’ 1994 *Bone Game*. The state’s “ritualistic violence” toward its Indigenous communities, as well as the pat version of reconciliation that it promotes via its Hollywood productions and history textbooks, influence the novel’s main narrative as much as any of the characters (Purdy 9).

*Bone Game* recounts the difficulties of reconciliation in the political climate of the late-twentieth century, when this type of work perhaps seemed largely performative or, worse yet, intended only for individual gain. According to our third-person narrator, the idealism and fervor of 1960s social activism, embodied most relevantly in the context of the novel by the American Indian Movement (AIM), is gone. AIM activists have become performers pursuing profit and fame, “running sweat ceremonies for crystal gazers in

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Santa Cruz, playing Chingachgook in a Hollywood movie, and singing with an Indian rap group" (31-2). While a stiff assessment of Russell Means and John Trudell, this passage depicts the 1990s as a time when the arduous work of reconciliation perhaps seemed abandoned. Rather than creating new narratives about Indigenous sovereignty, for instance, activists like Means seemed content with playing a supporting role in a narrative that serves as an early example of the Vanishing Indian myth. *Bone Game*, then, is set in a time informed just as much by settler colonialism as by the neoliberal milieu of the 1970s and 1980s, when personal profit largely eclipsed communal responsibility.

Cole McCurtain, our protagonist, has no community at the beginning of the novel. In his off-campus home, bottles of liquor pile up alongside unopened mail. Social interactions occur only in his capacity as an English professor teaching classes on Modernism and Native American literature. In addition to Cole's trauma from the death of his brother, Attis—the subject of Owens' *The Sharpest Sight* (1992)—he is troubled by dreams of a figure painted half-white and half-black "ready to gamble for this world" (71). These dreams unsettle Cole from his sleep, from his alcoholism, and root him in the genocidal history of Santa Cruz, where the Franciscan mission system recorded some of the state's highest death rates (Bernardin 47). Only knowing "a little bit" of the story and his role in it, Cole is joined by his college-aged daughter, Abby, as well as his father Hoey, his Uncle Luther, and his honorary "grandmother," Onatima, who advises Cole and others about the importance of stories (79). Together with Alex, a Diné Anthropology professor working at the same university, this group must reconcile the horrors of settler colonialism before it victimizes them. At the same time, each of them must help construct an Indigenous future when the realities of history are addressed, Indigenous sovereignty is restored, community and communal responsibility are revitalized, and Indigenous stories are linked and propagated.

Survivance stories, which Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) defines as “renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry,” connect Indigenous peoples to their ancestors, their histories, as well as to their descendants (1). The title of this essay, “Sordid Pasts, Indigenous Futures” speaks to this intergenerational connection forged out of survivance. While seemingly implying distinctions based on chronology (the past, simply put, is not the future, and vice versa), my objective is to diminish such chronological distinctions to show how Owens’ novel both prevents the past from appearing beyond reproach and stops the future from seeming too abstract. The novel asserts that Indigenous futures can be realized and fulfilled when the horrors of settler colonialism are addressed and resolved.

In the context of this study, an Indigenous future is one that honors Indigenous claims of sovereignty—of territory, of bodies, and of thought. While geared toward the future, as the name suggests, it is linked to the pasts informing our shared (or, in the very least, concurrent) present. Furthermore, an Indigenous future is rooted in the agency of and the voice(s) from Native communities; thus, it is closely related to Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s (Mississauga Nishnaabeg) concept of “Indigenous freedom,” which begins with “being very clear about what [we] want out of the present and what [we] expect from the future” (7). Cole’s and his community’s objective is two-fold: to tend to the past and the future simultaneously. By alleviating the injustices of the former, they brighten the prospects of the latter for Indigenous people, whose genocide has long been neglected in popular discourses about California and the United States more generally.

As Owens makes clear with *Bone Game*, the past informs both the present and possibilities for the future. The past of California, moreover, is rooted in necropolitics or, as Achille Mbembe explains, “the power of death” (39). Necropolitical power has been

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implemented against the Indigenous people of California throughout the region's history: from its missionary settlements as northern Mexico, to the gold rush of the mid-1800s, to the California of the novel in which Cole, his daughter Abby, and his friend/colleague Alex are the targets of a serial killer. Indigenous people are exposed to "the power of death" to such a degree that it informs their individual and collective senses of self. Onatima explains to Cole,

"It's not wrong to survive. I see Indians all the time who are ashamed of surviving, and they don't even know it. We have survived a five-hundred-year war in which millions of us were starved to death, burned in our homes, shot and killed with disease and alcohol. It's a miracle any Indian is alive today. Why us, we wonder. We read their books and find out we're supposed to die. That's the story they've made up for us." (165)

Settler colonialist stories teach Natives that there is something innately wrong about their ongoing survival. The danger of this lesson is compounded by the fact that these "books," and the world they have helped develop, seem to go largely unchallenged. Onatima tells Cole when he is younger: "[Writing] is how they make the world" (20). But it is, to return to Mbembe, a "*death-world*" that these books create, one "in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (Mbembe 40, italics in original). While Mbembe writes in the context of the occupation of Palestine (also a settler colonialist state), his concept of necropolitics aligns just as well with California, where Indigenous people, "and by extension all who can be made 'Indian,'... can be killed without being murdered" (Byrd 227). Their deaths yield no justice, not even sufficient social outrage. There is no justice for the Ohlone, who suffered the whip from Spanish missionaries in the not-so-distant past that haunts Cole.

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Owens himself had a complex relationship with his adopted state. While recognizing the “boundless possibility” that California promises in the minds of many, including Cole and Abby, Owens was also haunted by the heavy toll that the gold rush of the mid-1800s had on the state’s Indigenous communities, as evidenced by their 100,000 casualties (“Where Things Can Happen” 152). Underwriting the state’s promise of riches (historically via the gold rush or, more recently, via Hollywood or the tech-boom beginning in the late-twentieth century) are the atrocities enacted by Spanish and American settlers against California Natives that continue to go unacknowledged in the context of *Bone Game*. As Onatima observes about the part of California outside of Cole’s Santa Cruz home, “I’ve never felt a place so troubled by the past. And that, of course, is the essence of our problem... we know in our hearts that there is no such thing as the past... To believe otherwise is to deceive ourselves and to never be whole” (176). Here, Onatima is pushing back against the dominant narrative that the past is simply past and that dwelling on it is counterproductive. The failure to acknowledge and reconcile the injustices of history, she states, prevents Indigenous people of the Americas from “be[coming] whole,” much in the same way that a serial killer terrorizing Santa Cruz deliberately dismembers his victims. This history includes the oft-neglected enslavement of Indigenous people until 1867, a fact that prompts Cole to comment, “Californians don’t like to hear about their sordid pasts. No one’s supposed to even have a past in California. It’s considered in poor taste” (178). This conception of California as a place without a past no doubt contributes to its utopic associations. But rather than being a sign of utopia, the state’s deliberate refusal of its past is more dystopic in nature. Raffaella Baccolini argues that a dystopia, like California in *Bone Game*, in fact “depends on and denies history.” California denies its history of slavery and genocide, while “depend[ing] on” it to naturalize the presence and power of Euro-American settlers,

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even as many Native communities, including the Ohlone of the Santa Cruz region, struggle for recognition from the United States federal government (115).<sup>2</sup>

Rather than reversing this dystopian tendency to ignore history, the university where Cole works contributes to the milieu obfuscating uncomfortable histories of the state. Built on Ohlone burial grounds, as Alex points out, the university seems uninterested in serving the state's Indigenous communities when it is easier—and, perhaps more importantly, more profitable—for it to control the public narrative of their histories. Alex quips, "They don't want an Indian in their [Anthropology] department unless he's in a museum, like Ishi. It makes them uncomfortable to have a live Indian around when they want to go dig up Chumash bones" (51). Acting under the financial and ideological directive of UC Santa Cruz, the department only wants Natives as objects of study, like the dried up bones of the Chumash or the passivity that academic institutions wish to impose on someone like Ishi. Alex, however, wishes to be an active agent of social and intellectual change: he aims to prove himself as an inquiring subject, not just as a subject of inquiry. He contests the pacification of the Native by proposing a project in which he will treat Puritan bones as the bones of Native peoples have often been treated:

"They have the remains of twelve thousand Native people in the Hearst Museum<sup>3</sup> at Berkeley, right? The bones of our relations. Well, I've written an NSF proposal for a team of Indian anthropologists to do a dig in the cemetery at the Old North Church in Boston. That's where they buried all those Puritans. The Winthrops are buried there. My basic argument is that it's imperative we Indians learn more about Puritan culture. Puritans had a significant impact on us." (180)

Describing Puritans as "primitive but fascinating people," Alex takes the language often deployed against Indigenous people and turns it against settlers (180). Furthermore, he



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portrays Puritans in the same objective manner typically reserved for Natives, arguing that “it’s imperative we Indians learn more about Puritan culture [because they have] had a significant impact on us” (180). Puritans are examined for their “impact” without having any say in the process or in any conclusions Alex may draw. They are also spoken of in the past tense (“had”) as if they exist exclusively in history, a treatment predominantly reserved for Natives. In this way, Alex shows his status as the narrative’s primary trickster figure by emphasizing “humor over tragedy” (Lalonde 19). Alex does not dwell on the tragic aspects of Native experiences; rather, he uses humor and wit to challenge dominant narrative of American academia that reduces Natives to passive objects only. As Vine Deloria Jr. (Standing Rock Sioux) writes in *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*, “Laughter encompasses the limits of the soul. In humor life is redefined and accepted” (146). Alex’s humor, then, is an example of survivance, in that it “is an active presence over absence” (Vizenor 1). His use of humor in this passage highlights his “presence” in an intellectual space where his “absence” would perhaps be more welcome. Alex also highlights the necropolitical dystopia that *Bone Game* both accentuates and critiques, because Native Americans are only featured in museums as displays, not as scholars or curators. In his NSF proposal, then, he brings to mind the tragic case of Ishi, who as Vizenor explains, “represents to many readers the cultural absence and tragic victimry of Native American Indians in California” (3). Commodified as the “last wild Indian,” Ishi marks in the minds of many the end of the dominant story of California Natives. In contrast, individuals like Alex and Cole complicate settler notions that the west was “won,” that the frontier has ended, and that settler guilt over the horrors perpetuated against Natives can be assuaged if settlers (and their descendants) simply feel bad enough about them.

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Guilt spares Euro-American settlers the mess of having to acknowledge the necropolitical processes in which Indigenous people are implicated by the state. Mbembe writes, "the human being truly *becomes a subject*— that is, separated from the animal — in the struggle and the work through which he or she confronts death (understood as the violence of negativity). It is through this confrontation with death that he or she is cast into the incessant movement of history" (14, italics in original). To apply this argument to Owens' *Bone Game*, we must begin by acknowledging how it omits the processes of racialization in its discussion of how the state creates its subjects. In other words, the creation of a subject is by no means uniform across the citizenry, as each subject is variously affected by history, geography, language, and religion. Second, Mbembe portrays the subject's "confrontation with death" as a voluntary act when, in fact, the nation-state laying claim (or trying to claim) the subject is the one forcing this "confrontation." Ishi, for instance, was not seeking captivity when he was captured by settlers; the last of his tribe, he was in search for food. Likewise, the Ohlone (and all other California Natives) were not seeking Christ—or, more specifically, Roman Catholicism—but rather were presented with them through the cruel methods of the Spanish missionaries. As Alex puts it to Cole, who is still struggling to figure out his role in the creation of an Indigenous future, "the Spanish came and taught [the Ohlone] history and death in a single moment... one morning they woke up and the world was unrecognizable. They must have felt like they were the dead and the Spanish were the living" (54).

This feeling of being dead extends to the present day of the novel to Cole, whose struggles to reconcile history (using literature) are compounded by his own inability to express the complexities and nuances of Black Elk in a lecture. Reflecting on it, Cole identifies where he may have failed through the third-person narrator:

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In trying to free Black Elk from the romantic visions of John Neihardt and the students, he'd confused everything. He could tell the student felt cheated, missing the truth of the beautiful, troubled, old man, Nicholas Black Elk, the angry Catholic who had been born on the boundary of one world and survived far into another." (35)

Black Elk is a passive presence, even in his own narrative. Neihardt has assumed authorial control of Black Elk's life story. Following Neihardt's model, Cole's students are intent on perpetuating the silencing of Native people so that they may impose their own colonialist desires onto them: "They brought [Cole] lovely feathers, presenting them with wonder because he was Indian, as though his mixed blood allowed them access to certain astonishments of the beautiful world. In their own mirrors, they were explorers, raiding parties, horse thieves of life, and some of them were mad" (11). In these scenarios, they are not a passive audience for Cole's lecture; they are active participants in narratives of their own imagining: narratives forged out of their own tenuous grips on history rooted more in Old West films and grade-school textbooks that provide the one-sided version of American history that gives them comfort.<sup>4</sup>

Cole recognizes that his students do not actually want to confront the horrors of settler colonialism as they appear in Black Elk's narrative. Frustrated, he asks his teaching assistant, "[t]hat's what the fucking world wants, isn't it, Robert? To see Indians as noble and mystical, and most important of all, impotent and doomed" (42). The impotence of Natives is perhaps their most important characteristic, as it disqualifies them from being present in the nation's future. To Cole's students and his T.A., there is no need for actual Native Americans if settler whites like them can just as easily (and comfortably) fancy themselves in the same roles, as either "reincarnations of Crazy Horse [or] descendants of Indian princesses" (21). The sordidness of the past, then, is compounded by the

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inability of settlers, including those that might otherwise consider themselves allies, to come to terms with history and to embrace their supporting roles in the long, ongoing process of reconciliation. The past itself is not what settlers consider sordid; as the students imaginings make clear, the past is rife with possibility. Rather, it is the act of making settlers feel guilty and helpless about the past that can be considered, as Cole jokes, "sordid" (178). Reflecting on their roles in perpetuating settler colonialist history, as well as genuinely supporting Indigenous people instead of simply speaking for (and over) them, is not nearly as romantic and appealing as being the sole hero of the story.

Survivance, after all, is linked to community. Vizenor uses the "ance" suffix to elaborate on the active nature of survivance: "the suffix *ance* is a quality of action, as in *survivance, relevance, assistance*" (19, italics in original). The last of these words, "assistance," hints at the communal nature of survivance in particular. The heroic individual glamorized by western narratives is incompatible with Indigenous notions of kinship, community, and responsibility. In *Bone Game*, this mentality geared towards individualism is embodied most by Cole's T.A., Robert, who speaks of "restor[ing] the balance" of the Earth" as if he alone can do the necessary work (103). His use of collective pronouns like "we" and "us" elsewhere in his conversation with Abby does not negate the fact that he is speaking only for himself and speaking *at* and *over* Abby during most of the conversation. For Robert, these objectives can only be accomplished by a single male individual, a hero—or, as Cole dismissively refers to Robert, a "Natty Bumppo of Santa Cruz" (206). In other words, the goal of achieving "balance" on a global level require an individual that acts under the guidance of Native Americans but who learns their ways and skills to such a masterful degree that he ultimately renders his guides/mentors obsolete. Moviegoers of the time period would have seen this same process a couple years earlier in Michael Mann's adaptation of *Last of the Mohicans*, in

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which Natty Bumppo (played by Daniel Day-Lewis) integrates the skills of his Native American guides to such a degree that at the end, Chingachgook (played by Russell Means) can leave the lands to which he alone is Indigenous after the death of his son, Uncas, to Natty.

The primary method of resistance, or survivance, depicted in the novel is Cole's act of writing. Through writing, Cole undermines the narrative control of settler colonists, who as Onatima tells him "would imprison [him and other Indigenous people] in their vision and their stories" (140). In the context of *Bone Game*, this "vision" of Indigenous people relegates them to the past or, true to the necropolitical and dystopic landscape of California, to the grave. Either fate contributes to the silencing of Indigenous people and the erasure of their experiences and histories. Stories like Cole's challenge the limited narrative scope provided by settlers to the state's (and nation's) Indigenous people. As Onatima advises him, stories are a matter of survivance. She states, "We have to have our own stories" (140). It is stories that allow Owens' Native American characters—whether they are Choctaw, Chickasaw, or Diné—to recognize their roles in their ongoing construction of an Indigenous future. Stories also create a sense of community where there was none.

Cole's writing is both in service to and made possible by his community that assists him. Prior to their arrival, Cole not only stopped writing but had reached a point where its absence failed to register: "For the first time in ages, he considered the writing he hadn't done, surprised to realize that he hadn't even thought of writing since he'd moved, until that moment hadn't even felt guilty about not doing it" (194-5). The link between writing and place is significant here: the fact that his practice and dedication to writing leaves him when he arrived in California is no small detail. Before his move to Santa Cruz, he lived with Abby and his wife in "Indian country," where he felt rooted in

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ways that would elude him following his move to Santa Cruz (and in ways that elude Owens himself, as mentioned at the beginning of the article). But his dreams of California's genocidal history, while unsettling and haunting, root him to Santa Cruz more than he had felt prior. As John Gamber argues, Cole's writing helps him "re-place" to Santa Cruz, meaning he "establish[es] [himself] where [he is, and is] able to re-place where [he] might go" (229). Gamber's process of "re-place[ment]" marks a radical shift in perspective for Cole. Over the course of the novel, Santa Cruz becomes *his*: his community, his home, his sense of responsibility to others. His dreams, while jarring, make community possible for Cole in Santa Cruz.

Furthermore, the dreams gift him with a sense of responsibility that teaching at the college does not provide. Now implicated in the genocide of the Ohlone in the Santa Cruz region, he finally returns to writing because he recognized it as his responsibility. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson writes, "I believe our responsibility as Indigenous people is to work alongside our Ancestors and those not yet born to continually give birth to an Indigenous present that generates Indigenous freedom, and this means creating generations that are in love with, attached, to, and committed to their land" (25). While he is not Indigenous to the lands of the Santa Cruz region, Cole takes an active role in resolving the injustices written in the region's history. Through dreams and his conversations with Onatima and Alex, Cole understands that his responsibility to write is intrinsically linked to his responsibility to work alongside the Ohlone, especially Venancio, who haunts Cole with messages of the cruelty of the Franciscan missionaries, namely Padre Andres Quintana, who Alex explains "used a whip with wire ends to shred [the Ohlone people's] backs" (52).

Cole, however, does not understand why he was chosen for such a prominent role in the settler colonialist narrative of Santa Cruz. Even while learning about the injustices

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imposed on the Ohlone, Cole struggles to determine where his allegiance lies. He says to Alex,

“The strangest thing... is that I’m both of them. It’s as if I’m everything and everyone at the same time. I’m the priest whipping the Indian’s back to a bloody pulp, and I feel every second of it. And love it. I want to kill them all and spread their guts out to dry, hate them because their souls are somewhere I can’t reach... And it’s me tied to the tree and getting my back cut to shreds, feeling like somebody’s raking the flesh off my bones with steel claws and hating the priest and everything around me.” (95)

How can he reconcile the horrors of settler colonialism, of California’s necropolitical history, if he cannot reconcile his own split allegiance and self-hatred? In this passage, Cole confesses to the type of “*intense liminality*” that the narrator jokingly sees in him at the beginning of the novel (17, italics in original). Cole is not enough of any one category of identity. In the scenario he presents in this passage, he is neither the priest nor the Ohlone. He is both of them, which is to say equally neither. Likewise, he constantly feels that he is not “Indian” enough, as the text’s repeated references to his “mixedblood” lineage make clear. He is also liminal from a geographical standpoint, never belonging anywhere until the genocidal past of Santa Cruz grips him in his sleep and awakens him through the emergence of Venancio.

But unlike his students, who fantasize about role-playing as Indians and as colonists with equal aplomb (21; 11), Cole attempts to come to terms with his role in the ongoing narrative about creating an Indigenous future. His is a narrative based just as much on reflection and commiseration as it is about physical action, which is finally required at the end when Abby kills Robert when he is revealed to be the serial killer. Writing, and Native American literature in general, help Cole escape his “liminality,” a

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position that he had been occupying alone, and move into a role within a community. Cole's move towards becoming an active community member is likewise enacted at the scale of the book, which deliberately engages with other canonical works of Native American literature to show the intergenerational and communal scope of survivance. Earlier works of Native American literature, for instance, help Cole make sense of the narrative in which he finds himself, even as it unfolds. Following the death of his adopted dog (provocatively named Custer), Cole teaches James Welch's (Blackfeet/A'anin) 1973 novel *Winter In the Blood*. Our narrator explains, "In the novel they'd discussed in class that morning, the Indian narrator had confessed to shooting a dog just because he was drunk and it was moving. Custer's death, however, seems part of something much bigger, part of everything that had been happening" (193). Cole struggles to find meaning in the poisoning of his dog, yet he knows there is meaning somewhere. Rather than being a violent act for the sake of acting violently (like Welch's unnamed narrator), Cole understands that each action is part of a narrative that, even as it nears its end, remains beyond his control and comprehension. As Rochelle Venuto explains, Owens' novel is ultimately about "the need for stories to help make meaning out of existence" (26). Her argument relates to Cole's own writing, certainly, but it equally connects with Owens' rhetorical use of previous works of literature to develop *Bone Game's* engagement with the nation's (and the state's) settler colonialist past, as well as its construction of an Indigenous future. Resolving settler colonialism in the creation of an Indigenous future, however, is no small process and has no neat resolution. It is complex and at times may even seem cyclical, as we see with a second example of the novel's intertextuality.

On their way through New Mexico to California, Luther and Hoey encounter Emo, the antagonist of Leslie Marmon Silko's (Laguna Pueblo) *Ceremony* (1977). Published



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sixteen years before *Bone Game*, Silko's *Ceremony* ends with an uneasy resolution. Emo has been sent to California after murdering his friend, Pinkie, and the other characters observe that the witchery, rather than being settled, is simply "dead *for now*" (Silko 243, emphasis added). The resolution that Silko gives readers purposefully refrains from finality. The antagonism facing her characters and territory is not completely overcome; rather, through Emo's exile to California, it is deferred, "dead for now," only to re-emerge in the present of Owens' novel, when Luther and Hoey discover Emo back in New Mexico selling young women to men in California. Owens deploys *Ceremony* to demonstrate how the cycles of violence are quick to return and must constantly be broken: as Tayo had done when he refrained from killing Emo in *Ceremony*, Luther and Hoey consciously choose not to murder him to break free from the violence born out of the genocide, displacement, and warfare of settler colonialism. They abstain from doing the work of necropolitical ideologies that link Native Americans with violence, either as enactors or as victims. Venuto similarly argues that Luther and Hoey "refrai[n] from killing Emo and his cohorts, effectively ending the cycle of violence by refusing to participate in it" (37). In their refusal to participate in this cycle, they make possible a different progression of time, autonomous from settler notions of time. This present (and future) that they and other characters create exists concurrently with the present and future perpetuated by settlers, who relegate Natives and the injustices enacted against them to the past. Luther's and Hoey's act in this scene makes possible "the diversity of processes of becoming and the variety of potential interrelations among those processes" (Rifkin 17). Their decision, in other words, is not simply personal in scope. By keeping Emo alive and preventing him from enacting settler colonialist violence against others, Luther and Hoey enable a different "proce[ss] of becoming" in which Natives do not simply destroy one another and themselves. Characters like Luther, Hoey, and Cole

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challenge stereotypes of Indigenous people as violent or as alcoholics through the course of the novel. The stereotypes that these characters overcome can in fact be linked to the Euro-American settling of California and the subsequent genocide of Indigenous people. Brendan C. Lindsey explains how trail guides and emigrant guides "played upon [settler] fears of Indian savagery already present in the Euro-American psyche" (24). Here, Luther and Hoey prevent the "savagery" of Emo's transgressions against Indigenous women and thus, in no small way, challenge the construction of the "Euro-American psyche" that expects them to take violent revenge against one of their own.

Rather than depicting it as something to be reconciled, the earliest Euro-American settlers viewed genocide as a necessary consequence of Manifest Destiny. Lindsey explains that California's first state governor, Peter H. Burnett "believed that God had ordained the end of Native peoples as part of Manifest Destiny... Indeed in the minds of some nineteenth-century Euro-Americans, to turn away from genocide would be to contravene God's plan" (231). The genocide of Natives in California, as well as the use of God to justify that genocide, predates Manifest Destiny, though. Franciscan missionaries in the early-nineteenth century used the teachings of God to justify their cruel treatment of Natives, who resisted their religious doctrine. This far-reaching history of Mexican California might seem too removed from the late-twentieth century context of *Bone Game*. However, even before the novel begins, Owens emphasizes the speciousness of Euro-American notions of chronology that make the past seem irrelevant to the present. The Epilogue presents us with two widely disparate dates:

**October 15, 1812.** *Government Surgeon Manuel Quijano, accompanied by six armed men, is dispatched from the presidio in Monterey with orders to exhume the body of Padre Andres Quintana at the mission of Santa Cruz, La Exaltacion de*

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*la Santa Cruz. The priest is found to have been murdered, tortured in pudendis, and hanged.*

**November 1, 1993.** *The dismembered body of a young woman begins washing ashore on the beaches of Santa Cruz, California.* (3, italics in original)

While both events speak to the necropolitics of California, they are presented as being so removed from one another—chronologically as well as in scope—that the settler colonialist violence of the past (the murder of Padre Quintana in retaliation for his torture of the Ohlone) and the violence of the present day of the novel (the dismembered young woman) appear to bear no relation aside from their location of Santa Cruz. However, their juxtaposition collapses the settler notion of chronology that prevents any connections between these acts of violence in an attempt to keep the genocide of California Natives in the past and seemingly beyond resolution. As Chris Lalonde has argued, “[i]n juxtaposing events occurring around Santa Cruz, California in the nineteenth century with those occurring in the late twentieth century, the narrative helps to emphasize the text’s concern and play with time, temporality, and the idea of history” (101). The past and the present can exist concurrently, especially at the level of violence in the United States. This concurrence is not lost on Venancio who comments at the end of the novel, while staring out at Santa Cruz in the present day that “It is a world so like [my] own” (243). Histories do not automatically denote positive progress. And neither Silko’s novel’s ending nor Owens’ connote finality. To do so would imply that the horrors of history have been settled, that the characters’ work (as well as our own) is complete.

That is not the case. Even after Robert’s death, the characters feel anxiety instead of relief. Like in Silko’s novel, the antagonism that they have overcome is only temporarily settled. Onatima explains to Cole as she is about to head back home:

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"We have our own worlds... We carried our people's bones a thousand days to find a home. When so many were removed, we stayed behind. Who would talk to them out there at night if I never went home?... Luther and I have our tasks there, and [Hoey] has found his world there. He pretends he doesn't understand, but when the time comes he will surpass all of us. Luther has always known that. Hoey is *hoyo*, the hunter, the searcher, the one who seeks and finds." (242-3, italics in original)

For Onatima and for all the characters, responsibility is rooted in place. Back home in Mississippi, she, Luther, and Hoey must tend to their ancestors, whose remains they carried "a thousand days to find a home." In this endeavor, they enact sovereignty, described by Guillermo Delgado (Quechua) and John Brown-Childs (Massachusetts-Brothertown/Oneida/Madagascan) as "bringing our Indigenous past along" (69). As a writer and as one of the characters confronting Robert in the climax, Cole shares a responsibility to the Santa Cruz region, especially the Ohlone. Venancio looks out into for one final time before his "shadow falls across the town and bay, undulating with the slow waves" (243). He is still taken by the cruelty of the missionaries, as reflected by his final, italicized words ("*Eran muy crueles*"), which are also the final words of the novel (243). But in his last act of the book, Venancio returns to the land and waters of the Santa Cruz region. He is, at least temporarily, at greater peace following Cole's and his family's encounter with Robert, who embodies the settler colonialist thinking that perpetuates the necropolitical ideology of the United States toward Natives. If, as Alex points out, the Ohlone did not recognize the world following the arrival of the Spanish, Venancio finally can at the end of the text (54). He returns to the landscape and seascape, receding to a position that is not so much out of reach but all around Cole and anyone else who settles, or "re-replaces," to Santa Cruz (Gamber 229).

This is perhaps the most utopic ending possible in the present day of the novel. Venancio is at peace, Robert has been killed, and Cole's family can return home. Cole has returned to writing, prompted and empowered by the presence of his community who travel across the United States from their home territory. And Abby and Alex, challenging the dominant thinking that the future is somehow incompatible with Natives, have begun a romantic relationship. The novel ultimately shows that perhaps the most sordid feature of the past is thinking that it is beyond reproach, beyond reconciliation. As Venancio shows in his final act, our settler colonialist past is embedded in the lands and seas around us. The ending of the novel is less about finality than transition. While the novel was (and still is) marketed as a murder mystery, the climactic encounter with the murderer, Robert, is less about individual heroics than kinship and responsibility. Rather than signaling a break from the past (sordid as it may be), an Indigenous future deliberately links to it. If, as quoted earlier from Raffaella Baccolini, a dystopia is a world that "depends on and denies history," an Indigenous future is a world that consciously connects with and addresses its injustices.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> In the field of Native American/Indigenous Studies, the term "reconciliation" has become particularly problematic. For an in-depth discussion about how reconciliation, or "reconciliation politics" are deployed by the settler state, please refer to Glen Sean Coulthard's *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*.

<sup>2</sup> While previously recognized from 1906-1928 as the Verona Band of Indians, the Ohlone of the San Francisco area have struggled to achieve recognition since the 1990s. In 1998, following the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) classification of their application as "Ready Status," the tribe calculated that the process would take 24 years and sued the BIA to expedite the process. Subsequent petitions to the federal government by the Ohlone have been unsuccessful.

<sup>3</sup> More recently at the Hearst Museum, Nez Perce writer Beth Piatote staged a reading of her play, *Antíkoni*, a reimagining of Sophocles' *Antigone* that portrays Indigenous resistance through the title character's attempts to retrieve her ancestors' remains.

<sup>4</sup> In her memoir, *Bad Indians*, Deborah Miranda describes the "Mission Project" assignment of all fourth-graders in the state of California. As Miranda explains, however, the project does not provide students with an honest depiction of the state's genocidal past: rather, it

glorifies the era and glosses over both Spanish and Mexican exploitation of Indians, as well as American enslavement of those same Indians during American rule. In other words, the Mission Unit is all too often a lesson in imperialism, racism, and Manifest Destiny rather than actually educational or a jumping off point for criticism thinking or accurate history." (xvii)

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## The Physical Presence of Survivance in *The Heirs of Columbus*

HOGAN SCHAAK

According to A. Robert Lee, Anishinaabe writer Gerald Vizenor is a “Native American renaissance virtually in his own right” (qtd. in Liang 128). The author of over forty books and a plethora of essays, Gerald Vizenor is a self-proclaimed “word warrior” who fights with words, theory, and storytelling, as opposed to fists and weapons. He also claims to be a “postindian.” That is, one who uses storytelling to fight the dominant perception of Indian identity, which he dubs a form of “manifest manners” (*Manifest Manners* viii). His novel *The Heirs of Columbus* (1991) follows the lovers Stone Columbus and Felipa Flowers as they repatriate bones and DNA to tell stories that heal and fight the demon “wiindigoo.” They establish a sovereign tribal nation on international waters called Point Assinika, a place which embodies the importance of physical possession and the healing power of touch based in survivance.

Vizenor’s trickster figures are routinely the vehicle by which he manifests his theories in story form. Bearheart in *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*, Griever in *Griever: An American Monkey King in China*, and Stone in *The Heirs of Columbus* are all tricksters and healers who tell liberating stories to achieve their goals. As Timothy Fox explains of Vizenor’s specific brand of trickster; “one of its basic tenets is the belief that freedom is an intellectual achievement rather than a simple shedding of physical restraints” (71). For Bearheart and Griever, the intellectual liberation of individuals that they physically liberate is where the buck stops. They offer this kind of liberation, but never establish anything more—no community nor route to physical healing. And,

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Vizenor takes flak for this from some quarters. Arnold Krupat calls into question the political relevance of Vizenor's work in *The Turn To The Native*. Vizenor seems to respond in *Heirs*, dedicating a few pages to a discussion in which two characters note that Krupat is "arrogant" and performs "dialogic domination" in his assessments of Native American literature (111). The inclusion of a dialogue about Krupat in this novel indicates that *Heirs* is Vizenor's response to the challenge of his political relevance. I argue that survivance becomes communal and physical in *Heirs* partly because this is Vizenor's response to Krupat's charge. The "liberated" in Vizenor's novels are generally cut loose into a cruel world. In *Griever*, for instance, Griever liberates a truck full of political prisoners who are recaptured or killed shortly after. Stone, however, becomes capable of offering liberation through a physical space in *Heirs*. Stone adds a new function to the Vizenorean trickster as he creates an opportunity for the physical healing of wounds caused by imprisonment via a community of actively resistant survivors. Stone creates a new tribal community in stories, ultimately creating the physical origin for an ongoing ideology. In this way, he furthers the theoretical definition of Vizenor's pre-eminent theory of survivance by not only achieving individual, intellectual liberation, but also by establishing what I call a "tribal" ideology based in physical healing and possession.

Here, it must be noted that Vizenor employs the word "tribal" both intentionally and controversially in *Heirs*. He enters the discussion about what it means to be tribal and posits that anyone can be. This is a hotly debated topic, but for Vizenor "tribal" takes on a theoretical meaning somewhat separate from what it means to be "Indian." Vizenor attempts to make a statement about the difference between terminal and non-terminal cultures, not about what qualifies someone as an "Indian." "Tribal" is used by Vizenor to denote cultures based in survivance, while any non-tribal culture is terminal because it supports terminal creeds. For Vizenor, "tribal" stands as an intellectual

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position in *Heirs*; while one must be born a Native American, anyone can become tribal. This distinction is a sub-point of Vizenor's survivance theory.

Scholars from many fields have been using the term survivance for decades. However, defining the term, like defining most of Vizenor's theories, is tricky because he describes it ambiguously. Survivance is "trickster liberation, the uncertain humor...that denies the obscure maneuvers of manifest manners, tragic transvaluations, and the incoherence of cultural representations," according to one of Vizenor's many definitions ("The Ruins of Representation" 1). Sheela Menon recently defined the term as "stories that mediate and undermine the literature of dominance" (163). She borrows this definition straight from another of Vizenor's definitions in *Manifest Manners*. Most critics simply quote various descriptions of survivance they find in Vizenor's theory. These always pertain to oppositional storytelling—some kind of survival and resistance through words—but tend to be vague. While some critics, like David Carlson, have attempted to appropriate the term for political reasons, defining it as "the act of being recognized," most have stuck with defining it in its vague theoretical terms, quoting Vizenor or attempting to pin it down in more direct language (17). John D. Miles summarizes survivance as "a practice that emerges out of individual rhetorical acts... creat[ing] a presence that upsets and unravels discursive control over Native people" (41). Miles draws from specific examples given in Vizenor's theory where individuals speak and survivance manifests. Indeed, this represents most critics' understanding of the term. Miles notes that, in *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor himself claims that theories of survivance are "imprecise by definition" but must include "a sense of Native presence over absence" in people's minds (40). However, *Heirs* provides an example of survivance as potentially more concrete than Native presence in stories and words.

There is a difference between the traditional Anishinaabe trickster, the tricksters in Vizenor's past novels, and those present in *Heirs*. Namely, tricksters in *Heirs* are not

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solitary but meet and exchange stories, forming a community and playing communal roles. In order to help Stone offer liberation and healing to the world, his lover Felipa sacrifices her life repatriating Pocahontas's bones in England. Felipa wants to steal them and take them to the headwaters of the Mississippi River where the "heirs"—a group of storytelling tricksters—meet but is killed by a vengeful man named Doric Miched whom she had previously stolen from. The cave at the headwaters—where Pocahontas's bones do eventually end up—is located next to "The House of Life," a graveyard for tricksters. As tricksters are buried in The House of Life their stories are integrated into the stones in the cave and "the vault turn[s] blue" in the cavern, which coincides with new healing stories being added to the heirs' repertoire (*Heirs* 176). Michael Hardin claims that the headwaters are symbolic because the stories there "feed into the entire North American continent" through the Mississippi, distributing their healing (40). But this act is, first and foremost physical, grounded in bones. Pocahontas's bones would provide healing to the nation as her story, one commandeered by the English, could be retold and freed from the "terminal creed" that she, as an Indian, became "civilized" as she merged with Western culture. This is a story which is terminal because it implies that Indians are categorically savages.

Essentially, a "terminal creed" is a story—often represented by an icon such as an image or piece of writing—which does or cannot change. Stories that liberate are "oral" in nature and do change, just like oral tellings of stories do, according to Vizenor. And this allows a concept to adapt and be applicable to any context. But, "terminal creeds" don't change, and so people suffer as a concept is forced on them. They are written in stone, as it were, but not the living kind that Vizenor often envisions. Vizenor argues that the concept of the "Indian" is a terminal creed which needs to be constantly liberated and reimagined. He utilizes the lower-case "indian" or the term "postindian" to expose the absence of a real person in the upper case term "Indian." "indian" or "postindian"

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is a deferment of the meaning of "Indian." Billy Stratton provides an insightful discussion of the politics of which term to use (Indian, indian, native, Native) in a footnote from "Come For The Icing, Stay For The Cake," a chapter of his book *The Fictions of Stephen Graham Jones*. Stratton contemplates a discussion he once had with Vizenor in which they discussed his use of "indian." Stratton claims that the lowercase use of "indian" or "native" "overcome[s] the absence in the empty signifier" in the upper case "Indian" (3). Within his own book, Stratton regrets caving in to the demands of editors and the rules of publication by using "Indian," but recognizes the current (regrettable) need to do so, claiming that "we are not yet at a moment where we can write native, and so mark within the word a return of substance and the power of representation carried in and through story, rather than an emptiness of the past, a mockery, a teasing of a presence that is nothing that was not there and nothing that is" (3).

Vizenor, however, attempts to write just such an impossible narrative. *Heirs* is far ahead of its time, and the trickers and trickster bones point to this. Trickster bones, like Pocahontas's, are of the utmost importance to the heirs because they represent and literally contain the stories which shape the terminal creeds of Indian identity. Kenneth Lincoln notes that "[t]rickster's bones preserve a framework inside the culture" by being "artifacts of an ongoing tradition" (128). Bones signify the stories of a person, and so possession of them means possession of storytelling rights. The heirs hold neither the bones of Columbus nor Pocahontas at the beginning of the novel, but they seek to. Bones represent the concrete possession of an abstract idea in *Heirs*. The concrete, the tangible, is always a trace of something—a reference pointing to a story.<sup>1</sup> If Pocahontas's bones are held on display in a museum, then they are representations of terminal creeds. They represent the Indian "other" and are seen as evidence of the truth of that terminal creed. Whatever description is written on the museum's plaque to refer to the bones will become the story those bones represent, held in a glass box as the "other."

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In one interview, Vizenor claims that "[o]ral to written is sound to icon, sound to silence in an icon" (Harmsen-Peraino 2). In *Heirs*, Stone refuses to appear on tv or in writing, speaking only on the radio. He claims that "[r]adio is real, television is not," because the radio broadcasts "hurried his sense of adventure, imagination, and the stories in his blood" in a way only oral storytelling could (8). Imagination is active when listening to the radio in a way that it is not when the pictures—the icons—of the television screen purport to represent what an Indian, or something like an Indian, looks like. What is recorded as fact in writing and icons is unreal, because it cannot be reimagined to accommodate the natural change of the world or individual perception like an oral story can. The picture, unless placed alongside pictures which contradict it, establishes a fixed way of seeing something. So, Stone intentionally mixes up dates and facts in his image-driven retellings of stories to emphasize the importance of change, contradiction, and reimagination over "Truth." In one example, Stone changes a date from one telling to the next and then claims that "Columbus is ever on the move in our stories" (11). It doesn't matter which facts are used in a story, but rather what the point of the telling is, and this is an instance of intellectual survivance based in imagination, shaped through stories. However, the heirs cannot possess the right to tell the stories of Pocahontas until they obtain her bones and manipulate her image as well as her story. These tasks go hand in hand.

The heirs at the Headwaters also want Columbus's stories. Fantastically and literally they rebuild his lost bones over the course of centuries by telling stories about him. Stone and the other postindians believe that retelling Columbus's story would cut the very root of the Indian terminal creed. When the heirs speak of Columbus, they refer to him as a "bad shadow" cast over their identity (19). They know they need to tell Columbus's "shadow history," but they do not own Columbus's bones because his bones are lost, "denied the honor and solace of the grave" (29). And so, the harmful

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shadow history of Columbus suspends them in the limbo of Indian identity until physical possession of his bones is possible.

The concept of “shadows” and “shadow histories” is another of Vizenor’s theories, one that is integral to destabilizing and reimagining terminal creeds. Shadow “words are intuitive, a concise meditation of sound, motion, memories” which are ever-changing because they are continually intuited (*Manifest Manners* 65). And this is the point: “‘Meaning’ can never be grasped completely; it is in the play, in the trace, in the difference,” says Kerstin Schmidt (70). All that is important is that the trace of something else destabilizes the absolute “Truth” which was previously assumed in the terminal creed. Shadows point to a movement away from static “Truth.” Katalin Nagy proves that shadows are potential zones for creation as they often emanate blue light (248). The silent blue shadows are a space in which the imagination can fill a dead icon of terminal creeds with the life of an ongoing, oppositional story which points out what the terminal story lacks. Vizenor writes:

Postindian consciousness is a rush of shadows in the distance, and the trace of natural reason to a bench of stones; the human silence of shadows, the animate shadows over presence. The shadow is that sense of intransitive motion to the referent; the silence in memories. Shadows are neither the absence of entities or the burden of conceptual references. The shadows are the prenarrative silence that inherits the words; shadows are the motions that mean the silence, but not the presence or absence of entities. (*Manifest Manners* 64)

Vizenor theorizes “shadow history” to refer to the initial sense—literally the intuition—that one has an identity that existed before stories and cannot be contained in them once and for all. These senses, the “shadows” and the “silenced experience,” are not stories to be discovered but are the motivation to keep telling oppositional stories so that one’s identity will never become a terminal creed. So, Hardin claims that as the heirs

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pinpoint Columbus's narrative as the origin story of Native Americans as "victims and exotic," they realize that the only way out of that false "Indian" identity is to tell stories from Columbus's shadows histories (26). But, again, the heirs are unable to retell the Columbus story without his bones. And they must retell his story.

The problem the heirs face is that the Columbus story is thought of simply as "history" by the oppressor. This makes liberation difficult. As Homi Bhabha argues, the oppressing force of colonialism "takes power in the name of history, [and] it repeatedly exercises its authority through figures of farce" (126). History, then, is a terminal creed, and the farcical figure in *Heirs* is Christopher Columbus. What people understand to be canonical history is difficult to destabilize. Nevertheless, Vizenor must retell the story, according to Hardin, because his retelling "alters the myth of Christopher Columbus and makes him of Mayan descent." And this is important because "one cannot be a pitiable victim if one is also partially responsible for the atrocity" of colonization and death that Columbus brought with him (26). This is not to say that Vizenor is victim blaming, but that he recognizes the importance of physically possessing and retelling the Columbus story so that Columbus can become a minor character and not the point of origin for the "Indian" story. In this way, Columbus becomes part of Stone's tribal history because he is a blood relation. The idea that the "Indian" is different—an idea founded by Columbus—cannot stand if Columbus himself is an indian. This move cleverly undercuts the difference between Indians and whites which Columbus establishes. Moreover, it allows his story to be retold so that "Indians" can be reimagined as indians. According to Birgit Däwes, Vizenor "creates the potential for the individual to free him- / herself from a binary past"—which has not allowed white and Indian individuals in America to see themselves as anything except "conqueror or conquered"—so that a new relationship can be imagined in which the priority is to prevent such a dichotomy (27). This fits into classical and essential definitions of survivance as a state of mind. However,



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in *Heirs* this state of mind is impossible without a physical tie. The heirs must have Columbus's bones so that they can establish the blood connection and thus contradict his fixed and powerful image as a heroic European colonizer. Then they can establish their tribal stories, a fluid tribal history, instead.

As noted before, "tribal" applies to all people who do not own, are not born into, or do not choose to use the dominating stories of terminal creeds which take on life as manifest manners when acted out. A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff claims that "tribal" is a "celebration of communal values" which opens up the possibilities for what anyone can be, unlike the titles "Indian," "Native," or even "American," which are artificial terms created by oppressors ("Gerald Vizenor: Compassionate Trickster" 42). So, tribal ideology links directly with physical reality by way of a physical community no longer separated by ideological barriers.

The postindian heirs tell a story of Columbus, on his first night in the New World, in order to share their tribal ideology. In their story, Columbus is attracted to the shore by the bear and trickster Samana during his first visit. Samana lures Columbus in and makes love to him, liberating the tribal signature he brings with him in his Mayan blood. For that night only, Columbus becomes a bear and his "signature," or "spirit," "returned to the headwaters" where the heirs have met ever since (*Heirs* 41). At the headwaters "the old shamans heated up some stones and put him (Columbus) back together again," building his body around his spirit. As the old stories which Columbus is made up of are terminal,—cancerous to Indians—many shamans over the centuries fight back and "dreamed a new belly for the explorer... called a new leg... got an eye... so you might say that [the heirs] created this great explorer from their own stones" (20). As the novel begins, the heirs tell the stories of Columbus whom they possess "in a silver box." Felipa has repatriated a box with the last bit of Columbus's DNA in it, and that DNA is the final piece needed to complete Columbus's new body. With it, they can bring the bones to

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life so that possession of them can be used to create a new Columbus story and the healing nation of Point Assinika. The bones of Columbus and Pocahontas become the physical foundation and scaffolding of survivance in the floating city of Point Assinika.

All of the tribal, postindian heirs—including Columbus on that one fateful night with Samana—have found liberation in animal form, emphasizing the physicality and instinctiveness of survivance. They believe humans have natural, animal identities which are more real than their human ones. They also believe that terminal creeds cover up this reality. Memphis, an heir and a panther, exposes this reality. Perceived as a human by all seeing her, she states that "we are animals disguised as humans," and then proceeds to show her panther self to a courtroom full of non-heirs (70). Memphis purrs and evinces the attributes of a panther, and the postindian heirs see her as such. The non-tribal people in the courtroom, however, cannot imagine that Memphis, speaking as a witness in a court case, may be a panther and so become "worried and strained" in their resistance to seeing her as she is (72). Sean Corbin notes that this is another instance of Vizenor undermining the stranglehold that manifest manners have over identity. He states that "in including stories in the blood and shadow realities as evidence, the illocutionary act is performed, calling the reader to accept this inclusion, which, in doing so, generates the question, 'What is evidence?'" (72). According to Corbin, Vizenor stages a scene in a courtroom so that shadow realities can unveil the weaknesses in Western, legalistic logic which relies on the ontological premises that one divine God has established a natural and knowable—and most importantly, universal—moral hierarchy. So, Vizenor fights that understanding of human nature with his own version that carries the lone goal of destabilizing knowable human nature. The courtroom, a place of ideas and debates, stands in marked contrast to the immediate, instinctual, and physical reality of the human as animal. All of the heirs have recognized their animal selves. Caliban is a mongrel, Truman croaks like a frog, and even the child Miigis dreams

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she is a crane. When Columbus and Samana sleep together they both turn into bears and Samana becomes pregnant, later giving birth to the first daughter in a line of heirs with the stories of bears in their blood. A physical line of bear-people carries survivance. Physicality is essential to survivance in *Heirs* as it arises from physical experience, not thought as it primarily had in previous Vizenor novels.

Stone discovers that he is a physical representation of survivance as a bear when he is resurrected after his first death. In this first death and resurrection, Stone returns to life to discover himself as a postindian bear at the headwaters of the Mississippi. Stone is burned to death in a furnace “in the reservation school” during a wind and lightning storm (14). Wind and lightning are both signs of evil spirits, those who antagonize tribal people as “wild demons” of unfortunate chance (15). Stone dies because he “mocked the sounds of the storm for no good reason but fear.” When Stone awakes from death as a bear at the headwaters, he listens to the wind and “laughed at the blue light in the basement” where he had died (15). In discovering his stories of truly being a bear and finding the location of the headwaters, Stone overcomes his fear of the wind (tribal demons) as he laughs at them instead of mocking them. On that day, Stone dies to the oppressive, demonic education responsible for the terminal creed of the “Indian” embodied by the colonial reservation school. He dies to the fear of demons who would threaten tribal ways, and then begins his reality as a fearless postindian bear who instinctively enacts survivance.

Stone is free to live the tension of being thoughtful and instinctual as a bear and a man. When the tribal people silenced the wiindigoo—their ultimate enemy—by freezing his body, they created an imbalance in tribal nature, which relies upon oppositions. Stone claims that the trickster heirs “heal with opposition, we are held together by opposition, not separation, or silence, and the best humor in the world is pinched from opposition” (176). Anthropologist Paul Radin noted that “the concrete

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image of the trickster is suppressed" whenever evil becomes the "other" and is no longer recognized to be a part of the self (xiii). The evil that is "other" manifests in the concrete form of other people as the compassionate Vizenorian trickster disappears. In this way, the natural tribal balance is thrown off and the trickster—its physical and intellectual presence—is replaced with bodiless stories falsely claiming to be the truth which are then overlaid on all Indians and become terminal creeds (*Postindian Conversations* 19).

Stone tells oppositional stories grounded in physical humor to combat this fixed identity based in fear and separation of the physical and mental self. Stone and the other heirs of Columbus believe that reality itself is "created in stories" and images and that these stories must ever be actively reimagined as new pictures of people and events being painted in words (*Heirs* 8). People "imagine each other" and even "imagine who we (the heirs) would be" (16). Stone imagines Columbus with a comically "twisted penis" causing him to act in a humorously unpredictable fashion as pleasure and pain war against each other in his body. More fun is poked at Columbus as he is drawn to "blue puppets" in the heir's stories, recognizing something of himself in them because *he* is essentially a puppet fulfilling Mayan dreams (30). Stone's Columbus is a comical dummy, led around like a puppet enacting bodily humor, which strips away his dignity and god-like status as a figure of colonization. Columbus's dignity falters when the reader pictures him as clumsy. Likewise, what Columbus represents as the cornerstone of serious terminal creeds begins to crumble as his image is manipulated by the heirs.

Stone's name also carries both comic and serious meaning. Stones carry special significance in *Heirs*, being the physical containers of stories. A stone is the second being in the tribal creation story that Stone recounts while speaking on Carp Radio. Stone says that "[t]he stone is my totem, my stories are stones, there are tribal stones, and the brother of the first trickster who created the earth was a stone, stone, stone" (9). Vizenor expands on this stone story in *Postindian Conversations*, revealing that in his version of

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an Anishinaabe origin story a being named Nanabozho and his brother, a stone, were the first living creatures on earth. Nanabozho would go off and have adventures, but then always came back to where his brother was to recount his travels. Eventually, the stone realized that it was taxing on his brother to always come back and tell him stories, so the stone had his brother heat him up with fire and then pour cold water on him, causing him to explode into many, many pieces which scattered across the earth. This way, stone brother could hear stories from everywhere. As the story goes, pieces of stone brother still exist, holding all of the stories he has heard to this day (*Postindian Conversations* 131).

In Stone's story about stone brother he says that the "first" to create the earth was a trickster. This "first" implies that the physical creation of the earth is an ongoing process; not one that is dead in terminal, unchanging creeds, but one that lives in stories and actions. As the wounded in *Heirs* are literally touched by Stone, they hear his "creation stories" through that touch and are made well as they find that their terminal creeds are not true. They have the opportunity to actively participate in identity creation through resistance by way of a subjective physical connection made with the intent to know the "other" (*Heirs* 142).

Stone's name embodies this, but it is also a metaphor—a slang word for testicles. Testicles, like Stone, contain seeds of life. Stone embodies the kind of serious play his name implies. He often wears masks, like a humorous one of Christopher Columbus with a giant nose, in order to tease the seriousness of terminal creeds and bring his humorous imaginings of Columbus to life. But the truth of Stone's humorous stories is a liberating truth which brings life, not a dead "Truth," a terminal creed which must be literal and unchanging. That would defeat his very purpose. Vizenor writes that "[w]hether the heirs believe their story is not the point, because no culture would last long under the believer test; the point is that humor has political significance and as a scenario" (*Heirs* 166). The

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humor of the stories liberates the mind from monologic, humorless terminal creeds, but one must also fight the physical manifestations of those creeds once one is freed. So, Stone provides us with a comical Columbus we will never forget, taking pains to describe his looks. In this way, Columbus's physical presence in places like text books and paintings no longer has a monopoly on shaping our imagination of him as a heroic figure.

The heirs of Christopher Columbus are capable of hearing the stories that the stones located in the cave above the headwaters of the Mississippi River hold. They meet annually here, listening to the stones that glow blue as they reveal stories (14). These are the stories that "heal and remember the blue radiance of creation and resurrections" (13). For the heirs, the color blue is the color of creation, and because creation must be imagined constantly it is also the color of resurrection, the pinch of life from death. Each of Stone's resurrections is accompanied by glowing blue objects and/or Stone glowing blue. As the heirs heat up the stones in the cavern by sitting on them (just as Nanabozho warmed brother stone long ago) and then tell the stories they remember (spreading the stones across the world with their voices like Nanabozho did when he exploded stone brother with water), the stones begin to glow blue. That they turn blue is no coincidence. Blue is the color of water and water is essential to the spread of stone brother's stories. Point Assinika, the healing nation established by Stone, is set on international waters, and these international waters physically connect the world. The cave where the heir's stories come from is located at the headwaters of the Mississippi. This river divides America in two, making it the perfect place to bind America back together and heal its oppressor/oppressed divide. The heirs are so positioned in order to make themselves a physical obstruction which must be nationally and internationally dealt with, since they engage in activities on international waters with national implications and no clear-cut legal frameworks to prevent them from doing so. The physical spaces they inhabit trigger national and international court cases in which the heirs are seen and heard by the world.

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As Christopher Columbus was called “the admiral of the ocean sea,” transcending the barrier of the Atlantic to connect Europe and the Americas, so Stone mimics and becomes an “admiral” navigating the divide in identities between peoples across the world through water (*Heirs* 3).

When the ice woman resurrects Stone after his second death, it is out of the clutches of water—which is always associated with the wiindigoo and “water demons” (179). As Stone’s grandmother resurrects him and he sees his family’s place with the heirs and his true identity Stone is shown the history of the ice woman’s interactions with tribal people through ice woman’s touch and her freezing of the wiindigoo. He is also shown the inevitability of a thaw. Stone subsequently meditates on the seasons to “hold back the boreal demons,” and sees that “the ice woman bears a seductive hand of winter.” However, to be “cold and lonesome” (or, to be permanently in the winter) is to be “woundable” (93). A long-lasting winter under the ice woman represents the state of tribal people for hundreds of years. Because of their plea for her help with the wiindigoo, and the resulting winter, they are woundable—physically wounded and historically massacred because of the lack of an ongoing wiindigoo story. And so Stone begins work to build a floating casino to make money in order to fund his project of telling oppositional stories about Columbus on the radio, with the hope of liberating others with a tribal ideology.

But Stone’s floating reservation is destroyed by lightning one fateful night shortly after its opening and Stone dies. This time, after his third death, Stone is resurrected from the by Samana, the bear shaman, an heir of the Samana who slept with Columbus (12). The original Samana leaves a line of daughters who all have the same name and carry the same stories generation to generation. It is said that “[h]er touch would heal the heirs with stories in the blood” (*Heirs* 12). This Samana, a “hand-talker,” touches Stone and he “hears the wild dance of the blue puppets” that silent tribal hand-talkers

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use to tell stories. In this resurrection, Stone learns the importance of physical touch and community in survivance. Right before this, Stone makes love to Felipa, his first interest outside of himself in the novel. As they make love they turn into bears and Stone finds that love is a state in which he does not simply liberate minds, but cares for others in physical terms as well. In this instance of resurrection "[Stone] was a hand talker," gaining the ability to communicate as a trickster through touch. Stories alone are not enough; although the healing process began in the intellectual liberation of minds from and through stories, it must evolve and integrate physical healing and relationships. Stone needs the help of a tribe in which different members fulfill different roles in order to accomplish this. He is the intellectual, spiritual guide, but he needs a fitting "body" to act with. The manicurists and scientists who become the bodies through which Stone acts at Point Assinika are the proof that he learns to integrate physical healing into his liberations.

Stone creates Point Assinika by bringing together reappropriated stories, gene therapy, and tribal manicures. The oppositional story of Columbus and the gene therapy, which in this context is kept vague but presumably is the delivery of something into a patient's cells that gives them "tribal" blood, counters the racist notion of blood quantum and is an important factor at Point Assinika. The reappropriation of stories by stealing bones as well as the compassionate work of manicurists manifests these factors. Tribal manicurists are central to success at Point Assinika as they collect the stories and genetic samples which contribute to the healing genome project. Teets Melanos is the head manicurist, "the trusted listener" who takes battered women and children and tenderly cares for their hands—massaging them and clipping their nails—when they arrive at Point Assinika. In this way, she coaxes out stories, which are mostly about abusive, controlling men, and these stories "alter and attune the tribal world" (141). The stories of the traditionally silenced are added to the stories which are already recorded



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to create a narrative where everyone can be included. In some ways, Vizenor is responding to Gayatri Spivak's claim that the "subaltern" ("marginalized," possibly, in Vizenor's terms) cannot speak by positing a possible oral ideology in which even writing is an action and not a record of "facts" which constitute an oppressive "Truth." Writing in *Heirs* (as a literally written novel) records things, but it is nearly impossible to pin down meaning, no matter how hard we might try in critical articles. To paraphrase Vizenor, there can only be "more creative misreadings" of his work.

In *Heirs*, "facts" change over time in the heirs' tellings of stories, always indicating the primary importance of action over a Western notion of truth. The nail clippings collected by Teets Melanos are taken and stored, becoming "the source of genetic intromission and retral transformations" at the tribal genome pavilion (141). All of the genetic material collected from the fingernail clippings serves the project of collecting all peoples' genetic material for distribution. Then everyone can be tribal, as the "bits of skin and fingernail... and stories would be the source of genetic intromission and retral transformation" capable of crossing all human genes together (141). In this way, racial divides fall because everyone shares the same blood, as the scientists at Point Assinika craft gene intromission from the manicurists' clippings. Importantly, this process never ends; as each new person in Point Assinika brings with them new stories to be shared and integrated alongside a new set of genes. So, scientists and manicurists become the active body of Stone's liberation, now possible because the heirs own the storytelling rights of Columbus and Pocahontas and therefore the rights to their own identity.

"Stone resists the notion of blood quantum, racial identification, and tribal enrollment" (*Heirs* 162). Instead, he creates a process of gene intromission by which all people can share the same blood and become tribal. Yvette Koepke and Christopher Nelson argue that "[g]enes are metaphors for stories" in *Heirs*, and that the genetic crossing "should not be taken literally" (2). Vizenor is both evoking and opposing the

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notion of blood quantum by providing a humorous solution to its inherent discrimination through free tribal gene distribution. This subversion makes everyone who undergoes the process a tribal heir, which is an identity that transgresses the boundaries of race. However, I argue that Vizenor is suggesting that survivance must be thought of as a physical reality in which the segregation caused by blood quantum must be resisted. The physicality is vital because the stories alone are not enough to heal. He acknowledges the limitations of imagining intellectual liberation as the end of survivance. While intellectual liberation may be the beginning of survivance, it also may not be. It may come after the physical care and mixing of bodies and blood which creates trust at Point Assinika.

Members of Point Assinika only find healing when physically caring for each other, solidifying a sense of bodily safety in the fluid nation. This is a tribal identity of "survivance" being lived out. In this context, "tribal" evades definition by signifying the action of resisting terminal creeds and manifest manners. Vine Deloria Jr. notes that "tribal" usually stands "not as a commitment but as a status symbol of 'Indianness'" (28). However, Vizenor employs "tribal" here as an action which must be carried out, not as a set of attributes—the markers of manifest manners. He fights the "tribal" which was born of manifest manners with the "tribal" of survivance.

Pinning down exactly what survivance is remains tricky, if not impossible. Nevertheless, the term has incredible sticking power precisely because it is vague. By centering the term around concepts instead of giving it a precise definition, Vizenor creates a living and adaptable word. But, in *Heirs* we are reminded that survivance must be physical to become real, be pinned down at times in order to actually be effective. *Heirs* reveals the shortcomings of survivance as a solely intellectual exercise. According to Betty Louise Bell, Point Assinika represents a "native subjectivity [that] becomes comparable to Derrida's endless chain of signifiers, with no truth signified, each signified

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becoming in turn a signifier, each subject becoming a metasubject, each narrative becoming a metanarrative," until every person in the community is validated in the stories they share (183). Prescriptive identity disappears as all members of Point Assinika immerse into the sea of stories they create collectively, eternally, as a living "tribal" people. Yet they still hold their individual physical bodies, and they recognize that each body validates experiences and needs to be cared for if better stories are to be made and told to sustain tribal reality.

There is a celebration to mark Stone's victory over the wiindigoo, thanks to the people at Point Assinika. Almost Browne, a trickster of simulations, creates a laser show in the night sky to celebrate the tribal victory. "Jesus Christ and Christopher Columbus arose in the south... Crazy Horse, Black Elk, and Louis Riel were eminent laser figures in the north," and "Felipa Flowers and Pocahontas arose in the east" (*Heirs* 182). The old simulations of manifest manners Jesus and Columbus, the old simulations of survivance Crazy Horse, Black Elk, and Louis Riel, and the new simulations of survivance Felipa and Pocahontas, all come together in a new simulation of unity against fear of the wiindigoo. This new ideology of tribal opposition is realizable only as an intellectual and individual achievement that integrates physicality and community. And Stone makes this possible. Stone is both stone, a physical repository for stories, and trickster, one who acts in the world through stories. Stone's "stories are stones," represented by the people of Point Assinika being brought together as if he was a reverse of stone brother (9). Intellectual modes of resistance to terminal creeds and the physical resistance of reclaiming Indian artifacts, establishing a physical nation, combating blood quantum, repainting colonial images, and validating physical existence through loving touch are all realized through Stone. Survivance without these physical factors—such as the survivance deployed in *Griever*—results in the death of those "liberated."

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Nevertheless, the ongoing project of survivance does not end with Stone and the addition of physical considerations. Jace Weaver claims that "Vizenor has always been the literary equivalent of a drive-by shooting" (57). He fights evasively, always liberating, with his theory always on the move. In *Heirs*, Vizenor's theory of survivance adapts as it always has and always should—from theory to reality. Vizenor himself began this exploration of the physical side of survivance in the 90s, and he carries it on today in his most recent work, *Native Provenance* (2019). This book is largely concerned with the political ramification of peace treaties, sovereignty, and the representation of "moral imagination" shaped by the "blue shadows" of "sacred objects, stories, art, and literature" (35). These are all continuations of other notions in *Heirs*, and in *Native Provenance* Vizenor correspondingly continues to address the physical reality of survivance.

In the chapter "Visionary Sovereignty," Vizenor compares the military occupation of Japan with the military occupation of Native American lands. Vizenor claims the United States treated Japan—a defeated enemy of WWII—more fairly than Native Americans over the same period of time. In ironic fashion, "constitutional provisions of land reform and labor unions were observed for the first time in Japan, yet native communal land was reduced to allotments on treaty exclaves and reservations" (93). The military of the United States was able—or possibly pressured—to make and carry through more fair decisions concerning the governance of far-away Japan than it was with closer-to-home Native American communities. With the international eye on Japan and the United States after WWII, the military did the right thing if they could. But, the United States' relationship with Native Americans has always been, more or less, internal and hidden to the outside world. Recognizing this, Vizenor chooses to highlight the physical presence of the journalist and political activist William Lawrence in the final chapter of *Native Provenance*. Lawrence persisted in publishing reports of the injustices done to

Native Americans by the United States' government and placed hard-copies of that news in people's hands. In *Heirs*, Vizenor moves the physical contact between Native Americans and the United States' government to the international stage; he places real contacts in plain view at Point Assinika. This is a tactic Vizenor employs in much of his fiction, placing *Griever* in China and crafting relationships between Native Americans and the Japanese in *Hiroshima Bugi: Atomu 57* (2010).

Scholars have a way to go in mapping Vizenor's exploration of physical survivance. But, luckily, Vizenor's fiction welcomes this exploration. Although the intellectual side of survivance has always been Vizenor's primary concern, *Heirs* paves the way for scholars and creative writers to explore the necessary role of physicality in the enactment of survivance so that survivance can transcend the intellectual realm and manifest in real, physical relationships.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Scholars including Kerstin Schmidt have noted that Vizenor draws from Derrida's theory of "trace." A direct correspondence is not applicable, however, because Vizenor appropriates the word for his own uses.

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## Poetry, Activism, and Queer Indigenous Imaginative Landscapes: Conversations with Janice Gould

LISA TATONETTI

"I've always felt that my memory of California, my imaginative landscape, is not entirely my own but is embedded in the memory of many tribal people, my own tribe, the Koyangk'auwi Maidu, in the other small nations of Indian people who inhabited California before it was ever named and was still Turtle Island."—Janice Gould<sup>1</sup>

Koyoonk'auwi writer and scholar Janice Gould (1949-2019) was born in San Diego, grew up in Berkeley, California, and earned her BA and MA from the University of California, Berkeley and her PhD from the University of New Mexico.<sup>2</sup> A poet, essayist, musician, photographer, teacher, and theorist—to name just a few of her accomplishments and interests—Gould, though she might seem quiet or introspective at first meeting, was a force to be reckoned with. Her passing on June 28, 2019 of pancreatic cancer was a significant loss, first to her family—her longtime partner, Mimi Wheatfield, her two sisters, her nephews, and Mimi's son and granddaughter—then to her many friends and her Aikido community, and, finally, as I'll speak more about here, to the larger literary community.

Gould was an important voice in queer Indigenous writing and is part of a generation of artists who sowed the seeds for the incredible blossoming of Two-Spirit/queer Indigenous writing and theory in the twenty-first century. Together with authors and friends like Beth Brant (Bay of Quinte Mohawk, 1941-2015), Chrystos

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(Menominee, b. 1946), Paula Gunn Allen (Laguna Pueblo, Sioux, Lebanese American, 1939-2008), Vikki Sears (Cherokee, 1941-1999), and Maurice Kenny (non-citizen Mohawk, 1929-2016), Gould was part of the first wave of Indigenous writers to openly embrace sexual diversity and to depict queer or Two-Spirit Indigenous people as lynchpins of their communities.

As a California Native person, Gould was a product of the dislocations and incredible challenges that face Indigenous people in this region in the wake of attempted genocide. Gould engaged her connections to and dislocations from her Koyoook'auwi heritage most deliberately in her first three poetry collections—*Beneath My Heart* (1990), *Earthquake Weather* (1996), and *Doubters and Dreamers* (2011). These texts address ongoing *processes* of identifications, practices, and locales that elsewhere I have argued we might term Indigenous assemblages.<sup>3</sup> Such mobile and generative sites coalesce around the *shifting* nature of events, experiences, and perception, around the known *and* unknown. And such embodied movements, as Gould speaks of in these interview exchanges, mark the texture of her life as the daughter of a white father and a Koyoook'auwi mother who was taken from her family after her mother's death and placed in an informal adoption arrangement that led to her being raised by three white sisters from Kansas.

In Gould's second collection, *Earthquake Weather*, she explains that her mother, Vivian Beatty, was born in Beldon, California to Harry and Helen (Nellie) Beatty, both mixed-blood Koyoook'auwi people living in what historically would have been their nation's territory.<sup>4</sup> When her mother died of cancer, Vivian was subsequently adopted by Beatrice, Henrietta, and Clara Lane, three sisters living in the San Francisco Bay area. Gould's preface tells the story of her family's move from San Diego to Berkeley when she was nine. In this relocation to the house of her mother's adoptive family, to use her words, "Berkeley's proximity to the Sierra Nevada and the small town of Beldon, on the

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Feather River, where my mother, Vivian Beatty, was born in 1914" functioned as a catalyst that led her to become "firmly attached and sensitive to my California Indian, or Konkow heritage" (viii). Gould's family took frequent trips back to these regions and, while she overtly acknowledges her lack of specific cultural knowledge, as we'll see in the following interview, she also speaks about the embodied connection she felt to the landscapes that were the home of her Indigenous relatives and ancestors.

Gould's somatic responses suggest that there are connections between humans and the other-than-human world that exist before and beyond settler colonial confines and the psychic impacts of colonial violence. As another Indigenous Californian writer, Deborah Miranda (Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen/Chumash) argues, the dynamic restructuring of often-jagged cultural shards into what she terms a "mosaic," includes the need to acknowledge, rather than merely shunt aside, the realities of cultural fragmentations in many Indigenous California histories. In *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, Miranda explains, "We've lost our language, our lands, our religion, our literature (stories and song). None of these things are recuperable, no matter how hard we work" (136). She continues, "I'm not whole. And yet, I *am* whole. What the hell! I'm a whole mosaic. Deal with it, world. White and Indian, and not only that, but Indian and reinventing myself in this Post-Colonial Art Project I've inherited" (136). I want to suggest then that as we consider Gould within a California Native context, we keep in mind the active processes of Indigenous assemblage, the power of memory and physical return, and the frank realities and aftermaths of attempted genocide.

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As our interview exchanges show, Gould is a poet interested in craft and contemplation. Her newest collection, *Seed* (2019), highlights this attention to lyric detail and, at times,

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formal patterns of meter. In terms of thinking across her entire body of work, Gould's books include the aforementioned *Beneath My Heart*, *Earthquake Weather*, and *Doubters and Dreamers*, together with *The Force of Gratitude* (2017) and *Seed*. Furthermore, along with publishing extensively in anthologies and journals, Gould wrote personal and critical essays and served as an editor as well. Notably, together with Dean Rader, Gould edited the first collection of scholarly work on Native American poetry, *Speak to Me Words: Essays on Contemporary American Indian Poetry* (2003). Before her death, Gould had just completed editing *A Generous Spirit: Selected Works by Beth Brant* (2019), which is a beautiful and necessary return to Brant's influential writing that includes an afterword by Miranda.

I'd known Janice Gould for some fifteen years or more before her death, having been a fan of her work since my graduate school days at Ohio State in the late 1990s. We met sometime after 2005 and corresponded often about *Sovereign Erotics* from about 2008 on. In those and subsequent years, we were in contact frequently as I was writing about her poetry and essays. I brought her to Kansas State during this period and also had the good fortune of seeing her at many conferences and panels. Across these years, Janice was unfailingly kind and generous, sharing family history, giving permissions, and telling stories in our email conversations, occasional phone calls, and coffees/meals when we were in the same spaces. We had fallen out of regular contact for a time, however, when she contacted me in 2018 to tell me about both the upcoming publication of *Seed*, and, at the same time, about her diagnosis. The news was simply heartbreaking.

I had long wanted to do a substantial interview with Janice about her work and history. In late fall 2018, after we'd exchanged a number of emails about *Seed*, which she shared with me and I blurbed, I tentatively reached out about conducting that interview. My hope had been to go to Colorado, but by late December Janice's energy

had begun to fail—a combination of the cancer itself and the subsequent treatments; at the same time, my own mother had fallen seriously ill. Given the limitations of both our lives, Janice suggested email exchanges so that she was able to answer questions as her energy allowed. The questions and answers that follow arise from those exchanges. I split and sent my questions in three segments; she would complete and return one section to me and I'd send the next. I include them, then, in their three parts. Part One engages her most recent poetry collection, *Seed*; Part Two engages California—though that focus also arises in other sections—and in Part Three, Janice answers my questions on her memories and involvement in Queer of Color and Queer Indigenous histories.

The questions in these three sections were answered from January to April 2019. Subsequently, they are not always in the same format—one appears as interstitial comments in which Janice inserted responses in a different colored font to my questions and the subsequent two are written as letters. In the latter two sections, I append my questions in footnotes when relevant. Because I find, and have always found, Janice Gould's stories, poems, and thoughts by turns compelling and thought-provoking, and because this is one of the last interviews she completed, I offer our exchanges in their nearly complete form.

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### Part One: Questions for *Seed*

**LT:** *Seed* is a gorgeous, contemplative collection. It was really a privilege to have the opportunity to read it as it heads toward publication. Can you talk about the collection? How it developed? What you see as its core?

**JG:** I started *Seed* as a manuscript in September 2018, but much of the writing probably emerged from a thought or desire I had been mulling over for some time, and that had

to do with a question I'm not sure I ever asked aloud. Was it possible for me to write from the dictates of spirit, from a place within that wasn't exclusively about me? I had "finished" writing a kind of memoir using something like a form of prose poems or vignettes; some of those pieces were fairly extensive. I had worked on that writing a long time, and I was interested in finding my back to a more lyric form of poetry.

In 2017 my partner Mimi and I were asked if we'd like to be part of a small, newly formed writers' group in town. We joined and had a few sessions with some other women writers in our community. For some reason, it really helped me find my voice again. It also helped me think about the craft of writing. It was exciting and nourishing to be with other writers who were also considering questions of craft: how best to convey a story, build a character, how to clarify one's thinking/writing, how to find the right image.

You need to understand that this is not part of my work life at all. I don't teach Creative Writing, I'm not in an English Department, and discussions about books and literature are not particularly interesting to my students, whose orientations are more typically sociological. My actual creative life has nothing to do with being in a milieu of writers and scholars who think about things more or less the way I do.

The first poem in the collection, "A Poem," was one I brought to our writers' group. It came to me more or less intact, and I wrote it down. Even though it called on a landscape I have put in words before, it also came from dream landscape, one that is similar to our worldly reality, but is always its own place. I'm fascinated by that place (and places) that return to me over months and years—or to which I'm returned. And I felt that I could perhaps write honestly from that dream perspective, that perhaps it was a way to open to spirit differently. The last sentence makes it seem like I had organized thoughts about this process. I didn't. It was more a feeling about which I was not fully cognizant.

**LT:** As the title suggests, there's a beautiful movement of growth in *Seed* from the first stirrings of germination to emergence to bloom and beyond. These natural transformations most often parallel human emotions in the poems—love and a deep contentment as well as loss and, sometimes, a sense of mourning (of past loves, past lives). Can you talk a bit about this? About the movement of the collection and/or these parallels.

**JG:** The collection was not planned. I realized after I had written the poem "Seed" and some of the other "garden" poems that I could start with "A Poem," which ends "as if a poem could emerge from a seed." It was coincidence because I'd written "A Poem" a year before and then had more or less forgotten about it. As I periodically do, however, I went through some older poems I had stored away, and when I found it, I realized it would work with the other writing, most of which, as I said, began around September 2018.

I wanted to write about the Beloved, who is also the beloved. I wanted to write about the Mother, who is also the mother. This allowed me to move into the realm of the ideal, yet I am someone who remembers that our feet are planted on the earth. Thus, many of the poems move between an ideal garden and my own poor rose garden, between an actual cabin where Mimi and I lived, and a cabin upon whose porch a group of angels could be sitting after the rain. But this makes up only a part of the collection.

In September I went to women's Aikido camp in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I can be a bit anti-social, and I wanted some privacy, so I stayed about forty-five minutes away at an inn where we had lodged before in the village of Chimayó. After each day's Aikido session was over, I would stop at a market and buy something for dinner, usually just cheese, fruit, wine and bread. Then I'd return to the inn and sit outdoors with a glass of wine while evening came on and watch the birds flitting around in the cherry tree, listen



to a donkey braying somewhere. I would relish that particular mildness that happens in New Mexico in September. I knew I could write, and though I was there ostensibly for Aikido, I had a feeling a poem or two was waiting for me and I knew I needed to make good use of this time.

Most of the "New Mexico" poems in the collection come from that time away by myself. But I also just wanted to reflect on the sacredness of certain times of day. I suppose in some religious traditions these are marked and prayer is required. I don't feel that way. I love how different times of day have different meanings. Of course, this means that one must actually take the time to reflect on sun-up or twilight, and I imagine that many if not most people would find that a silly and time-wasting exercise.

**LT:** I was struck by the poems that gesture toward writing, toward your process and feelings about the creative endeavor. I'm thinking here of "Poetry" and "Integrity" or even "Sunday" and "Beyond Knowing." Will you share a little bit about your writing process and/or your relationship with poetry and language and how you came to it?

**JG:** As for poems about writing, I figured it was my time to say something about this creative act. My relationship to writing has been fraught. As a young person I somehow felt what a poem could be, and thus like many young people, I was drawn to wanting to create this personal expression. In my first attempts, I was using metaphors and images without fully knowing what those terms meant. But later, reading poetry in literature classes in high school, for example, poetry confounded me. I was pathetically stupid about poetry, mute and frightened.

It did not make me hate poetry, but it hurt me that what others saw clearly remained opaque for me. Eventually I grew up enough to become intrigued all over again with what a poet can do with language. I had some good teachers who helped me

to understand better what I was not confident enough to understand before. Intuitively I began to feel not just the richness of sound and the beauty of image, but the rhythm of language that moved the poem forward.

I don't know if I have a writing process. Much depends on having free time and repose. But there is some mysterious requirement that I don't really understand that isn't about time or repose. It's a feeling that if I sit down to write, I will be able to follow through with it. I sometimes have ideas for poems—especially lately, being sick for several weeks—but I know that if begin, I will stop, the language won't come. I won't know where I'm going.

**LT:** Along the same lines, I'm also interested in how you would identify—do you see your poetry as autobiographical or confessional or are those not the right terms at all?

**JG:** Some of my poems are semi-autobiographical. In other words, I don't necessarily separate fact from fiction when it is meant to be blended, because that is what creates the seed of the narrative or story. I would not say my poems are confessional because these are not exactly confessions of guilt or contrition—more a sort of exploration of moments that I relive (mentally, emotionally) from time to time where I need to understand my vulnerability or shame, the difficulties of being a young lesbian in a world hostile to Gay people.

**LT:** I find "Contradiction" absolutely captivating. In it, the speaker (you? she?) calls herself a "tomboy" and names a desire for women, that is "Clearly a sin / that never feels wrong / except when I am found out." This aligns with poems like "Snow," "Mrs. Ryder's Hands," and "Fierce Defense." These poems detail a young woman's queer coming of age in a world that does not accept same-sex desire. They're painful and raw

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and remind us how thin and recent LGBTIQ/Two-Spirit acceptance is and how difficult these realities were (and, let's be real, are still in many cases). Can you talk about your relationship with, thoughts about these poems, and decision to include them in this collection? As an aside, this set of poems remind me, in the best of ways, of *Beneath My Heart* and *Earthquake Weather*.

**JG:** "Snow" and "Contradiction" (and I would include "Black Hair") are more recent arrivals than "Mrs. Ryder's Hands" and "Fierce Defense," both of which I wrote years ago and then stored away. As you point out, they are in the vein of some of the poems in *Beneath My Heart* and *Earthquake Weather*. I think these poems needed a home, and I just decided to add them to *Seed*. I did hesitate a little, though, because I felt the rawness of those poems might jar against the more contemplative (quieter?) poems. But I like the intensity of those poems. I like their fierceness and passion.

I want to add that contemplation is not benign, not a benign activity; perhaps it is the result of an activity. Anyone who has meditated knows what a struggle it can be to keep coming back to breath or mantra, to return one's focus to whatever inward light one is seeking. There is pain or at least frustration at moments in how elusive this search can be. But then... there it is again, that still clarity.

**LT:** There are many poems in *Seed* that speak to what feels, for me as a reader, a deep peace or contentment, even if sometimes tinged with sorrow. I'm thinking of "Eventide," "Simple," "Benediction," "Ahimsa," and more. Am I imagining this? And, if not, is this thread arising from a particular moment, experience, a broader sense of knowledge, a particular place you find yourself in life and/or writing?

**JG:** I have studied Aikido for many years and have given a lot of thought to the deep beauty of this art. Some people would call it a martial art. I call it a path. Like any path, it presents its challenges, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. My study of Aikido has changed me. I have had to deal with anger and judgments I thought I had already dealt with. I have had to seek ways to be more compassionate, more empathetic, more humane. This answer goes hand in hand with the response to the prior question you asked.

**LT:** I have your published collections—*Beneath My Heart* (1990), *Earthquake Weather* (1996), *Doubters and Dreamers* (2011), *The Force of Gratitude* (2017), and *Seed* (I've never been able to get my hands on *Alphabet!*)—spread out across my table. They are dog-eared and tabbed with different colors and underlined. I find your work, by turns, stunning and painful and beautiful and often read it aloud to both myself and others. I'm currently, for example, completely obsessed with the last lines of "Weed":

Creator made me for some  
unstated purpose, perhaps  
to annoy and displease you,  
to disrupt your fundamental beliefs  
about order and meaning.  
Or to offer you another way  
to see beauty.

How do *you* see the body of your work? Can you chart a movement, change, shift, development—insert your own descriptor here—across your books? Take us anywhere you'd like with this question as you think across and among your books.

**JG:** In my first couple of collections I was concerned with creating a lesbian voice that was also a Native American voice. I was not trying for the erotic but for the intimate. That is still one of my goals: to open readers to the possibility of intimacy—with a loved one, with themselves, with the poem. It seemed important to emphasize my Native identity because I'm a California Indian (Concow or Koyoook'auwi). While the number of California Indian writers is growing today, when I began publishing there were only a few others that I knew of—Frank La Pena, for one. There were no presses that I knew of that were seeking creative writing by California Indians. Artists and basket weavers were better known to the public.

There is a bloody history in California when it comes to Indians. The Mission system, the creation of haciendas, and the enslavement of Indians as peons to work on those large ranchos. The Gold Rush—in a whole other part of California—brought the seizure of Indian lands by whites who wanted to strike gold and get rich quick. Meanwhile, Indians were without legal status. They became increasingly pauperized.

I felt I needed to somehow get that story across—not just the story of my own struggles with my mother, with homophobia, etc.—but the fact is, I grew up in Berkeley, California. I spent a good deal of my life in California. And as I grew as a poet, I knew there were other tales to tell, right from my own family. That's when *Doubters and Dreamers* emerged. In that book, I also wanted to play with more formal structures—the opening poem, "Indian Mascot, 1959," for example, is a sestina. I was beginning to bring in my relatives as characters who had an impact on me, and the landscape of the Feather River Canyon. I was delighted when University of Arizona Press was able to get Rick Bartow's "Two Views of Hawk" for the cover. I think that book is beautifully produced. It was a finalist for a couple of prizes, including the Colorado Book Award.

I was very pleased when Headmistress Press accepted my chapbook manuscript, *The Force of Gratitude*. It was a finalist for the Charlotte Mew Poetry Contest. That book includes some of the prose poems or vignettes I was working with in my as yet unpublished memoir, if that's what it is. So, there are autobiographical elements in that book as well, and attention to landscape.

Finally, I am very grateful and happy that Headmistress Press was excited about *Seed* and was willing to publish it in January 2019. It will have a showing at the AWP Conference in Portland, Oregon. I only wish I could be there, but much depends on how I feel after the treatments (I have Stage Four pancreatic cancer).

**LT:** Is there something else, something more you'd like to share as you think about *Seed* either on its own as a collection or in relation to the rest of your work?

**JG:** I love *Seed*. I was delighted with the cover that Mary Merriam designed—using a 1950s black and white photo of my dad and me. I'm deeply appreciative of the good words that other writers contributed to the volume with their blurbs. I've also been so pleased that *Seed* came to me when it did. Poetry work, for me, can take a long time. So, it was something of an astonishment that over the fall I was able to just keep writing. It was the Beloved who said, "Find the first word... and go from there," and each time that word came to me, I had something to say. I am not sure if that will happen again, but I'm grateful to or for whatever force or mystery it is that allows me to write poetry.

## **Part Two: Questions on California**

**LT:** Can you meditate a bit here on how you see your relationship to California, to Koyoonk'auwi landscapes, and/or to Koyoonk'auwi history today?

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California looms large in histories of the Red Power movement. I'm thinking, in particular, of the two occupations of Alcatraz, especially the eighteen-month occupation that began in November 1969 and ended in June 1971. Were you living in Berkeley during the take-over? Can you share a bit about your experience of that era?

Poems like "History Lesson" (*Beneath My Heart*), "Easter Sunday" (*Earthquake Weather*), and "Indian Mascot, 1959" (*Sovereign Erotics and Doubters and Dreamers*), among many others, teach readers something more than what "Easter Sunday" calls the "rich, false history of California" (41). You've been doing this work of pushing folks—especially non-Native folks—to see the often-difficult realities of California history for some thirty years now. Will this always be a part of your creative/theoretical work? Has headway been made here?

Finally, can you comment on the community of California writers today—whether Indigenous California writers or Native writers who call California home. (This could be a shout out to folks you love, a reverie on what's happened there since you started your career, or another approach of your choice.)

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JG: Hello Lisa,

I will try answering your questions as best I can. I'll begin with my relationship to California, a complicated topic. Since I have not lived in California for many years, and because I have lost significant relatives and simply do not know others of them, it seems my relationship to California has become considerably thinner. And when I speak of California, I am speaking mostly about the northern part of the state. I lost some connection to southern California after my family moved to Berkeley. Interestingly,

however, when I returned to San Diego in fall of 2017, I remembered exactly how to get to the neighborhood on Pt. Loma where I spent the first nine years of my life.

I guess we maintain relationship through memory and imagination of place—its smell, the feel of the air, important people, events, and activities that created the cloth of experience, visually, aurally, tactilely. My sisters and I were aware of our American Indian heritage, but what that meant in real experiential terms is hard to define. There were no specific Concow (Koyoook'auwi) objects that served as reminders of our ancestry other than some old photographs of my mom's mother, father and siblings. We also had photos of the town of Belden and some of its inhabitants, the railroad, the Feather River and surrounding mountains, and glimpses of the Beatty family homestead. My grandparents, who I never met because they died before I was born, were both "half-breeds," as the term had it. My grandmother was French and Concow and my grandfather Irish and Concow.

After my grandmother died, my mother's dad, Harry Beatty, allowed my mom, Vivian, to be "adopted" by the Lane sisters, three white women who were interested in adopting or fostering an Indian child. My mom was possibly between seven and ten-years-old when this occurred. The story of her mother's death, her father's abandonment of her, the break with her siblings, her apparent adoption by the Lanes, and much more, were tales my mother imparted to us over the years. The land still had meaning because of my mom's memories.

My parents would take us camping on the Feather River, or we would stay at our Aunt Lillian and Uncle Ivan's homestead, which was set back from the river several hundred yards, and about a mile from Belden's main street (it really only had one street). We spent time exploring the area by car, driving to places that had historical meaning and [importance] for some Indian people who had memories of significant sites where ceremonies may have been performed. For us, removed in time and culture from some



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places, these areas might be beautiful, but we had no particular attachment to specific places, or knowledge of what might have gone on among the Concow or Maidu people fifty or a hundred years earlier, other than what happened to members of our family.

Nevertheless, for me, especially as time wore on and I became more familiar with the history of the region, Belden, the Feather River, and other towns and sites became significant. The map of my knowledge expanded regionally, linguistically. I still feel a strong fascination about the life of Indian people, especially during the colonial era, just before and after California was seized from Mexico and eventually became part of the United States. Greg Sarris (Miwok) points out in his writing that among the Pomo, tribal people who lived west of the Concow across the Sacramento Valley, some preached what could be seen as a kind of assimilation, except that it wasn't. For example, dressing in western garb might better protect Indian women from the ravages of colonial white male settlers than the traditional clothing, which was scant. No doubt by the time of the Gold Rush, which began in 1849, some Indian people had already adopted Euro-American clothing and were employed as farm laborers, laundry women, cooks, wood cutters, and vaqueros. My grandparents dressed in late 19<sup>th</sup>, early 20<sup>th</sup>-century style.

As a young person, I hiked and backpacked in the Sierra Nevada and the Coast Range, on the John Muir Trail and in the Los Padres and Yola Bola Wilderness areas. We spent time on the coast, especially at Pt. Reyes National Seashore, where we could observe sea lions and sea otters, elk, deer, and many birds. There are many regional parks in the Bay Area, and we hiked in and explored these places as well. We learned to sail on San Francisco and Tomales Bays, went rock-climbing at Indian Rock Park in Berkeley and in Yosemite. We rode horses in the east bay hills. We lived about three blocks from UC Berkeley land, what was essentially open space when we were kids. The steep hills east of the campus were full of wild oats and milkweed, and in the canyons

there were oak and laurel trees, chaparral, and poison oak. We watched the fog roll in through the Golden Gate and over the bay, right up and over the hill that we lived on.

My older sister and I attended Merritt Junior College, which was an old technical/vocational school on what used to be Grove Street and later became Martin Luther King Boulevard. It was there, taking a journalism class, that I became interested in what was going on at Alcatraz. I wanted to visit the island. Shy as I was, I imagined that I would talk with some of the Indian people who were out there. A couple of friends and I located an office in San Francisco that must have served as the Public Relations headquarters, among other things. A young arrogant Indian guy was in charge, and he basically told me I could not go out to the island. He was so supercilious that I became incensed and walked out on him in the middle of his spiel. A few days later, my older sister and I went to the Friendship House in Oakland and spoke with an older Indian gentleman there who told us that Alcatraz was thought to be a place of bad luck for California Indian people, and he kindly discouraged us from trying to go there. My sister and I decided to listen to him.

I would guess that especially the older Indian man could see what a naïve and sheltered kind of young person I was. I really had no firm idea of what the issues were that Native people were protesting and that sparked the take-over of Alcatraz Island. I had not yet become politicized in any cognizant way. That didn't start to happen until I took Women's Studies classes (again through Merritt) and began to acquire a language for what I felt, thought, and experienced.

Being now so far from California in time and space, I have only a vague idea of what is going on in Native California, artistically and in other ways. I know that more scholarship is going on among the young scholars who are earning their doctoral degrees, and I applaud that.

### Part Three: Questions on Queer Indigenous History

JG: Dear Lisa,

Thanks for all your questions, all the work you've gone to in asking them... and for your friendly, scholarly self! It's been fun thinking about these questions and wondering what answers I will find to them.

How would I think about the three decades, '70s, '80s, and '90s? Many socio-political shifts and changes went on over that period of time. I found my own footing, though it took quite a while, because I was busy being angry for many years, and it was not until my mother passed away and I found my partner, Mimi, that I began to settle down psychologically and emotionally. I was still in a lot of turmoil, even through the '90s. I had so many changes to go through, so many challenges.

There was a lot of social unrest in the Bay Area [during that period]. After the People's Park protests and violence in 1969, Governor Reagan sent the National Guard to Berkeley and barbed wire was strung up along University Avenue, down to the Berkeley Yacht Harbor, where the Guard was encamped. From up on the hill, we could see clouds of tear gas being shot at protesters. The Zodiac Killer was on the loose, and all kinds of other bizarre killers and rapists were suddenly making headlines. I also believe a brisk business in drugs and prostitution was on Berkeley streets during the early '70s.

The general level of revolutionary fervor increased as militant arms of the Black Panthers and Brown Berets made their presence known. In 1974 the Symbionese Liberation Army kidnapped Patty Hearst a mile from where I worked; they had assassinated the Superintendent of Oakland Schools, Dr. Marcus Foster [in 1973]. Many of them eventually met their end in a shoot-out in Los Angeles.

As a young lesbian, I had no idea what I would be or do in the world. I had moved away from home, had lived in Oregon and Colorado, had returned home after the break-up with a girlfriend, was attending various Junior Colleges—Merritt and Laney—and delving into different majors every few months, wanting to find “practical” employment but being bored out of my mind with 9-to-5 jobs. I had fallen in love with a straight white woman, and, of course, I was experiencing all the intensity of her ambivalence [and also] the deep grief of not being able to talk about this with my family or old friends from whom I had become increasingly isolated. I was just beginning to experience what it meant to be out of the closet.

Gay Pride was a nascent movement in the early '70s, but it gathered strength during that decade.<sup>5</sup> I had begun working at I.C.I-A Woman's Place Bookstore. It was billed as an information center, and it certainly provided needed texts for women interested in building the Women's Movement, feminist theory, etc. It was also a center for lesbian artists, poets, and activists. Some excellent scholarship on the role of feminist bookstores in raising consciousness has recently been published. These were vital sites for organizing and activism, for sharing music, poetry, and prose literature, for developing a political consciousness. I participated in the Berkeley Oakland Women's Union (I called it bow-wow) through the cultural arts contingent made up of singers, actors, and other artists. We marched in a couple of the Gay Pride parades, singing and playing instruments. I met Cherríe Moraga at A Woman's Place; we already knew of each other. I marched with her and some of her friends during [a] Gay Pride March.

I was attending UC Berkeley in the 1980s. I majored in linguistics and focused my attention on Native American languages. I became friends with a small number of graduate students in that program, and graduated cum laude, having written up some work on the Hopi language. I had also been awarded a fellowship to do field work in

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Alaska through the Alaska Native Language Center. I worked on an Athabaskan language called Salcha; there were but two speakers left of that language.

While I was at UC Berkeley, I also took classes in Native American Studies, sitting in at times on Gerald Vizenor's literature class and later attending Wendy Rose's literature class, meeting poets Maurice Kenny and Mary Tall Mountain. Later I applied to and was accepted into the Ph.D. program in Linguistics, but dropped out of it, worked for a year in the department, and applied to the Master's Program in English at UC. That is where Mimi and I met; she was a year behind me in the program.

Oddly enough, the English Department did not offer any classes in minority literature at that time. These were mainly taught through Ethnic Studies. Mimi and I decided to organize a class through the English Department in which we would read literature by North American women of color. We were able to call on friends and faculty to help us with this project, including Professor Sue Schweik, who agreed to sponsor the class. We enlisted a number of women to teach the class, including Cherríe Moraga and Ana Castillo, Norma Alarcón, Merle Woo and Nellie Wong, Elaine Kim, Paula Gunn Allen, and others. The English Department was skeptical that the class would make, but on the first night nearly fifty women showed up. Some were students, others were staff.

I met Beth Brant probably in the mid-1980s. I think Beth had come out to California for some kind of literary residency. It was at least year or two before my mother died. I drove Beth out to Marin County where she would be housed in residence for some days. A year or two later Beth returned to the Bay Area, possibly when *Mohawk Trails* came out. She called me to say that Gloria Anzaldúa, who was living in south Berkeley or Emeryville at the time was having a party at her place and I should come meet her. I brought my girlfriend, Mimi, with me. I recall that Gloria had a computer and was working on the text of *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*. She showed us bits and pieces of the text; it seemed magical to me. Later, after Mimi and I moved to

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Albuquerque, Gloria stayed with us during a National Association of Chicano & Chicana Studies (NACCS) Conference.

Through Beth I met Michelle Cliff (and later I met Adrienne Rich, both in Albuquerque and in Portland, Oregon, where she had come to do a reading.) Beth was instrumental in helping get my first book, *Beneath My Heart*, published with Firebrand Books. She sent a manuscript of my poems to Nancy Bereano and suggested that it might be a good candidate for publication. Nancy agreed, and in 1989 that book was published. Beth also helped me to meet Chrystos, who came to Albuquerque to read at Full Circle Books, a women's bookstore in town. Later, Chrystos stayed with us on yet another trip to the Southwest. Joy Harjo was living in Albuquerque, and she came to my reading at one of the bookstores, which is where we met. In addition to meeting other Native women writers, my partner and I met lesbian poet Margaret Randall and her partner, the artist Barb Byers.

The Returning the Gift conference in Norman, Oklahoma brought many, many Native American writers together. That is where I met Vickie Sears, as well as Linda Hogan, Betty Louise Bell, and others whose names I am not remembering now. Some of my poetry was included in an anthology, edited by Joseph Bruchac, that came out of that conference.

After obtaining my Ph.D in English from the University of New Mexico, many opportunities opened up for me in the 1990s. For one thing, while studying at UNM, I received a Ford Fellowship, which helped support my scholarly work. Grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and from the Astraea Foundation for Lesbian Writers helped with the creative work (I took time from my studies to write). Over the years I have met many other Native American writers and scholars, both Gay and straight, both through my work as a scholar and also through my work as a poet: Greg Sarris, Craig Womack, Qwo-Li Driskill, Daniel Justice, Malea Powell, Ellen Cushman, Joyce Rain

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Anderson, Virginia Carney, Deborah Miranda, Cheryl Savageau, Margaret Bruchac, Heid Erdrich, Elizabeth Woody, Nancy Mithlo, Suzan Harjo, Marty de Montañó, Inés Hernández-Ávila, and many others. I have benefitted enormously and learned much from the friendships and acquaintanceships that I've had with my fellow Native Americans and with other non-Native scholars, like Dean Rader, Hertha Wong, Deborah Madsen, and yourself. In fact, Dean and I put together the first (and only?) scholarly book exclusively focused on American Indian poetry, *Speak to Me Words*.

As for the term "Two Spirit," I think it can be a useful descriptor, but there is a sort of ambiguity to it, and it seems to cover a wide variety of social-sexual expressions—and it feels like everyone gets lumped in together, even though everyone is quite different in how they live their sexual/erotic identities.<sup>6</sup> I've used it to describe myself in the past, partly because (in my mind) I have some androgynous qualities that I cannot deny. Chrystos once called me a "soft butch" when I was much younger. But I have no idea how I'm perceived these days, perhaps simply as an older woman, maybe a lesbian, with a short haircut.

I think it's still true, that quote you supplied from the *Ariel* article. For some of us, it is perhaps not such a burden to be "out."<sup>7</sup> Among liberal colleagues where I work, for example, being a lesbian is not an issue, as far as I can tell. Being a Native American lesbian poet is not a problem (probably since most people don't read my books—and I am just such a nice person!) It does not seem to be an issue for my students, and I expect that a percentage of them come from Evangelical Christian families that have little tolerance or love for LGBTQ people. But these young folks are in school to learn, to be exposed to thoughts and ideas that they probably did not grow up with. Whether they accept in the long term (internalize) the wide diversity of thought and expression that they are learning about, I don't know.

I'm aware that there are vast parts of the country at least as conservative as Colorado Springs, and in small communities it may still be that if a person is LGBTQ, they feel safest staying in the closet. I suspect that undisclosed erotic activity goes on in every community, and that it isn't discussed openly because in so many ways it still is not safe to live an honest life as the person you know yourself to be, loving whom you wish to love. And I'm speaking of both Native and non-Native communities. We live with a legacy of religious fervor that raises its bigoted head every now and then, fearful and intolerant of difference, and believing it has the right to judge and condemn others.

I am way out of the loop when it comes to younger LGBTQ Native American writers, except for my friendships with Jennifer Foerster and Byron Aspaas, both wonderful poets.<sup>8</sup> This has to do, in part, with the way I work. I'm a bit of a recluse. Also, I am very careful about the work I take in to myself because other people's writing can affect the process of my own composing. I really have to love the poetry I encounter otherwise I won't feel like spending any time with it. Some contemporary writing, whether by Native or non-Native poets, leaves me cold because it seems to have no internal fire or reality. Some of it seems far too wedded to "language," but the language seems to refuse the beggar at the door (the common reader) who needs light and warmth and a scrap of food.

It's hard to be a poet. The apprenticeship takes time. We learn from others, we experiment, but then we have to make our own way and find a language that can bear our truth. I guess that's the only advice I can give: do your work and do it honestly and generously. Sometimes that will mean encountering challenges or problems that are hard to solve, but it's important to persist if poetry means anything to you, and if it's to survive in a world where suffering is ever present, but where joy remains possible.

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I leave this final conversation wanting *more* of Janice Gould's words. Her thoughts on her poems, on writing, and the details she relates here about the queer coalitions of which she was a part at a crucial time in the rise of queer multiethnic and Indigenous literatures and activism speak to how much more she had to share, how much more that we could learn from her gorgeous art and rich experiences. Further, Janice's thoughts throughout these conversations point to how our embodied understandings of self and place shift in relation to time, to proximity, to health, and to the ebb and flow of memory. In thinking of the movements of Gould's experiences in/of California, I return again to the frame Miranda offers us for the active process of Indigenous assemblage: "I'm not whole. And yet, I *am* whole. What the hell! I'm a whole mosaic. Deal with it, world. White and Indian, and not only that, but Indian and reinventing myself in this Post-Colonial Art Project I've inherited" (*Bad Indians*, 136). Gould acknowledges this inheritance and its potential fragmentations throughout her writing, yet, as we see in the final words she offers here, still looks toward a world where "joy remains possible." It is that world she leaves with us as her legacy.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in "Janice Gould" from *The Geography of Home: California's Poetry of Place*, Christopher Buckley and Gary Young, eds., 85.

<sup>2</sup> The spelling of Koyoonk'auwi (also known as Concow or Konkow Maidu) varies in English. As seen in the epigraph that begins the text, Gould was at that time using "Koyangk'auwi." I use Koyoonk'auwi, the spelling employed in her most recent work, throughout.

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<sup>3</sup> See Tatonetti, "Chapter Five: Toward Queer Indigenous Methodologies: Indigenous Assemblage and Queer Diasporas in the Work of Janice Gould," *The Queerness of Native American Literature*.

<sup>4</sup> Gould's parents and relatives lived in the wake of California Indian genocide. Besides remaining extant in oral histories, these events have also been documented in numerous historical texts. In particular, Brendan C. Lindsay's *Murder State* has documented "the creation, through the democratic processes and institutions of the people of the United States, of a culture organized around the dispossession and murder of California Indians" (2). This dispossession, the subsequent attempted fragmentation of Indigenous kinship systems of the remaining California Indian peoples are key factors behind the Gould's mother's adoption. See the preface to *Earthquake Weather* and Gould's "Singing, Speaking, and Seeing a World" for more on her family history.

<sup>5</sup> This section responds to two questions I posed: 1) "As someone who thinks a lot about the early years of queer Indigenous lit—the 1970s, '80s, '90s—it seems like there was this amazing convergence of writing and thinking and art. How would you think about that time? With the Gay American Indians forming, *This Bridge Called My Back*, *Living the Spirit*, and *A Gathering of Spirit* coming out, and your first books,—*Beneath My Heart*, *Alphabet*, and *Earthquake Weather*—being published. Were you consciously aware of (what I see as) a seismic shift happening?"; and 2) "OK, this is totally a question for me—I've always wondered—were you in the GAI? And did folks writing/publishing in the '80s/early '90s (you, Beth Brant, Paula Gunn Allen, Chrystos, Maurice Kenny, Vicki Sears, Carole laFavor, Connie Fife, Sharron Proulx-Turner and more...) know each other, hang out at all?"

<sup>6</sup> Janice's response here is in answer to this question: "Do you remember when you first started hearing the term "Two-Spirit"? What did that feel like/mean for you? Was it a descriptor you took up immediately? Is it one that still fits for you today?"

<sup>7</sup> The particular question to which she refers is: "Your 1994 essay in *Ariel*, "Disobedience (in Language) in Texts by Lesbian Native Americans" is incredibly important. Just as you were part of that first wave of creative writing, you were also in the vanguard of scholars doing critical/theoretical work on Queer Indigenous/Two-Spirit literature, as well. This essay in particular, which I still often teach, is hard-hitting and unapologetic. You talk overtly about California's settler colonial history and, among other things, about the power of the erotic in Indigenous lesbian writing (Sears, Brant, and Chrystos). There's a quote in that piece I've cited so many times:

I am aware that in speaking about a lesbian American Indian erotics, and even more in speaking about lesbian love, I am being disloyal and disobedient to the patriarchal injunction that demands our silence and invisibility. If we would only stay politely and passively in the closet, and not flaunt our sexuality, we could be as gay and abnormal as we like. (32)

What do you think when you look back at that quote, at that piece, some twenty-five years later?"

<sup>8</sup> This paragraph and the next respond to this question: "There's a really amazing group of queer young Indigenous writers publishing right now. Do you have any thoughts about the new generation of Two-Spirit/Queer Indigenous writers? Advice for them?"

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## Sweatlodge in the Apocalypse: An Interview with Smokii Sumac

JAMES MACKAY

\*Please view the html version of this piece in order to watch the recording of the original interview.

**James Mackay:** I wanted to start by asking about the images on the front cover of your book, *you are enough*. They're very striking, and seem to say a lot about you and your relationship to the land. How did you come to the design and how did you come to choose those particular images?

**Smokii Sumac:** I love this question! I don't get to talk about it a lot.

I was really lucky to be working with an Indigenous press, [Kegedonce](https://kegedonce.com) (<https://kegedonce.com>), who gave me the freedom to choose. And when I started thinking about what I wanted to share, I was thinking about first of all, where I'm from. The lands there in those photos are my many different homes, places that I'm connected to. A lot of the book is about finding home. So there's Peterborough, Ontario, where I was living. One of them is just the moon. There are the mountains from home where I live in Ktunaxa territory. And there's also Blackfoot territory where I do ceremony.

Then I put *myself* out there. I think there's sort of this insecurity around selfies sometimes that can happen because there's sort of a stigma around them – at least, the Kim Kardashian kind of selfie mode. And yet it means something else for our Indigenous women specifically. I think of an artist Nancy King, who is known as [Chief Lady Bird](https://chiefladybirdart.tumblr.com) (<https://chiefladybirdart.tumblr.com>), or of [Tenille Campbell](#)

([www.tenillecampbell.com](http://www.tenillecampbell.com)) who is another poet and photographer and she's got a book, [Indian Love Poems](http://www.signature-editions.com/index.php/books/single_title/indianlovepoems) ([www.signature-editions.com/index.php/books/single\\_title/indianlovepoems](http://www.signature-editions.com/index.php/books/single_title/indianlovepoems)). You look at their Instagrams and they have thousands, tens of thousands of followers. And they've talked about this idea of revolutionizing the selfie, which is important for me because of the transition. Not just because I medically transitioned, but also because of being in transition in my life, deciding to change genders and moving *between*. What does that presentation look like? There was kind of a really neat time in my life, the two years of when these poems were written, where I was playing with different things, whether that was being feminine-presenting and using earrings and lipstick, or male-presenting and wearing my hats. I think when we say gender is performative, sometimes it is what you're wearing. So I did have quite a few photos that I sent and said "These are options," and we went from there.

It's revolutionary for Indigenous people to represent ourselves. I think about [Tik Tok](https://www.tiktok.com/tag/firstnations?lang=en) (<https://www.tiktok.com/tag/firstnations?lang=en>), I think about [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/firstnations/) (<https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/firstnations/>), I think about our youth being able to just sort of make a movie in a way that's so much more accessible compared to the years of the only representation of ourselves being through lenses like Western movies. It's changing for now. When I talk to my students, I ask "Do you know who John Wayne is?" And they don't now, but they know Pocahontas, so that's the next stereotypical imagery to overcome. It's different when we get to represent ourselves. When it comes to my book, I also thought about the people who are the young people who are in transition and what it would mean to see that sort of spectrum on the cover.

My four year old niece, when she was showing it to someone, was really proud. But she also went, "This is Smokii's book, but he's not a lady!" She was very confused

on that front, although we've been talking to her about gender, because it's only in the last two years that she's sort of adopted me.

**JM:** I love what you're saying about the digital self-representation for First Nations artists. Isn't it also true for most trans people that they haven't been self-represented?

**SS:** Definitely. When I started looking for trans representation, all I found was young white men - young white *boys* even. There weren't a lot of people that look like me or were my age even. And then it's often a before and after photo. It just becomes like weight loss photos: these sort of problematic things that show this instantaneous "before and after" this moment. I wanted to show the range. I wanted to show the movement. We're not all of this stuff. It's not a binary line. For my story, I can't say there was a before and after - there were years of change and of understanding myself, and that movement continues. So I like the idea of thinking of it as a spectrum rather than the binary.

**JM:** I don't think I see a single capital letter in the entire book outside the copyright pages. What does lowercase mean for you?

**SS:** I've been taught that in our languages we don't use the same kind of grammar, although we have adopted some punctuation marks to make it user-friendly, for example the question mark. I'm not a fluent speaker, but I'm learning right now. We have a grammar app, and I'm learning from that. We've been debating whether to use question marks or not, or whether we use periods or not, because in our language it doesn't work that way. Our grammar actually is added in through suffixes and prefixes and these kinds of things. So that was part of it.

Another part is just aesthetic. At one point my editor said, "I don't know why you have a period in some places and why in some you don't." And I said, "Well, because they were all written on Facebook!" I was not thinking of them as a collection at the time - it was just basically an unconscious choice. But I think part of it was just the social media aesthetic. It also honors what, [what Joy Harjo calls](https://poets.org/text/ancestors-mapping-indigenous-poetry-and-poets) (<https://poets.org/text/ancestors-mapping-indigenous-poetry-and-poets>) our "poetry ancestors." [bell hooks](https://www.berea.edu/appalachian-center/appalachian-center-home/faculty-and-staff/bell-hooks) (<https://www.berea.edu/appalachian-center/appalachian-center-home/faculty-and-staff/bell-hooks>), for instance, has that idea of not capitalizing the "i." It means not putting myself above anything, and that we're all on the same level.

I also at the time was moving from using my previous name, which I usually used in lowercase. (Now actually I do capitalize my name, I think because it means a lot to me.)

**JM:** The other thing I'd ask about is poem titles. Because a lot of the pieces are untitled and it's really unclear in some places if it's one long poem or if it should be considered as lots of short poems.

**SS:** Most of these poems are curated from two years of work under the hashtag #haikuaday, which I was posting on Facebook daily, or almost daily, for two years. The original working title for the collection was actually #haikuaday, though we scrapped that at some point, and when I was in the editing stages, I had a really long table of contents at one point, where I had titled each poem as the date they were written. As the work evolved, as it became the book, when I started organizing them by topic, it became a completely different thing. Do they need titles? How do you title a haiku? It was quite funny because the academic in me was saying "People are going to write about this! It's going to be impossible! How are they going to cite?" And my editor



had to say, "You're the poet - you're not the academic right now." And so we scrapped the table of contents because it was confusing and just got in the way.

Now they feel like a longer poem, even though the breaks are where they were as when they were written as haiku, certainly for any of the ones that follow that the 5-7-5 syllable haiku pattern. The longer poems are a little bit different, of course, and those are signified in different ways.

**JM:** As you say, these poems appeared on social media originally, which makes for a very particular audience, especially on Facebook where the audience is closed off. Is there a difference, either in what you're prepared to share or in what you do with form? How does the medium affect the poems?

**SS:** When I started sharing on Facebook, the nice thing about it was that it gets lost. Like you read it and then it's gone. It's a moment in time. And because not only is there a closed audience, but also because of the algorithms, people don't necessarily see your posts all the time. So I was getting interactions of maybe 15-20 likes on a post, and in my mind people weren't really reading them. So when I started it as a practice, it was very casual. A writing coach told me to try to write a poem a day. I thought "Haiku are short - I can do 13 syllables a day!" though they ended up being longer. I did it for about two months then kind of stopped. But in Peterborough I ran into someone on the street and they asked me "What have you been doing? I really missed your poems!" I didn't realize until then that there's a big audience on Facebook that doesn't interact with posts. They read them, but they don't necessarily like, or react or comment. So I realised "Oh, I have a bigger audience than I know," and I thought, "OK, I'll just keep going with it."

I was lucky enough to be approached by a publisher because the editor knew that I had this body of work and was interested in it. That was when I started to ask, how does audience change? How does this work with people not knowing me? Even now there's still some really specific details that people are not going necessarily to know, but I caught a lot of that journaling stuff. Originally there were many more what you could call inside moments, for instance if I was at a conference, if I was out with friends, or at a show, and I would write about this specific thing and name people all the time. I realized that that's not going to speak to people in a book form. Or there was the time my cat had fleas for weeks and there was a whole series about that – that didn't end up making the book, even though people loved it at the time, because it didn't fit with the book.

That was when themes started to come out, recognizing these sections that I have. On Facebook, I wouldn't do a land acknowledgment every day, but in putting together the book I saw most of these poems were written in Nogojiwanong, which is the Anishinaabe name for Peterborough, so I start there to acknowledge that place.

What's surprising with social media is the reach. You get emails from everywhere from people who have read the book. Some of my friends have been traveling and then there's pictures. So my book's been to Iceland. I'm starting to grow my online presence now, though as you said it was very closed for a while.

**JM:** You've got six sections in the collection - #nogoseries, #courting, #theworld, #recovery, #ceremony, and #forandafter. Did those sections come fairly naturally?

**SS:** They actually came very naturally. I sat down with the collection and color-coded it, poem by poem. I think there might've been eight or nine sections originally, maybe even 10. And then it was easy to delete the most journal-y bits, or say "That isn't going

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to fit with these themes." I already had a good idea of what would be there. For example, I knew there was a lot on colonialism and grief - I didn't want to call it "colonialism," so I called it "the world." Or there was the land acknowledgement that I just mentioned. #forandafter came about because it was really, really important to me to honour some of those people that I'm inspired by – artists, people in my personal life, and some who have gone on.

What surprises me was that #courting became the largest section. It comes partly from looking at the work that's happening from a lot of the young Indigenous poets, queer Indigenous poets, 2SQ to sq poets, like [Billy Ray Belcourt](https://billy-raybelcourt.com) (<https://billy-raybelcourt.com>), Tenille Campbell, [Joshua Whitehead](https://www.joshuawhitehead.ca/about) (<https://www.joshuawhitehead.ca/about>), [Arielle Twist](https://arielletwist.com) (<https://arielletwist.com>). They are talking about our interpersonal relationships in really important ways. And also those poems were often the most popular - the "consent series," as an example, was one that took off on Facebook - so that was another way to gauge what was resonating with people the most.

**JM:** How did you come to the order of the sections?

**SS:** Honestly, it was quite rushed. I submitted the manuscript in August and the book was out December 31st, so it was a whirlwind. I've already mentioned starting with the land acknowledgment, and I knew I wanted to finish with the poems about individuals. I wanted #courting to be in there early because those are the pieces that are going to resonate, that are funny, that are starting in that good place. A lot of Native lit has been stuck in trauma narratives, and so "#theworld: a constant state of grief" was natural. The "#recovery: on depression and addiction and 'not good enough'" section was there, with a lot of darker poems, harder poems, and I wanted #ceremony as

healing to come out of it. And so for me, it was sandwiching the hard bits with love and ceremony. Because that's how we take care of each other.

**JM:** I wanted to think a little about form, starting with haiku. Do you read haiku as well, and if so, who do you read?

**SS:** To be honest, I haven't read haiku much lately. I did go through a period. In the first reiteration of the book, when I was calling it *#haikuaday*, I had a note to readers to acknowledge the fact that not only is this a cultural appropriation, but also that what I do is not haiku – because haiku in its original cultural context is different and beautiful. I don't mean my poems are not reflective – many of them could be haiku because of the nature element. When I learned more about haiku I was very excited to know that there was a history of collaboration, for instance haikai no renga (俳諧の連歌) (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Renku>), which were haiku parties. I like to think that those poets of Japan from hundreds of years ago would be excited that I'm using it, but I always make that disclaimer. I really only use the 5-7-5 syllable structure, which is what you're taught in Canadian grade 6 classes as an easy way to introduce poetry. There was a time where I did a haiku radio show on Trent Radio with a friend of mine, Sarah McNeely, where we only spoke in 5-7-5 syllables, and it was just a really fun creative time. I believe there's still some archives that get played. We used to bring in the old poets and read original haikus by [Bashō](#) (<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/basho>).

**JM:** Again on form, something that I noticed is that you often use a form where there's a poem that's torn in half, so the top part is left, aligned at the bottom is right aligned

and there's this sort of gap through the middle of the page. What do you like about that particular shape?

**SS:** In reading, that form creates separation and movement. As much as I can lead the reader, I try to create that space for them. That goes back to the question of whether these are long poems or not, which is a very big change from Facebook where they were just short pieces. But yeah, I really think it's about movement for me, giving the space to the reader to take the time with poetry. It's tough to take the time sometimes in our lives to reflect.

**JM:** The first section of the book is dedicated to Nogojiwanong. It's a traditional Anishinaabe territory, but you begin talking about it as "a place where / when I walk home / many friends appear." What does home mean to you?

**SS:** There has always been a space where I've been thinking, "where is home"? I'm finding there are many different versions of home. I'm an adoptee, fourth generation removed – each of those generations were raised away from our biological family. I'm actually the oldest of cousins, and all of my cousins are in my uncles' and aunties' homes, which is super exciting. That's restoring us into our biological family after four generations of that loss. I was actually born in Anishinaabe territory, in Toronto, even though I am from where I live now, Ktunaxa territory, Invermere in British Columbia. I came out here when I was very young, which makes me one of the people privileged to have grown up in my nation.

I spent a lot of years searching for home. And what I didn't realize until later in life, around the time these homes were coming, was that part of it is that I didn't feel at home in my own body. So that was part of my learning: learning about transitioning,

deciding to do it, and understanding more about what it means to feel at home in your body.

But, going back, I am privileged to work with Leanne Betasamosake Simpson who is Michi Saagiig Anishinaabe. I talked to her about being born there, and she said, "What is your responsibility to us then?" What that means is, when I came to university, I was both returning to my home and also coming to someone else's homelands. I spent a lot of time considering that responsibility and building those relationships wherever I could: spending time getting to know the land, helping their elders. One of the elders there, Doug Williams, has a maple sugar bush, so I learned about making maple sugar by boiling down the sap.

A funny thing is that I was eventually named this way. Sumac is a tree that is mostly Eastern. People in my home territory go, "What, what, like, what is it? Oh, it's a tree. Right." And so that's kind of funny in itself.

Peterborough became home even at the level of minutiae: I know the grocery store when I walk around it, I know the people on the street. It's a town of about 80,000, but in the downtown core there are some places where even now I think I could walk in and know everyone.

There are so many layers to seeking out home. There is also a spiritual home. To me that is family. The last poem is for Carol Edelman Warrior, who became a mom to me. She taught me how to find home in our relations through building and caring and love.

**JM:** What are you writing about in your dissertation?

**SS:** I'm looking at narratives by people who have come home, and thinking about Two-Spiritedness and coming home in our bodies. I'm thinking about naming as a practice that allows us to understand who we are: as Indigenous people, as Ktunaxa people, as

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adoptees, as Two-Spirit people, that kind of stuff. I'm talking about umbilical cord practices and birth practices as things that reconnect us.

**JM:** You write, "for the love of all / that is queer and brown," and then a little later "learning to love / ourselves our bodies / each of our naked / burning hearts our lipstick and / our binders our canes." How does someone find a voice as a Two-Spirit writer?

**SS:** By spending time with other Two-Spirit writers, just reading and spending time with them. One gift, even before finding my voice, was just the knowledge that I wasn't alone. I'm just now working with [Beth Brant's](#) (<https://www.poetryfoundation/.or/poets/beth-brant>) books *Writing is Witness* and *Food and Spirits*. I was just amazed. The preface to *Food and Spirits* is this incredible poem about resistance that's talking about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women - she talks about being a writer, how to sit with all these feelings. How do you speak about it? How do you honor them? There are great writers around now – Billy-Ray Belcourt, Tenille Campbell, Joshua Whitehead – and we are a family. Even though we live in different cities, we're able to spend time with each other and really think about what we're doing and talk. "Have you read this?" "Oh, have you read that?"

That specific poem that you quoted was actually written about a night at the [Naked Heart](#) (<https://nakedheart.ca>) festival in Toronto, which is I believe the largest and oldest queer writers' festival in Canada. The main site is [Glad Day Bookshop](#) (<https://www.gladdaybookshop.com>), which is the oldest queer bookstore in Canada. I grew up in a small town. There was one out gay man that I knew growing up, and he actually died of AIDS. That's how that narrative was built for me. It's funny now, because of all of my best friends in high school, I'm not the only one on testosterone.

We're actually very queer. And we were then, but we didn't know how to talk about it because we didn't have any representation. It wasn't safe to be that person. And so for me to go into in Toronto and be in this space where everyone has the hair and the colors and the glitter and all of that still makes me think "Wow, this is exciting." It feels good to witness other people stepping into their voices.

One thing that really helped me and pushed me was Tenille Campbell's book *Indian Love Poems*. Teaching some of her sexy poems, sometimes even I get uncomfortable, which is funny because now I'm somebody who has sexy poems out there. Poems that are talking about all sorts of stuff that I never thought I would talk about! The "Cadillac of dicks"! When I'm writing those songs, I ask, "Does this need to go out in the world?" And then I think about what it felt like to hear somebody else read a poem like that. What it did for me, how it freed me.

**JM:** There seems to be a surge of young Two-Spirit writers, particularly in Canada. Does that say good things about Canada as a space for finding that voice?

**SS:** I think so. The violence still exists, but I think our communities are strong. It's down to population. The difference between America and Canada is that in Canada we're 5-6% of the population, whereas it's something like 0.2% in America. So that allows for more things to happen. Much as I critique reconciliation as a concept, I think if you look right now at conversations, for instance around the [Wet'suwet'en](https://twitter.com/iy4wetsuweten?lang=en) (<https://twitter.com/iy4wetsuweten?lang=en>), you can find many more comments in support of Indigenous people now than you ever could. The racism is still there and the hatred is still there, but I think in the community there has been a shift. And then on a spiritual level, I was taught Two-Spirits are here to challenge and to push back, to help create balance. And so, yes, Canada's a good place, but also the fact that we're all



here doing this means that there are major problems and there is a major balancing that needs to happen. That's one of my teachings as a Two-Spirit person, from one of my Two-Spirit elders. I know that there's hundreds of definitions and understandings of Two-Spirit – mine is not the only one – but the way that I've been taught is that we are here to challenge and speak up and do those things.

Reconciliation also, in Native lit, allowed for publishing. People are reading, people are excited, and people want to know more. One of the best sellers for almost two years now is [Cherie Dimaline](https://cheriedimaline.com) (<https://cheriedimaline.com>). Publishers now see that our literature sells. So it's a very good time to be a Two Spirit writer because people want to read us. When we look at Maria Campbell, at Beth Brant, at many of these poetry ancestors, many of them passed before they could make a living off writing. Daniel Justice talks about this a lot – that you have to be able to afford to be a writer. If you're working all the time to put food on the table, it's hard to do.

**JM:** Kegedonce has played a big part in it as well.

**SS:** Yes. They've been amazing. They just put out Tunchai Redvers' book [Fireweed](https://kegedonce.com/bookstore/item/129-fireweed.html) (<https://kegedonce.com/bookstore/item/129-fireweed.html>) and she's another Two-Spirit writer, a really brilliant young person. Native presses have been super important because they were publishing us before anybody else was as well, so I was very excited to support them and to have that connection, rather than try and go to a bigger press.

**JM:** What did it mean to you to win the Indigenous Voices Award?

**SS:** I'll get emotional again! That award is hosted by the [Indigenous Literary Studies Association](http://www.indigenousliterarystudies.com) (<http://www.indigenousliterarystudies.com>), and at the time the board

members included Deanna Reder, who was my first Indigenous literature professor and supported me in going into a Master's degree. She introduced me to poetry! Jeanette Armstrong, too, one of my aunties of literature, was one of the judges in that category and she got up and read from my work too. We've become a family, and to be able to be there with them and celebrate my work, to honour those voices, to build on those voices, to make space for new voices to come, was really important.

All literary awards are great, because they help writers do what they do. But that award, out of any awarded in Canada, is the only one judged by Indigenous people for Indigenous people. It was crowdfunded through speaking back against cultural appropriation. It's about us having our own voices. It was just a huge celebration.

In that award ceremony, I loved that every single person who was shortlisted got to read. It wasn't about the winner, it was about all of us sharing our work. There are some incredible people in the Unpublished category that year that I cannot wait for their work to come out.

So, yeah, for me, it was really beautiful – and then I would just look around and think “I'm sitting here with Joshua Whitehead!” As much as I'm like their family, I'm still always floored by their work. And Tanya Tagaq was on that list and these other big names, and it's becoming more and more real that I'm part of this community, when until then I'd been growing up in it. I'm becoming that next generation – the literary baby.

**JM:** In another poem, you say “self love is a revolution for an indian.” Why was it important to include intimate details about both sex and about transition in your poetry? Did you have to push back against any inhibitions?

**SS:** Writing poetry first comes pretty quickly to me: I'm not immediately thinking about audience. The hesitation comes later, before posting on Facebook, and then very much so at the readings. I have in the past tried not to read some of the sexy poems, and then at the Q&A people just ask for them anyway!

I often make a link between Indigeneity and being trans, as there's a similarity in the phobias you're up against. In both cases so much of the representation is "Victim Being Killed." And that is real. We need to know that. You need to know that black trans women are dying at these incredibly disproportionate rates to everyone else. But I also think it's super important that we say – both for trans and Indigenous people – that we aren't just victims. We aren't just trauma. We also are in love. And we also have sex. We have sexualities.

In my own community reading was hard to do, but I also think that often our communities are really ravaged by sexual abuse and intergenerational trauma with residential schools, and so, for a long time, we haven't talked about sex. Being able to talk about healthy sexualities and making people laugh is important in our languages. We have all sorts of dirty jokes and we have all sorts of those kinds of things. Bringing laughter back in that different context of sexuality is really important.

But like Leanne Simpson always says she writes for Anishinaabe at first, so I really wrote for Indigenous trans youth. I didn't know that there were trans men until I was 27. Could you imagine if I had had access to this information when I was 17? Maybe my life would have gone differently. And so I really want that space to be opened for them. What was surprising was a settler auntie of mine, an older white woman and a lovely person who I'm not going to name here, who came up to me after I read the "Cadillac" poems. She said, "You know, there's some questions you just don't ask. Thank you for teaching me things that I would never have known." That's part of it too, to educate people. I personally think that more cis-gender hetero

couples need to be talking about sex, because we have so many issues with sexuality and, and in those relationships, it's sort of treated as "This is what sex is." And, no, I think everyone needs to talk about it.

I really tapped into Tenille Campbell and I always when reading just think "She would be laughing at this," and that makes me feel good. So if I think of Tenille and the audience, I can sort of tap into like, you know, OK, I can do this. And I have had the odd difficult one. One time that poem was called "boorish"! But when I read that specific poem about the Cadillac of dicks, I think that if that's all you get from it that, you aren't listening or reading, it's the transformation that is the important part. The audience recognizing that is important. I often hear, especially in Indigenous communities, people saying that we don't cut off parts of our body, describing top surgery as - I don't want to use this word, but it does get used - as mutilations, or thinking about us as freaks. And so I want to really normalize it and be like, "This is my reality."

I share that feeling of being transformed when I've read that poem in front of my family members and all sorts of other people. I'm so nervous to read this in front of elders and they go, "What, do you think we've never had sex before? Look, we have grandkids." I feel that strength. You know, sometimes I still feel that fear of violence, but I'm pretty privileged to be able to step up and say, "OK, I feel strong enough to do this." There's going to be someone in the audience who doesn't feel strong enough to do that. Seeing me will help with that. That's what people I saw and witnessed did for me. Richard van Camp talks about sex and hickeys all the time! I remember the first time I was there, bright red and laughing and horrified by the things that he was saying in front of audiences - and now I get to tap in and make people feel that sort of discomfort, but also laugh and go home and maybe talk about something they wouldn't.

**JM:** Water imagery is really noticeable throughout the poems. I that the truck, the poems in all sections of the books, whereas I think imagery shifts for a lot of other things. What does water signify for you do you think?

**SS:** To rip off Standing Rock - no, I'm just kidding! But I mean, water is life, right? That's the deal. Water is life. We hear it all the time.

It's funny how in Western culture the idea of a cliché is so apparent, and that you hear something enough that it becomes meaningless. But for us, repetition is deeply important. So I am going to own that. Water is life to me. I've been taught that we need to honor water as much as we can.

I actually do this exercise with students where I'd get them to go and sit by a body of water, and then reflect on it and write about that. And so many of them never do that. They don't find time to do it. They don't do it. I live in the most beautiful blue mountains and lakes and rivers, and it's incredible. When they do it, many of them go, "I haven't done this in a long time. I need to make more time to do this. I don't know what it is. It just makes me feel better." Yes, it does. And this is why.

First of all, it's part of us - I mean, not just our bodies. One of the teachings I love says that "Water comes before every one of us is born." That's how we come into the world. That's what we live in. That's what we are part of. For me, it's sacred - everything is sacred, of course, but without water where would we be? I've been in communities where they have "boil water" advisories. I've been in communities where our old people say the water wars are coming. To honor that and to try and give people that different thought, if they've never thought about it in that way before, is important to me.

Also, it's just so deeply part of my life. Wherever and whenever I travel, I find the water. I try to go there. There's one poem where I talk about traveling to Standing Rock – when we did that, we stopped at Flint to pray for the waters, because of what's happening there.

In Anishinaabe territory, women are water carriers or water keepers. I think of Grandmother [Josephine Mandamin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephine_Mandamin) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephine\\_Mandamin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Josephine_Mandamin)), who's one of the [water walkers](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_Earth_Water_Walk) ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother\\_Earth\\_Water\\_Walk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mother_Earth_Water_Walk)), one of the people who walked around the Great Lakes to pray for the waters. These are pieces of honoring the women that taught me this in the lands that I came from.

**JM:** “#theworld” begins with grief, and then it shades into resistance. Do you feel hopeful for the outcome of resistance to Canadian/American governments, oil companies, ecocide, online bigots, mass shooters and everything else that you take on there? That's the weight of the world on your shoulders.

**SS:** It's all in there! Jesse Wenthe had a piece recently where he said “It will all come back.” If, big picture, I think about the fact that we've been here 14,000 years, I can be hopeful. I can remember that it will all come back, that those songs are coming back. I look at the Indigenous youth who are shouting things like “Reconciliation is dead” right now, if I think of those who as the police are arresting them are yelling “Your spirits will never recover from this,” and they've got these ancient teachings in them that are coming back. I can be hopeful.

The war's coming, and it's going to get worse. I have to remember that. And it has been worse before, in different ways. I have to remember that as well. “a love poem to your great great grandmother” in the collection is about recognizing that

there were times that people saw the genocide up close, times where we were starving. And so, generationally, I can see that big picture as hopeful.

But I also get really worried when I see liberal hope. Liberals say "Things are changing and reconciliation is good and we just need education." Those people have blinders on and they're not seeing the things that we are consistently facing, or the fact that, as we get stronger, the resistance, the attacks, the violence against us gets stronger as well. We are putting our lives on the line. How many of us are going have to actually lose our lives? We are warriors, we will stand, we will do that to the end, and then beyond the end.

I do believe it will all fall. I don't think in my lifetime, but I'm trying to do whatever I can to prepare as many young people as I can to be ready for those things. And that sounds pretty heavy and dark, but sometimes just a case of going to the gym now and thinking, "OK, you're getting ready for the apocalypse." It helps me. It's a silly thing, and I'm not a doomsday prepper, but I do ask, "When it comes down to it, what what do you need to be doing? And what is the most important thing to help young people?" I often just say to people when I have audiences, "What are you doing to get us our land back? And what are you doing to help our youth survive?" Because those are the really big questions.

I am hopeful because we have grief practices, and we know how to help people. Those things are coming back as well. We know how to take care of each other. As long as those things are happening and renewing themselves and continuing, then I think we'll be OK.

**JM:** Would you talk a little bit about ceremony, and your relationship to ceremony?

**SS:** Ceremony saved my life. I often tell the story of how I spent a lot of years looking for things as a young person. A friend of mine was very Christian, so I went to Bible camp. I really liked that, and I tried to find meaning there. I think I was trying to make meaning for a long time. For a long time, the medicine, the spirit that helped me was "alcohol and drugs." They helped me get through the very hardest parts, and then it stopped helping because, as I've been taught, that spirit only knows how to take. I was taught, "If you don't like your job and you drink about your job, it'll take your job. It'll take your family if you're drinking about your family." These kind of things, it continuously was taking. For a long time, I was trying to find my way out of the addiction. What was going to help me through that? I did spend a lot of time in Alcoholics Anonymous and Narcotics Anonymous and these kind of programs, which also have a spiritual element to them. I was always searching, asking "What is that higher power? What is that?" And then I started to get invited to ceremony. When I say ceremony, my teachers say that it's part of life. It's how we walk in the world in general. It's not always just an event, but at first it's going to a sweat lodge, or it's going to a sunrise ceremony, or at one point I was invited to a Sundance. I don't lead, I am very much a baby in this. But reconnecting with those things became something that I could hold onto in a way that I hadn't been able to find before.

There are all sorts of pieces to this. I know that yoga is helpful for me. It's not my culture, it's not my spiritual or cultural practice, but stretching is helpful. One of my teachers says we can take a bite out of that stuff. That prayer is real.

And I have seen things. I have seen people be cured of illnesses, things that people would call miracles or would maybe question. I don't. I don't question, I don't care what anybody else believes. I know what I've seen and witnessed and done. I know what it feels like now to be able to do something and to care, and that the ways



that we learn how to be together in ceremony are really important. Because we all have to work together and learn how to listen in a different way.

I want to mention that not all Indigenous people do this. My path is very unique. Not all of them believe, and that's OK, too. I had a very close friend who is Indigenous say to me, "I just don't understand why they're trying to do sweat lodges in the apocalypse." And I was like, "What do you mean? That's exactly what we would be doing!" I should say she comes from people that are not sweat lodge people, so her ceremonies would be different, and so I also understand that too.

What I'm seeing, you know, is our youth picking up those teachings. I think about the *Marrow Thieves*, a book that came to me at the right time, a lot. That book tells it all – what we're trying to save, why we grieve – and also reminds us we have very specific instructions. I can talk about it as "out there," because I know sometimes it sounds like we romanticize this spiritual thing that we have, but the lessons are specific. One was "Don't cry at night." Some people will think, "OK, so there's probably some spiritual reason," but we just figured out that that at night you're alone. That's a really hard space to be in, you could cry all night and not sleep. So if you've got that rule, you try and make space for it in the daytime when it's easier. Somebody asked, "Why do we use a match to light the smudge?" I said, "Because you need to hold a lighter a long time and it burns my thumb!" There are typically practical reasons for the things that we say, and those practical reasons aren't always told. Because of that "mystical Indian" myth out there, some of these stories get going and those practical reasons get taken out.

**JM:** Thank you very much for giving your time to this. It's been very much appreciated.

**SS:** Thank you for the questions and for honoring my work, that means a lot to me.

## HOKTIWE

(for L. Rain Prud'homme-Cranford)

JEFFERY U. DARENSBOURG<sup>1</sup>

This work is a cento, a type of found poetry, composed using David Kaufman's *Atakapa Ishakkoy Dictionary* as well as Gatschet and Swanton's *A Dictionary of the Atakapa Language*. I use Kaufman's orthography here, which conforms with contemporary linguistic scholarship. The correct name for the language is "Ishakkoy" ("Human Being Talk"), as "Atakapa" is an exonym and slur historically directed at the tribe by others.<sup>2</sup> The primary original source material was gathered in Lake Charles, Louisiana and environs in the 1880's and 1920's. There is but a small corpus of Ishakkoy, consisting of a few paragraphs of narratives in the Gatschet & Swanton dictionary. There are, however, many example sentences therein that aren't included in those texts, which I extracted on notecards, using these to compose additional texts.

**Note:** All sentences appear as in the Kaufman dictionary, except that some place names have been switched into different sentences. All place names used are found in the published dictionaries of the language.

Katkoš koykit:

"Išak tayš okiān yukit he mon yalpeyulāt."

Šokšoš šokšo waņšolkit.

An eagle is speaking:

"Strangers have come and taken our land."

Birds are tearing up the young seed plants.

Cikip tat.

Naw taw walwalštit.

Iti hihwalšat:

A blue heron is poised there.

Many feathers are waving.

I dreamt last night:

Wi šaknoms puškin waņankamstit.

Neš ne(y)kin tlop tat.

Išak išat ha(n) huulāt.

My children are playing outside.

A post stands driven into the ground.

They see a headless man.

Cok Taykin išakāt.

He was born near Blackbird River.

Tew Tulkin išakāt.

Kui Taykin išakāt.

He was born at Tail of the Lake.

He was born along Cactus Pear Bayou.<sup>3</sup>

Nun tixt mon waŋo.

Oce hew šiwtiwkit.

Išakkoy tiwxc koyo.

I walk all over the village.

Snakes slither quickly.

I speak a little Ishakkoy.

Okwaŋš haŋšāt.

Tik kakáwkin polšwaŋkit.

Itans ockawškit.

The war is over.

On the water an arrow floats.

A cloud passes over the sun.

Šaktelšo.

Kakáw taw inikit.

Wi šokatkok akilikišo.

I unfold.

The water comes in.

I soak the cloth.

Šoktol hew wi ke.

Wi Nuŋ Uškin ket ta.

Kultan oktišat.

I'm rather lucky.

I live in Bulbancha.<sup>4</sup>

A long time has passed.

Wiš kewtiukšo ya šokyułšo.

Cit lawkit.

Tanstal tolka makawāt.

I smoke and I write.

The tobacco burns.

The paper falls down whirling.

Pam inululāt.

Ha išak lukin tiktat temakip.

Neš takamš kamkamš.

Many footprints they left.

This fellow goes wading in the mud.

Limbs branch out from the tree.

Hoktiwe.

Hatpeo.

Wi äm (h)inawš.

We are together.

I am ready.

Let me drink.

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 Notes

<sup>1</sup> Enrolled member and tribal councilperson, Atakapa-Ishak Nation of Southwest Louisiana and Southeast Texas. This poem was composed during an Adaptations Residency at A Studio in the Woods, Tulane University, Spring 2020. *Hiwew* for comments to Christine Baniewicz, Carolyn Dunn, David Kaufman, Justin Southworth, Russell Reed, and Kimberly Gail Weiser. This poem is recited by me in the 2020 short film *Hoktiwe: Two Poems in Ishakkoy* by Fernando López and myself (<https://vimeo.com/452435309>), commissioned by the Contemporary Arts Center New Orleans for the exhibition "Make America What America Must Become" (<https://www.oc20.cacno.org/>).

<sup>2</sup> For more on the status of the language, including notes on the tribe itself, see Darensbourg and Kaufman. Other recent writings in Ishakkoy by tribal member Tanner Menard are discussed in Lief and Darensbourg.

<sup>3</sup> Tew Tul ("Tail of the Lake") is the original name for Lake Charles, Louisiana. Kui Tay refers to a bayou nearby where an important food source, the prickly pear cactus (*Opuntia humifusa*) may be found. The French assigned a name that is an echo of the original, Bayou Guy. In their dictionary Gatschet and Swanton misidentify the waterway as "Bayou des Gayes" (72). My thanks to Robert Caldwell (Choctaw-Apache Tribe of Ebarb) for helping with the correct identification.

<sup>4</sup> Nuṅ Uš ("big village") is a postcolonial term in Ishakkoy for Bulbancha ("the place of foreign languages"), which is the original, pre-colonial name for what most call "New Orleans." On the name and its spellings, see Hali Dardar, "Bvlbancha," *64 Parishes*, Fall 2019, p. 22. For more on Indigenous People in Bulbancha who still use that name, including myself, cf. Laine Kaplan-Levinson, "New Orleans: 300 // Bulbancha: 3000," 20 December 2018, in *TriPod: New Orleans At 300*, produced by WWNO, podcast, <https://www.wwno.org/post/new-orleans-300-bulbancha-3000>.

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Kyle T. Mays. *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes: Modernity and Hip Hop in Indigenous North America*. SUNY Press, 2018. 180 pp. ISBN: 9781438469461.

<https://www.sunypress.edu/p-6543-hip-hop-beats-indigenous-rhymes.aspx>

Modernity is a charged topic when it comes to scholarship on, with, and by Indigenous people(s) because of the ways colonial apparatuses, including the academy, have seized on the concept to frame Indigeneity as belonging to the past in ways that occlude political agency in the present. Indigenous people, it seems, must retain traditional cultural ways while *obviously* being fully modern as well, according to the simplest definition of the modern, which is to say, living fully in the contemporary moment. It is not actually a paradox, but through the distorting lens of colonial *dispositifs* it can appear as one. In music studies, this apparent bind is reflected in the entrenched ordering of classical, popular, and traditional musics. This institutional ordering reproduces disciplinary investments in these categories that effectively forces scholars of Indigenous music-making to choose: which formation will render this music and these people legible?

Two new books seek to reset the discourse on Indigeneity, modernity, and music. *Music and Modernity Among First Peoples of North America* is a collection of essays edited by Victoria Lindsay Levine and Dylan Robinson. *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes: Modernity and Hip Hop in Indigenous North America* by Kyle T. Mays is a monograph based on the author's ethnographic work with Indigenous hip hop artists and members of the communities that have sprung up around them. Both books engage in what one might call performative enactments of modernity that bring discourses and people together. At their base, both books are sensitive to the ways modernity is fraught—shot through with the tremulous question of membership. The persistent feeling of being left behind is not a problem of temporality *per se*, although temporal maneuvers may produce it. Nor is it a direct product of modernity defined in temporal terms, or the distribution of goods and amenities that we associate with the very modern imperative of development. The experience of being told—either directly or through governmental apparatuses and epistemic orderings—that one is *not*

modern, that one does *not* have a commensurable voice and therefore an equal say, is what these contributions seek to rectify, each in their own way.

*Music and Modernity Among First Peoples of North America* has a lofty ambition: “to refocus the ethnomusicology of American Indians/First Nations toward new perspectives on Indigenous modernity and to model decolonized approaches to the study of Indigenous musical cultures,” as Victoria Lindsay Levine writes in her Introduction (2). The product of a careful, ten-year germination, the fifteen essays that comprise this volume are united by the metaphor of a dance, as invoked in Heidi Aklaseaq Senungetuk’s Prologue. Senungetuk describes how Inupiaq dance groups often invite guests to participate in a puala, an invitational dance that allows for a degree of improvisation while adhering to certain protocols. She extends this invitation to the reader, noting that the puala form in some ways mirrors the process of writing this book. What makes this collection unique is that each author had the opportunity to read the contributions of the others and incorporate their insights. The book is thus not organized by “theme, theoretical orientation, geographic area, or chronology” (3); rather, the authors chose to weave conceptual strands from one chapter into the next. Many hands make light work, and by bringing together very different essays with a shared focus on the contemporary and on music (broadly defined), the authors and editors make it clear how rich the reality of Indigenous musical practice in North America is today.

The editors have taken care to include studies of traditional, popular, and classical music, while highlighting the arbitrary borders between them. For instance, Gordon E. Smith’s exploration of Mi’kmaw funeral practices reveals how the vehicles by which tradition is enacted are modern. Essays on popular music include T. Christopher Aplin’s detailed tour of the construction of a global Indigenous consciousness through hip hop, set against a backdrop of migration and mediatization as both ideology and lived experience; and Christina Leza’s exploration of how hip hop activism at the U.S.-Mexico border facilitates a negotiation of Native American and Latino Indigenous identities. Finally, Dawn Avery’s analysis of the contemporary Indigenous classical music scene makes clear that it is both diverse and vibrant.

In addition to discussing a range of music, there are chapters devoted to politics and policy, as well as Indigenous musical and sound ontologies that push the boundaries of what music studies had historically considered music. These range from the essays on music’s role in activism by Anna Hoefnagels, Elyse Carter-Vosen, and the aforementioned chapter by Christina Leza, to analyses of music’s confluence with

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governmental apparatuses. For example, Byron Dueck elucidates how Indigenous culture is treated as expedient through the example of powwow instruction sponsored by educational and child welfare apparatuses (part of the legacy of residential schools) in Winnipeg. John-Carlos Perea interrogates how universities police space by analyzing how his own institution has treated powwow musicking as “noise.”

Turning to Indigenous ontologies, Dawn Avery challenges the idea that Indigenous classical music compositions are intrinsically tied to ideas of pastness—European cultural heritage in particular—by suggesting methods of musical analysis that are in keeping with Indigenous (Kanienkéha) teachings. Dylan Robinson introduces Indigenous ontologies into the analysis of performance art by drawing attention to the *functions* of song and address in works by Peter Morin (Tahltan) and Rebecca Belmore (Anishnaabe). And Jessica Bissett-Perea’s chapter on Inuit sound worlding in television documentaries explores how a visual sovereignty might be enacted.

The volume is bookended by historiographic and theoretical essays. David Samuels’ opening essay reexamines Frances Densmore’s recording practices to show how ethnomusicology’s idea of modernity was constructed. Beverley Diamond’s penultimate chapter offers a critical reappraisal of the binary between tradition and modernity, suggesting action-oriented ways of being—such as different modes of listening—as an alternative analytic. Finally, Trevor Reed’s concluding essay draws on Bruno Latour’s theory that the idea of modernity is constructed through a two-part process: hybridization or translation followed by purification. Through the example of his own work repatriating Hopi song recordings, Reed shows how Indigenous people are agents of the hybridization and purification process. Ultimately, he suggests that processual ways of understanding modernity and its agents could help us break free from the confining set of terms associated with modernity that we have inherited.

*Music and Modernity Among First Peoples of North America* is a critical contribution to scholarship on Indigenous music, showcasing the diversity of contemporary Indigenous music-making as well as the different methodologies and positionalities from which Indigenous and settler scholars have approached them. Not only does it provide a solid overview of the field, this collection shows how we can be in dialogue—however subtle—with one another, even across large differences. While it would be premature to herald any particular model of scholarship as decolonized, the fact that the editors of this book took such scrupulous care to produce this work in a collaborative way does enact a different model, and it is a generous, hopeful one.



The desire for inclusion—a shared stake and an equal voice—runs through Kyle T. Mays' *Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes*. Mays brings his own voice as a Black and Indigenous scholar into the discourse, and it is almost *through* his voice—his choice to combine hip hop vernacular with academic prose—that a sonorous sense of subjectivity is evoked. Mays' writing is engaging, accessible, and unselfconscious. He frequently uses the first-person to enter into a more personal dialogue with his readers. For example, the passage below where he tells us what the book is about is clear and its rhythm pulls the reader in:

In this book, I make one major claim: Indigenous hip hop might be one of the most important cultural forces that has hit Indigenous North America since the Ghost Dance movement in the late nineteenth century. Straight up! Hip hop allows for Indigenous people, through culture, to express themselves as modern subjects. They can use it to move beyond the persistence narratives of their demise, or their invisibility, or the notion that they are people of the past incapable of engaging with modernity.

Now, let the story begin. (3)

The quoted section ends with the literary equivalent of a beat drop. Mays punctuates his prose with verbal interjections that conjure a musical analogue (e.g. the record scratch of "check it"). This contributes to a sense of hip hop as a lived-in way of experiencing the world. The musicality of the writing is one of the book's best features, particularly because Mays' musical analyses focus for the most part on the content of the lyrics. It might otherwise be easy for the reader to lose sight of the fact that while the world of Indigenous hip hop exists at the intersection of multiple force vectors, it is a musical world. Mays' prose conveys a sense of what it might mean to live in it.

The book has five body chapters, each focusing on a different aspect of Indigenous hip hop. The first chapter articulates the stakes of Mays' claim that hip hop positions Indigenous people as modern subjects. He juxtaposes the use of racist sports mascots as an example of how Indigenous people have actively been erased, portrayed as extinct, to assert that Indigenous people are nevertheless fully modern. Other chapters open onto the claims that different identity groups might make of Indigenous hip hop artists. So, there is a chapter on masculinity and feminism in Indigenous hip hop, as well as a chapter teasing out some of the complex points of encounter, contention, and accord between Black and Indigenous peoples. The second chapter is a bit of an outlier, as the only purely descriptive chapter in the book, focusing on the fashion of Indigenous hip hop. As far as overall methodology is concerned, Mays offers descriptions and interpretations of lyrics, iconography, and relevant secondary sources

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such as documentary films and sample curricula, mixed with insights from interviews he conducted, including a chapter-length interview with Lakota rapper Frank Waln.

*Hip Hop Beats, Indigenous Rhymes* is designed to complicate simplistic or essentialist views of Indigeneity and hip hop (Indigeneity as distinct from Blackness, hip hop as intrinsically masculinist). This is important work, but it is hampered by Mays' lack of precision when using key terms and a tendency to pull his punches. Take for example this passage where Mays defines modernity:

By modernity, I am taking a simple yet complex definition put forward by Scott Richard Lyons. He writes, 'To embrace indigenous modernity is to usher in other modern concepts...including the concepts of decolonization.' Decolonization itself has varying definitions, but one of my favorites is put forth by decolonial theorist Frantz Fanon. He writes, 'In its bare reality, decolonization reeks of red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives. For the last can be first only after a murderous and decisive confrontation between the two protagonists.' I am not advocating the use of violence for radical social change, per se, but I am calling Indigenous hip hop artists warriors, armed with both words and art. This art can, in turn, get people—especially the seventh generation—moving to change their existing social conditions. (23)

The problem with this definition is that it is not a definition. Lyons is outlining the implications of adopting Indigenous modernity as a stance, one of which would be a necessary engagement with the idea of decolonization. Mays seizes on this turn as an opportunity to quote an uncompromising passage by Fanon; however, he twists it so it reads counter to Fanon's spirit. Fanon's very next sentence is, "This determination to have the last move up to the front, to have them clamber up (too quickly, say some) the famous echelons of an organized society, *can only succeed by resorting to every means, including, of course, violence*" (Fanon 3, emphasis mine).

Defining a key term by elaborating on a tangent and then advocating for the opposite of what the author of that tangent intended suggests to me that Mays chose the passage for its affective impact, without engaging with Fanon's call for violent uprising against the state. This is probably wise from a standpoint of self-preservation, but it raises important questions concerning the role of the scholar in a world yearning for transcendent rupture in the direction of justice. Mays' disavowed desire points to the ways the traumatic reality of violence imposes limits on how we scholars permit ourselves to understand the many expressions of Indigenous modernity. Did the last already clamber up, or is it yet to occur? And if it is yet to occur, are we blinding

ourselves to possible circumstances? Is the metaphor that of a dance, or a war? Is it words and art, or red-hot cannonballs and bloody knives?

In his chapter on the intersection of Blackness and Indigeneity, Mays draws upon his experience as a Black and Indigenous man to advocate for the necessity of viewing the categories as not mutually exclusive. It is disquieting, though, to see anecdotal evidence employed frequently to explain insensitive uses of Indigenous iconography by Black individuals. For example, Mays describes his encounter in an airport with a Black man wearing a shirt with a racist image by the rapper T.I. on it. The exchange is brief though, and the conclusions drawn too broad:

...I saw a brotha in Group A wearing... a shirt that has an Indian chief head; it is the emblem of T.I.'s Grand Hustle Gang label. I had to ask him, 'Whas goin' on, bruh. Yo, what does the chief head symbolize on that shirt? I'm Native and was just curious.' He responded, 'It's just the Hustle Gang symbol, just about doin' you, bein' yourself.' I just nodded and said, 'Cool.' This brief anecdote suggests that many black Americans might be clueless about Native mascots and representations. (90)

This is not the only instance of unsubstantiated speculation. For example, he says that "[i]t is difficult to explain the function of Indigenous representations in hip hop culture, but if I could speculate, I would imagine black folks find something noble in Native histories, a white settler masculinist version, where they desire to align themselves with being a chief, the best artist in the game" (51). I suspect Mays' positionality comes into play here: he offers up examples of insensitive behaviour, generalizes them, and then empathizes with each side without excusing the behaviour. This is a heavy burden for one individual to bear, though—it is a heavy emotional burden, and it comes with a heavy burden of proof. A method that grapples with its own limits—perhaps a phenomenological approach—would be more informative and evince greater care, for the researcher and subjects alike.

The chapter on gender is similarly empathetic, while being richer in ethnographic detail. There remains a tendency, though, to issue a call to arms and then backpedal. While drawing conclusions in order to influence the direction of future research in the area, Mays writes:

Is there room for an Indigenous hip hop feminist framework? Hell yeah! I think we need to begin to further consider that the work being put in by Native female artists is a form of Indigenous feminism. We can utilize the dope scholarship of black hip hop feminists in order to develop Indigenous hip hop feminist theories that are not essential in nature, but

are multifaceted, place the experience of Indigenous women within hip hop and how that is represented, within settler colonialism, race, class, gender, and sexuality.

I want to be careful, though, as a black/Indigenous male. Indeed, Indigenous women can and have always spoken for themselves; my family and all of the Indigenous women who continue to influence me greatly are a testament to that. I am in no way attempting to speak for them. But it is some shit worth noting, and should be considered for future scholars working in the field of Indigenous hip hop. (83-4)

This is a welcome gesture toward acknowledging work being done outside academic channels while nudging scholars toward adopting an intersectional analytic. But Mays renders himself transparent in the next paragraph by claiming that he is not engaging in the act of representation. Is citation not a form of representation? Why claim that these groups speak for themselves and, moreover, that he as the scholar writing about them is not? It seems to me that the cause of justice, whatever its manifestation, is not served by abdicating our scholarly responsibilities in order to make room for the expertise of others. Better to add one's voice than to erase it. When it comes down to brass tacks, I want Mays to speak *for* himself, and not only *as* himself.

Mays' authorial voice is a striking one, and it belies his timidity in the above examples. His melding of scholarly and vernacular language is the great strength of the book, a stylistic choice that comes out of a desire to bridge his academic readership and his Indigenous interlocutors. Underpinning this is an ethical commitment to accessibility and building community. However, it raises some interesting problems. The many ways academics use language are all for the purpose of communicating research findings at the same time as situating those findings with regard to pre-existing scholarship. There is some overlap between this purpose and, for example, the way Mays gives shout-outs throughout the book. Nevertheless, scholarly claims (if not diction) tend toward parsimony, whereas hip hop is larger than life. At times, Mays' pumped-up style and ear for wordplay can make exposition and passing comments read like major—even controversial—claims. For example, "[t]he 1970s marked a complete reversal in US policies toward American Indians, from termination to self-determination" (26). I can't help but wonder how the book would read if Mays had committed to writing the body of the text *exclusively* in hip hop vernacular, and relegated all the scholarly buttressing, including historical context, to an extensive series of footnotes.

The sheer amount of work being done by Mays' voice imparts to his arguments a lonely feeling. But the production of scholarship is, at its base, a communitarian effort

(neoliberal atomization and the corporatization of the university notwithstanding) and, much like modernity, we partake of it through engaging with the fruits of one another's labour. I would have liked to see Mays engage with literature examining the relationship that Indigenous artists—including hip hop artists—have with their publics, the marketplace, and governmental institutions. Scholars, including most of the contributors to *Music and Modernity Among First Peoples of North America*, have explored these dynamics in interesting and productive ways. It's never too late to join the dance.

*Lee Veeraraghavan, University of Pittsburgh*

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**Natalie Diaz. *Postcolonial Love Poem*. Graywolf Press, 2020. 120 pp.**

**ISBN: 9781644450147.**

<https://www.graywolfpress.org/books/postcolonial-love-poem>

In *Postcolonial Love Poem*, the eagerly-anticipated follow up to her American Book Award-winning debut *When My Brother Was an Aztec* (2012), Natalie Diaz offers readers intellectual complexity, formal diversity, and remarkably capacious lyrical attention. Grounded by single poems at the beginning and end, this collection interweaves several thematic strands across three sections. These sections feature eminently readable mid-length poems about erotic desire and family dynamics, longer forays that leverage states of fracture to explore the violences of colonialism, and several prose paeans to the pleasures of basketball. Diaz's sense of the lyric snakes methodically toward and away from the presuppositions of prose, drawing from multiple wells of readerly delight.

Fans of Diaz's 2017 *Envelopes of Air*, written in collaboration with Ada Limón, will recognize and be happy to see some of the poems generated from that epistolary project, only slightly edited here. Both wistful and searching, the poems from *Envelopes* keep easy company with Diaz's other questing lyrics of erotic desire. In poems like "From the Desire Field," originally published as a letter to Limón, romantic and sexual longing invites transformation: the expansion of the self from a stable, merely human entity to a roving intelligence that scours the world for what it wants in a rapidly changing carousel of expedient, extrahuman form:

My mind in the dark is una bestia, unfocused,  
hot. And if not yoked to exhaustion

beneath the hip and plow of my lover,  
then I am another night wandering the desire field—

bewildered in its low green glow,

bellling the meadow between midnight and morning...

I am struck in the witched hours of want—

I want her green life. Her inside me  
in a green hour I can't stop. (12-13)

Diaz deploys this shapeshifting ability throughout her collection, as in “Wolf OR-7.” In this poem, the speaker watches the GPS signal emitted by a tracking device on the first gray wolf to reenter California since the last one was killed for a government bounty in 1927. As the wolf makes its way back across the arbitrary borders on a colonialist map in search of a mate, Diaz inhabits him, feels her desire through him:

...a trembling blue line,

south, west, south again,  
twelve hundred miles from Oregon to California

to find *Her: gray wolf, Canis lupus, Loba, Beloved.*

In the tourmaline dusk I go a same wilding path,  
pulled by night’s map to the forests and dunes of your hips,

divining from you rivers, then crossing them—  
proving the long thirst I’d wander to be sated by you. (32, italics in the original)

Though some of these shorter works address issues of coloniality in addition to erotic longing (poems like “Manhattan is a Lenape Word” and “American Arithmetic” come to mind), the longer poems in *Postcolonial Love Poem* stretch out along the borderlands of the lyric to accommodate an even more discursive poetic mode. “The First Water is the Body,” for example, verges on the essay. This poem uses brief, prose-like stanzas to intersperse meditations on the inseparability of the body from water with explications of translation theory:

‘Aha Makav is the true name of our people, given to us by  
our Creator who loosed the river from the earth and built it  
into our living bodies.

Translated into English, ‘Aha Makav means *the river runs  
through the middle of our body, the same way it runs  
through the middle of our land.*

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This is a poor translation, like all translations. (46, italics in the original)

Diaz posits, with considerable lyrical grace, that the futility of translation in this instance may not be the result simply of incompatible linguistic structures or vocabulary, but rather of centuries of genocidal environmental exploitation:

Jacques Derrida says, *Every text remains in mourning until it is translated.*

When Mojaves say the word for *tears*, we return to our word for *river*, as if our river were flowing from our eyes. A *great weeping* is how you might translate it. Or a *river of grief*.

But who is this translation for and will they come to my language's four-night funeral to grieve what has been lost in my efforts at translation? When they have drunk dry my river will they join the mourning procession across our bleached desert? (47, italics in the original)

"The First Water is the Body" achieves the considerable task of using carefully layered images and assertions to convey the crucial importance of its subject matter. In addition to the exercises in translation above, Diaz also draws connections between the degradation of the Colorado River and the lead poisoning of the drinking water in Flint, Michigan, and she points to potential remediation in the form of rivers in other countries that have been granted legal personhood. When Diaz writes, "How can I translate—not in words but in belief—that a river is a body, as alive as you or I, that there can be no life without it?" she shakes her readers by the shoulders to impress upon them the utter urgency of the matter (48).

Another long poem, "*exhibits from The American Water Museum*," likewise uses its extra length to sidewind along la frontera of the lyric, though it makes its moves through wry pastiche instead of a steady stream of discursive juxtapositions. "*exhibits from The American Water Museum*" is composed of numbered sections that appear to be jumbled, out of numeric order: the poem starts with a section titled "0." which is followed by a section titled "17." As pillaged objects are displayed in museums without respect for their contexts or for the people that created them, so to do these chaotically catalogued lyric fragments lay scattered across the imagination of the



reader, slowly accruing their meaning in relation to each other despite their fractured state. Though we have been reminded in “The First Water is the Body” that the body is inseparable from water, it is still shockingly moving to be told in this later poem that,

67.

There are grief counselors on site for those who realize  
they have entered The American Water Museum not as  
patrons but rather as parts of the new exhibit. (67)

The poem concludes with a statement of survivance in the face of the colonial violences of water contamination and theft and of erasure by exhibit:

11.

*Art of Fact:*

Let me tell you a story about water:  
Once upon a time there was us.  
America’s thirst tried to drink us away.  
And here we still are. (72)

When Diane Glancy writes in her essay “The Naked Spot: A Journey toward Survivance” that “poetry is rebound,” she neatly prefigures the appearance of the three prose poems on basketball dotted strategically throughout *Postcolonial Love Poem* (271). In “Run’n’Gun,” “The Mustangs,” and “Top Ten Reasons Why Indians Are Good at Basketball,” Diaz unveils yet another strategy in her poetic arsenal: while this collection is challenging, intricate, dense, and beautiful, it is also extremely funny. The first of the series, “Run’n’Gun,” opens with an anecdote about “a Hualapai boy from Peach Springs” who “dunk[s] the ball in a pair of flip flops” to promptly slip and compound fracture his wrist. While the image deployed by Diaz here evokes previous extrahuman affinities and overlaps when she writes “His radius fractured and ripped up through his skin like a tusk,” the story arcs ultimately through the hoop of humor: a little bone poking through does not stop the boy “from pumping his other still-beautiful arm into the air and yelling, *Yeah, Clyde the Glide, motherfuckers!* before some adult [speeds] him off to the emergency room” (23). Though woefully injured, our man is nevertheless triumphant, nevertheless committed to his game and his joy. All three of these poems are celebrations of athletic catharsis—the delight that comes from playing big, fast, and fearless.

*Postcolonial Love Poem* is a rich collection with a wide and glittering array of poems on offer. Whether readers comb through this book looking for lyrical lust, potent theorizing, or ready laughter, Natalie Diaz offers readers opportunities to yearn, to grieve, and to celebrate. She is a poet of remarkable abilities, and this is a book of remarkable pleasures.

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**Janice Gould. *Seed*. Headmistress Press, 2019. 75 pp. ISBN: 9781733534505.**  
<https://headmistress-press.square.site/product/seed-by-janice-gould/59?cs=true>

Janice Gould's latest and last collection, *Seed*, compels us to reconsider a need to return to the beginning and to connect that beginning in the formation of a poem to a sense of self, and where the poem may travel. Her words lead you through a personal pilgrimage of a specific beginning for discovering the beauty of language, heartache, and longing. Gould's poetic journey uses language to express the emotion and experience in her struggle to accept her many facets of identity. Reading through each poem also invites a search for truth and acquisition, faith for acceptance, emergence, and discovery, of loss, and resolve. These various poetic expressions then return to a rebirth, a new beginning. The emotional transitions expressed throughout her collection resonate as each poem is recited: finding solace in times of despair and encountering the ever-evading truth—the truth of where she travels and will soon long to bare—missing but always remembering. In this poetic assemblage Gould helps envision a return to her truth and what struggles will be accepted when she finally realized herself in identity—once her identity arrives. To understand her journey, Gould forces us to start with a beginning, "A Poem" (1). The written word Gould displays become the objects and personas that depict her in this collection. Each poem begins with a word title or concept as a benediction over each poem. This idea of benediction conveys her journey as a sojourner in each place and time. This journey ends with the poem "Beyond Knowing" which brings her back to the beginning where this search through despair circles back to the books beginning, "Looking / is the beginning / of seeing..." (67). Each poem is a small prayer saving a place for solace, for resolve.

I had the pleasure to be on a panel with Gould during the Jaipur Literary Festival in Boulder, Colorado, "Orientations: Writing Sexuality" on September 25, 2017, and to read alongside her at the Counterpath, "In Conversation with Colorado Front Range Native Writers & Scholars, Series II" on September 17, 2017. During these times we spoke about poetry and identity. She sang a few songs, she played her guitar, and we talked some more. Her words are like her songs, easy on the ears, with the despair hiding behind the soft language conveying so much of herself. Gould continuously seeks truth and honesty. In her poem "Contradiction" she constantly searches through the expectation of identity, she often sacrifices herself and doubts her identity, not expressing how she was meant or intended to exist. Always "naming herself as silence" (41). "A Poem" (1) states this beginning

is about to flower  
full force from my abdomen,  
my spleen, my wrists,  
my ankles. I could feel  
the pip of it in last night's dream  
that kept threading its way  
back to sacred land, ... (1)

Expressed in these words is the presence of a beginning that points out a specific place of emergence, "her abdomen." The area she describes does lead all to a place of "sacred land," where the emergence of existence stems (1). The recognition of such a place also recognizes the beauty, the purity of poetry. Knowing the body is a large part of acknowledging herself in these poems, where she travels and connects to places as a germinating memorial to land, to the body, to time, and to resolve. Using the "seed" as a metaphor allows us to view the minuscule interconnectedness between the soil and seed. The offering and receiving of life "unconditionally" (3). This point of origin is a reference point to allow herself to travel and remember the complex existence and relationships in her poems.

The concept of emergence and becoming lends an urgency to the acknowledgment of self and place. In the poem "Weed," her words express the delicateness of self and place. Comparing herself as a "weed in your perfect garden" is an example of the delicate interconnectedness of self and place (6). Gould acknowledges this instance and finds value in what is inherently something natural as itself, the value, meaning, and purpose in a "weed" and a "rose":

After that I grew intentionally,  
absorbing every drop  
of moisture that fell  
from her leaves, droplet  
by droplet, onto the thirsty  
patch of soil that sustains me. (6)

Gould speaks often about the identity of self, placing each poem in moments of recollection. These recollections are like "migrations" and habitual patterns solidified on a landscape, such as a river, or a canyon, or animal trail. Many of these formations or events take place in small moments which happen over time, some carved over a millennium, some in a drizzle of "feminine" rain (11). The language Gould captures

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places her in these spatial patterns to let us know the controlling nature of who she is and who we are as a habit, carving its way through history and this world. Her poem, "Migration," is an example of this historical habit:

Too worn down to celebrate  
Our freedom, we vanish quickly  
Like Indians, making our way  
North and west, rattling  
Down the highway  
In an oversized truck. (9)

This notion of self and placement is indicated in many places of her collection. Like a grotto, a place to contemplate. Inside the lingual moments are the remembrances of comfort, the embraces—that offer tenderness and peace. Identity is a theme throughout her collection. The identity of the female, Lesbian, Person of Color, and as a "tomboy" is represented as a "contradiction" (41). Gould depicts the constraints of honesty and truth towards "self" and identity. The expectation of decorum and how others see her adoration for what her heart wants and seeks. Her spirit seeks freedom away from despair and from not being able to express her true self. Gould envisioning herself existing in this immense universe but only remembering the tiny moments that make the most differences in her life such as a "wall in the garden," or "feeling the night wind on our faces" (17). Awareness is the virtue that pushes her to continue moving forward and adapting to a better self. In this constant pull in identity she "calls her name silence in a stance, tantalized by another girl's grace" (42). The concept of place and spiritual acceptance and the constant justification of her identity as a sin for being a lesbian is the ongoing struggle Gould encounters often. Whether in Idaho as a child feeling the snow on her face and melding into it( 43), or in the valleys of Oregon remembering the interaction and negative response from her friend's mother as "disgusting" (49), Gould challenges the tension through contemplation and meditation. The contemplation leads to faith and resolve of spiritual acceptance through things unnoticed, today—"trees, water, music" (57).

The concept of place has a sacred space in this collection, the discovery, and connection to everything beautiful. Taking moments and willingly allowing herself to watch a day unfold and letting that motion become part of her being. Recognizing there is beauty all around and "observing the fiery residue" (58). In this moment of acceptance, Gould experiences a connection to faith towards trust intertwining with "beauty all around and spiraling out like happiness" (59). This concept of whirling

beauty in all is the direction that leads her to sacred places where she can contemplate natural beauty and sanctuary. Gould references Chimayó, which is also the title of her poem, and the small sanctuary in New Mexico. This place of solace helps resolve her struggle for love and longing inside herself and to those she loves—to a constant search and commitment towards the truth about herself inside the recognition of beauty (24). The heaviness of miracles and persistence through time and memory hold a sacredness allowing a moment of awareness and belonging to a holy sacredness on the breezes and patio singing praises for all love (25). Gould addresses life consistently happening and noticing life as it consistently happens, never missing moments because those moments can escape us. She also wants us to notice the small, especially those in the dark and dank because everything wants to be noticed (15).

The last poem of the collection is a reverent poem called “Beyond Knowing.” In this poem, Gould reverts to the beginning, specifically her epigraph from Marilou Awaikta’s novel 1994 *Selu: Seeking the Corn-Mother’s Wisdom*: “A Cherokee elder told me, ‘Look at everything three times. Once with the right eye. Once with the left eye. And once from the corners of the eyes to see the spirit [essence] of what you’re looking at’” (epigraph). The return to a beginning and opening the poem with a similar language is the conceptual idea Gould wants the reader to realize. The importance of returning to places that mold and allow her to reflect, contemplate, and meditate on a pilgrimage through life. Returning to specific memories is a return to “poetry” (67). Returning to a beginning is a kind of rebirth—or renewal. A journey without reflection is a “denunciation of self” (67). The pilgrimage through the corridors of life, if we choose to acknowledge life, allows us to look all around and notice the unnoticeable. The “intention of looking beyond the curvatures of the earth” and beyond the “blue sky” is part of the faith she seeks and the truth that sustains the search (67). “Integument” is the idea of becoming grounded in who she is (67). Becoming the seed that will germinate unconditionally, recognizing the “small truths” and blending with the light of the sun (68). *Seed* is a heartfelt and honest journey of reflection, longing, and discovery. The last poetic testament left with us, Gould sows a collection worthy of continued growth and harvest.

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**Seth Schermerhorn. *Walking to Magdalena: Personhood and Place in Tohono O’odham Songs, Sticks, and Stories*. University of Nebraska Press and the American Philosophical Society, 2019. 258 pp. ISBN: 9781496206855.**

<https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/university-of-nebraska-press/9781496206855/>

*Walking to Magdalena* reflects a decade-long dialogue between the author, Seth Schermerhorn, and members of the Tohono O’odham Nation. The main driver of the book is to uncover and understand the ways in which the principles and practices of Christianity have been adapted and co-produced by Indigenous tradition. In the introduction, Schermerhorn notes that analysis in this field too often leans towards discussion of what Christianity does to Indigenous cultures, as opposed to what Indigenous cultures do *with* Christianity. This important critical distinction establishes both the content and the methodological decisions that shape this book.

Much of the study provides fascinating and detailed conversations with Tohono O’odham participants in the pilgrimage to Magdalena, a journey from Arizona to Mexico. Unlike traditional narratives of the pilgrimage to Compostela, Northern Spain—a comparison noted in the book where the destination is more often the principal focus—in this narrative account the word “pilgrimage” is replaced with “process of the journey,” to ensure that participation, not destination, is the subject of analysis. The embodied experience of travelling and journeying as a collective across this at once ancestral and contemporary landscape provides the core focus for analysis.

In each of the five chapters, different strands of Christian and Indigenous practices are explored through very specific means, focusing on personhood, place, songs, and wooden staffs, connecting geographical, spiritual, and material realities. In the introduction and chapter one, and in keeping with established interventions in the field of Indigenous methodologies and systems of knowledge construction—specifically Lisa Brooks’s contribution in her ground-breaking text, *The Common Pot* (2008)—place is given priority over time, meaning that where an event happens is given priority over when. In this way, the author sets out to show that “the O’odham have made Christianity their own by embedding it within their ancestral landscapes” (23). Prioritising place and challenging the dominance of historicism, which Schermerhorn does by navigating established spatial and cultural theorists, Soja, Bourdieu, and Foucault for example, allows him to cut through chronological sequences of colonisation that might normally set a more linear critical framework for analysis of the legacies of Christianity brought by colonisation.

Indeed, the historical framework—which relates the legacies of Catholicism brought by Spanish colonial rule, legacies which would normally set the context for such an analysis—appears towards the end of the text, in an appendix. The methodological implications of this move are revealing: it allows the voices of the O’odham travellers to speak their religious traditions, past and present, not necessarily as a legacy of colonisation, but as their Indigenous Catholicism reflects lived, everyday practice. The anthropological research methods, gathering testimony through conversations and recorded interviews, is shaped by the author’s decision to follow the methods of Jill Dubisch, where “observant participation” is prioritised over observing participants (13). Further, following James Clifford’s work, Schermerhorn also rejects the traditional model of the binary where the anthropologist writes what the “Native speaks” (13). Instead, a more collaborative model of co-production is created and deployed, modelled on Peruvian anthropologist Marisol de la Cadena who insists on the “co-laboring” of cultural or anthropological knowledge and understanding. Ultimately, this approach has the effect of successfully challenging the loaded binary distinctions between what de la Cadena (and Schermerhorn) have described as “*their belief and my knowledge*” (qtd. in Schermerhorn 14).

The central challenge proposed by the study—where place is prioritised over time, where the land and embodied experiences of walking, song, and material objects become the focus for different chapters—allows a composite narrative of Indigenous Christianity to emerge. Importantly, this exploration of Indigenous Christianity is not driven by time-markers but by lived experiences and cultural memory.

Chapter one prioritises the links between person and place: designated sites in the landscape are layered with stories, actively supporting the development of personhood as individuals move through that landscape and understand the agency of ancestral land. In chapter two, Schermerhorn creates what he calls a song map. This mapping exercise is based on accounts of the songs sung during the different parts of the journey, cumulatively creating a song series for each of the different routes taken to Magdalena. Crucially, the songs are mapped onto the landscape, taking the singers and the audience through traditional landscapes, acknowledging Indigenous knowledge and meaning-making as part of that process. The following chapter focuses on material culture and the walking sticks that support the walker physically, it’s true, but the symbolism is much richer. The author contends that the sticks (generally each individual has the same stick for their many journeys to Magdalena in their lifetime) have become personal archives, with the addition of ribbons and notches,



documenting lived experiences of the journeys and offering stories that offer access to the ethical or moral imagination.

Chapter four focuses on the journey, attending to categories of movement that reflect specific cultural resonances. Again, the destination is not the final goal, rather it's the dynamic process of walking, of being in motion, of being "a good walker," which sets the terms for an analysis of personhood. Defining "a good walker" is learned and practiced, rather than perfected, and becomes an art as well as an action. Personhood, like the walker, is therefore analysed as a state of being in process. Chapter five, where divergent claims about the where, when, and how of Catholic influence on O'odham culture emerges, draws the strands of the book together: people are connected to places rather than times, and lived experience, the everyday, navigates ancestral and conceptual landscapes.

The subject-matter of the book is original: a decade-long partnership with the O'odham, built on trust, offers the reader insights into contemporary, every-day, lived religious experiences of this Indigenous Catholic community. It's a complex and, at times, contradictory or incomplete account, where internal disagreements about cultural memories and values add to the veracity of lived experiences and vitality of a community at ease with negotiation, change, and adaptation. It appears as an ethnographic study of an Indigenous community, and it is. But it's also an auto-ethnography, where Schermerhorn consciously positions himself as a participant, an observer, a friend, and a travel companion. The conscious revelation of self, as it sits alongside the presentation of the O'odham, allows the author to acknowledge his position as the author, without effacing the co-production of this work with his partners in the O'odham community.

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**Tai S. Edwards. *Osage Women and Empire: Gender and Power*. University Press of Kansas, 2018. 230 pp. ISBN: 9780700626106.**

<https://kansaspress.ku.edu/subjects/women-s-studies/978-0-7006-2609-0.html>

A report by the Center for American Women and Politics (CAWP) found that a record 18 Native American women ran for congressional office in 2020 (“Native American Women Candidates in 2020”). This is a particularly important statistic for a number of reasons, but primarily because there were zero Native American women in Congress before Sharice Davids (Ho-Chunk) and Deb Haaland (Laguna Pueblo) were elected in Kansas and New Mexico respectively in 2018. However, this does not mean that Native American women lacked political agency or were without significant political voice prior to the twenty-first century. This crucial point forms the backbone of Tai S. Edwards’s *Osage Women and Empire: Gender and Power*.

Edwards opens *Osage Women and Empire* by quoting correspondence from Christian missionary Reverend William F. Vaill, published in 1827 by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions. In this correspondence, Vaill claims that Osage women were bound to a degrading life of unceasing drudgery and servitude, whilst Osage men reclined at ease in their camps, smoking and telling stories. In response, Edwards poses a number of questions that ultimately guide her study: were nineteenth-century Osage women truly exploited and subjugated in such a manner? Can we trust the conclusions of men such as Vaill, whose judgement is likely clouded by an entrenchment in European patriarchy and female subordination?

Edwards’s study provides straightforward answers to these questions by bringing Osage gender construction and complementarity to the foreground in her work. In doing so, *Osage Women and Empire* addresses a glaring gap in the study of the Osage empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a gap Edwards attributes to a gendered scholarly bias that associates the historiography of war, diplomacy, and politics with masculinity. Edwards identifies a further gap within several decades of scholarship on Native North American women, wherein scholars have referred to women holding important roles in Osage society but largely overlooked the complementary nature of gender roles. Edwards’s intervention with *Osage Women and Empire* is an exemplary piece of work that more than addresses these gaps in both academic modes of inquiry.

An overall emphasis on the importance of gender complementarity binds Edwards’s study together across four central chapters. The core text is only 132 pages—the remaining page count is made up of detailed notes and an extensive bibliography. The

four main chapters are roughly equal in length and bookended by a fairly detailed introduction and a brief conclusion. Chapter One provides readers with the necessary tools to understand the basics of Osage cosmology and the particular way that an Osage worldview informs and necessitates complementary gender roles. Chapter Two traces the impact of European colonization on Osage expansion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, detailing the incorporation of Europeans into systems of Osage dominance and exchange, systems that depended on gender complementarity and subsequently thrived. Chapter Three is located in the early nineteenth century, when the Osage empire declined as the US settler empire was born and began expanding westward. Edwards is explicit in her portrait of US imperialism as manipulative, exploitative, and genocidal, but such a portrait does not leave the Osage painted as helpless victims. Edwards emphasizes the continued role of Osage spirituality, the facilitation of a mobile lifestyle, and the utilisation of European missionaries to combat the encroaching US presence on their lands. Chapter Four follows the Osage to their Kansas reservation, an environment that placed new pressures on traditional gendered work. Edwards argues that the continued implementation of gender complementarity in their religious and economic structures allowed the Osage to control and direct change in specific ways.

The study draws from a variety of sources, combining traditional archival materials such as missionary records, traveller narratives, and ethnographies with works from both Osage and non-Osage historians and scholars. Edwards acknowledges the significant biases present in the vast majority of her chosen archival materials, often using that bias as a springboard for discussions of gendered prejudices, misappropriations, and misinterpretations. The text features ten black-and-white photographs interspersed throughout which provide useful reference points for the subjects discussed. Chapters Two, Three, and Four also mirror the chronology of three maps by Bill Nelson (included in text) depicting the changing boundaries of Osage territory across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The final map appears in the conclusion, depicting total land loss divided by each treaty responsible.

*Osage Women and Empire* is not intended to be a definitive guide on Osage spirituality or political history, and thus it functions well as a broad and accessible historical overview. The combination of historical context and analysis of gender flows well from page to page and, where it may occasionally lack depth, it excels in breadth. For the reader who requires more historical granularity, Edwards acknowledges the extensive works already written by twentieth-century Osage scholars such as John Joseph Mathews or Louis Burns.

There are places where Edwards does drill down and her analysis is given an opportunity to shine. For example, the latter half of Chapter Three features a particular focus on the relationship between Osages and Protestant missionaries. Drawing from disparaging notes made by missionaries at the time, Edwards convincingly argues that gendered domestic production and hospitality carried out by Osage women and girls visiting the missions played a significant role in maintaining diplomatic ties with Americans during the nineteenth century. This example is one of many throughout the text where Edwards draws from a source saturated in ethnocentric and colonial bias and instead manages to find and emphasize the agency of Osage women during a period, and indeed a field of scholarship, that has tried to write them out.

Edwards does leave one avenue of inquiry understudied. In Chapter One, there is a brief acknowledgement of the presence of trans\* and/or Two Spirit individuals in the notes of nineteenth-century missionaries and travellers. Edwards makes the point that although gender was constructed into polarized male and female roles in Osage society, these roles were not bound by sex and included a range of gender identities. The point is all-too-brief, however, as Edwards does not acknowledge alternative gender roles nor the possibility for gender identities beyond the colonial scope in any of the subsequent chapters, leaving open the necessity for further scholarship in this area.

*Osage Women and Empire* functions both as an excellent and long-overdue intervention in historical scholarship on the Osage empire that emphasizes the critical role of gender complementarity and as an easily digestible overview of existing scholarship that is accessible to academic and non-academic readers alike.

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**Frank Kelderman. *Authorized Agents: Publication and Diplomacy in the Era of Indian Removal*. SUNY Press, 2019. 286 pp. ISBN: 9781438476179.**

<http://www.sunypress.edu/showproduct.aspx?ProductID=6762&SEName=authorized-agents>

*Authorized Agents* analyzes the relationship between Native American literature and Indian diplomacy in the nineteenth century from the Missouri River Valley to the Great Lakes. This meticulously researched literary history examines an array of Native American-authored texts produced in the context of Indian diplomacy in the era of removal by the settler-colonial United States. From 1820 to 1860, tribal leaders and intellectuals collaborated with coauthors, transcribers, and interpreters to address the impact of the crisis of forced removal and American imperialism on Indian peoples. The literatures of Indian diplomacy, like much early Native American literature published in English, were produced out of necessity to defend and protect Indian lands and lives, advocate for Indigenous sovereignty and autonomy, and participate in settler-colonial political institutions in the context of land theft and settler occupation. Kelderman's careful reading of literatures produced through the context of Indian-settler diplomacy demonstrates the power of Indian oratory and writing to represent Indigenous perspectives, persuade colonial agents, shift settler institutions, and appeal to US publics. Offering the term "authorized agents" to name Indian diplomats, writers, intellectuals, and tribal leaders who participated in an array of collaborative publication projects that brought Native perspectives of American imperialism into the public sphere, Kelderman's study of literature produced through Indian diplomacy pays due attention to a body of work that has been previously underexamined in the field of Native American literature.

*Authorized Agents* makes a significant contribution to critical debates in Native American and Indigenous studies regarding the relationships among Native people's agency, Indigenous sovereignty, and literary representation. Kelderman acknowledges that by the nineteenth century the figure of the Native diplomat had become a trope in the US public imaginary as "scenes of treaty-making had become a fixture of increasingly romanticized cultural narratives about US-Indian encounters... that popularized a distorted or even sanitized version of the colonial relations between Indian nations and the United States" (3). In the face of these popular cultural misrepresentations, Kelderman acknowledges how, in fact, Native diplomats bore "witness to the concerns of individual Indian nations and the state of intertribal relations, in ways that affirmed indigenous sovereignty" and launched "critiques of American institutions" (3). Kelderman illustrates that Native diplomats did not merely

participate in colonial institutions, but that they fundamentally shifted settler institutions by interjecting Native perspectives and challenging colonial assumptions. He argues that Indian writing and oratory produced through institutions of diplomacy are foundational to early Native American literatures in English.

The book's introduction, "Indian Removal and the Projects of Native American Writing," provides a thorough overview of historical and political contexts, theories, and concepts necessary for understanding Native American writing, both self-written and transcribed from oratory, produced during the Indian removal era. The four body chapters that follow trace the histories and legacies of publication projects produced by Indian diplomats and their interlocutors in tribally specific and intertribal negotiations for power and place. Complementing the book's text, readers will enjoy more than two dozen illustrations representing Native diplomats, handwritten letters, Native-made maps of Indian lands, and other helpful and fascinating archival documents.

The first chapter, "'Kindness and Firmness': Negotiating Empire in the Benjamin O'Fallon Delegation," details the historical and literary record of an 1821 delegation to Washington, D.C., overseen by Benjamin O'Fallon, the subagent at the Upper Missouri Indian agency. The delegation participants included nine Pawnee leaders and eight representatives from four other Native nations in the Missouri River Valley. Kelderman reads the transcribed oratory of Sharitarish (Chaui Pawnee) and Ongpatonga (Omaha) to show how they critique colonial ideas about civilization which attempted to justify settler expansion. Addressing the limitations of diplomacy for Indigenous peoples to retain their homelands, Kelderman explains how delegations to Washington constituted an alternative to US military force as federal agents sought to intimidate and subdue Indigenous leaders through displays of US hegemony and dominance. Nevertheless, the Upper Missouri delegates "brought indigenous forms of decision-making to bear on the formulation of Indian policy in Washington" (46). This chapter defines Kelderman's broadly useful key term, *authorized agent*, as "an indigenous representative whose words were read as expressions of indigenous perspectives within scenes of diplomacy" (62).

Chapter two, "'Our Wants and Our Wishes': Frontier Diplomacy and Removal in Sauk Writing and Oratory," traces Sauk literature that addresses the effects of settler encroachment and Indian removal in the 1830s and 1840s. This chapter shifts the scene of Indian diplomacy from Washington, D.C. to the "frontier," as Kelderman notes that "although delegations to Washington were a fixture in US-Indian relations, the routines

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of Indian diplomacy more typically took place in Indian country," for example, in Indian agency offices and intertribal councils (74). This chapter expands the literary archive of Sauk and Meskwaki removal after the Black Hawk War (1832) by examining the most famous Sauk text from this period, *Life of Ma-ka-ta-me-she-kia-kiak* (1833), alongside the writings and oratory of the civil chief Keokuk and the tribal leader Hardfish. Black Hawk produced his as-told-to autobiography in collaboration with editor John Barton Patterson and interpreter Antoine LeClaire, and the publications of Keokuk and Hardfish also were produced with the aid of textual collaborators. Kelderman's comparison of these publications considers transcribed Native oratory as a form of Native American literature in English and "offers a new perspective on the question of indigenous agency and representation as it played out in the history of removal" (75). Whereas Black Hawk's bestselling autobiography offers his perspective on the war and critiques the settler-colonial treaty system, Keokuk is often read as an assimilationist. Kelderman explains that Keokuk developed "a pessimistic view of staving off settler expansion" because, during visits to Washington, D.C., he witnessed the growing settler population and military might of the US and consequently became convinced that his people must form an alliance with the Americans (79). However, Keokuk also intervened in colonial institutions through his oratory and "sought to change the conditions of interaction with the United States" by suggesting that councils "be held in Sauk political space, on their own terms" (83). Keokuk's publication projects attempted to bring negotiations with his primary interlocutor, William Clark, the superintendent of Indian Affairs in St. Louis, "into a mixed indigenous-settler public sphere, in which his oratory carried tribal authorization and resisted being co-opted by the agenda of the settler state" (84). Kelderman makes a case for Keokuk's agency, however constricted by the colonial logics of the treaty system: "Keokuk's diplomatic efforts sought to continue an existing mode of social and economic organization that was rooted in the traditions of Sauk life. No matter how compromised they were, his textual collaborations asserted a Sauk political voice within the networks of the colonial government" (110). Finally, Kelderman addresses intratribal conflict and disagreement by reviewing tribal leader Hardfish's public challenges to Keokuk's policies and chiefdom which fomented a faction of Sauk-Meskwaki people against Keokuk and the other civil chiefs.

Chapter three, "'The Blessings Which We Are Now Enjoying': Peter Pitchlynn and the Literature of Choctaw Nation-Building," examines the significance of writing and literature to the creation of the Choctaw Nation with a focus on diplomat and educator Peter Pitchlynn. Pitchlynn conducted a survey of Choctaw lands in Indian Territory and wrote a report that defended Choctaw land claims and also mediated between

Choctaw leadership and colonial government and religious groups to advocate for public education for Choctaws. Significantly, Kelderman does not shy away from complex issues of race and class as he addresses the fact that Pitchlynn's Choctaw nation-building rhetoric "buried the social and cultural differences that existed" within the Choctaw Nation, including Pitchlynn's denial of the privileges of education to lower-class Choctaws or to the enslaved African Americans who lived in Choctaw Nation—more than 100 of whom were enslaved by Pitchlynn himself (147). Kelderman engages postcolonial theorists including Homi K. Bhabha and Frantz Fanon to examine the complexities of identity and agency in seemingly assimilationist or otherwise problematic colonized subjects such as Pitchlynn who, Kelderman asserts, "constructed the project of 'civilization' as a form of Choctaw exceptionalism vis-à-vis other Indian nations—a rhetoric of nation-building that hinged on a form of colonial mimicry" (152).

Followed by a brief Afterword, the fourth and penultimate chapter, "Rewriting the Native Diplomat: Community and Authority in Ojibwe Letters," reads Ojibwe literature from 1827 to 1860 to argue that published representations of Native leaders and councils became "a means to assert indigenous sovereignty within transnational cultures of diplomacy and philanthropy" (29). In the face of popular US culture that sanitized the figure of the Indian diplomat as "an emblem of American nationalism and empire," this chapter examines Ojibwe writing and oratory that "complicated the representation of tribal political authority in American literary culture, reasserting the political value of Indian diplomacy in a new publication landscape" (168). Kelderman reads poetry, autobiography, pamphlets, and speeches published by Jane Johnston Schoolcraft, Peter Jones, and George Copway who carved out a place in the American literature canon where the figure of the Native diplomat represented the political voice of Indigenous peoples.

*Authorized Agents* contributes to a trend in Native American literature scholarship that seeks to broaden the nineteenth-century canon, in part by reassessing what counts as literature. Perhaps due to the conventional understanding of an author as one who writes, authors such as William Apess and Elias Boudinot "have long stood in for the full breadth of Indian nations that bore the brunt of removal policy in the nineteenth century" (213). Consequently, with the notable exception of Black Hawk's as-told-to autobiography, the production projects of Native authors who created works through collaboration with translators, editors, transcribers, and other collaborators have been critically underrepresented. However, as Kelderman argues, the transcription of Indian oratory is a central part of the origin story of what we call Native American literature today. Therefore, *Authorized Agents* extends critical conversations about the



fundamentally collaborative nature of early Native American literatures in English, including work by scholars such as Andrew Newman and Birgit Brander Rasmussen, who examine how early Native American literatures hinged on collaborative forms of writing; Matt Cohen, who discusses Indian diplomacy as publication events characterized by cross-cultural interaction; Eric Cheyfitz, who explores collaboratively written American Indian literatures produced through a range of situations from cooperation to coercion; Arnold Krupat, who developed seminal work on collaboratively written American Indian autobiography; and Lisa Brooks, Phillip H. Round, and James H. Cox, who address the links between Indigenous publication and Indian diplomacy.

Kelderman's impressive first monograph deftly navigates the paradox of Native American literary representation during the era of Indian removal by recognizing the limitations of Native authors' anti-colonial agency and also asserting the power of their publication projects' literary representations of Indigenous peoples as political actors rather than pitiable victims or romanticized "noble savages." Kelderman engages organization theory's concept of a project to coin the term *indigenous publication projects*, "mediated forms of indigenous representation that are produced with non-Native collaborators, which take place in institutional and diplomatic networks but also intervene in them" to "construct indigenous counter-discourses within colonial scenes of interaction" and emphasize "the strategic agency of Native authors who navigated diplomatic publics within government and civil society" (12). In its assertion that agency "should not be seen as simply an abstract human capacity for action but as a negotiation between the structural and the situational," Kelderman's *Authorized Agents* is useful for understanding the significance of literary representation and agency of Native writers and orators in the context of settler colonialism (24).

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**Jules Arita Koostachin. *Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths*. Kegedonce Press, 2018. 100 pp. ISBN: 9781928120148.**

<https://kegedonce.com/bookstore/item/104-unearthing-secrets-gathering-truths.html>

Jules Arita Koostachin's debut collection of poems, *Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths*, is a highly personal and interior journey through themes of remembrance, continuance, trauma, and connection. A project over twenty years in the making, *Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths* reveals the author's "extensive knowledge working in Indigenous community" (97). The collection's biography tells the reader that Koostachin was born in Moose Factory Ontario, raised by her Cree-speaking grandparents in Moosonee and her mother, a survivor of the Canadian residential school system. The biography also interestingly reveals how Koostachin—a band member of Attawapiskat First Nation, Moshkekowok territory—has "established herself within the film and television community" throughout Canada and the United States, winning awards in documentary and film work, acting, and directing. Because many of her projects commit to supporting youth and women as well as language and cultural revitalization, Koostachin's "About the Author" reads like a living and public prologue to the very intimate world of her poetry. While this world undoubtedly has shaped the poet's film and acting career, the book builds a poetic environment culled from Cree language and relations.

Four sections with Cree subtitles frame *Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truths*: Inninewak, Wikwam, Mitewin, and Iskwewak. These subtitles, like many of the Cree words Koostachin uses in her collection, are either directly translated through the glossary she provides or become apparent via context within the poems themselves. In translation, the four sections—"Human Beings," "Home," "Mitewin (which is *not* defined, but my best approximation would be "dream" or "medicine"), and "Cree Womyn"—shape the contours of the very finely outlined community of influences and landscapes from which the author speaks. Whether in English or Cree, however, Koostachin's poetic language implies a gathering effect, a language that is as directional as it is relational. Indigenous languages, as they do, essentially prompt philosophies for living:

*KiiWayTeNook*

*WaPaNo*

*NaKaPayHaNook*

*ShaWaNook*

*NiiPii*

*IsKoTew*

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*AsKi*

*Mee'Kwetch*

*KiChi MaNiTo. (12)*

These lines end Koostachin's poem "God and Me" (found in the first section) and gesture for her reader the grounding basis from which she writes against remembrances of a broken family, violence and abuse, and the long histories of colonial and Christian invasion in her community. The elements, gathered as the life-giving forces, grant an accessway "to make new for the truth of [her] identity" (12).

As Koostachin sets out the collection, however, she is eager to provide guidance to her reader and to these acts of unearthing and gathering. The first poem of the collection, "InNiNeWak – The Human Beings of MoshKeKoWok," is cast by a litany of repeated words that will echo and deepen over the course of the book. Visually compelling, "InNiNeWak – The Human Beings of MoshKeKoWok" acts in some ways as a map for the rest of the poems, with "human," "people," and "life" running down the page and emptying out to "Cree / Cries / Call," and finally "human / CRIES / dreaming" at poem's end. Visual and aural rhythms preoccupy this map of *The People*.

This mapping of *The People*, moreover, links the ways they are protected to the ways they are claimed through the land itself. In "Dancing AaTimWak," the speaker says,

dancing *AaTimWak*  
 want us to listen  
 the protectors of our people  
 protectors of the moss  
 swamplands  
 joining us with the others...  
 we are rooted  
 generations before me gather  
 all beings speaking the same language...  
 I will listen again. (6)

Indicative of the entire collection, where there is a constant and robust fusion of home, land, people, and language, Koostachin leans on these Cree guides to ask: "what is freedom in a colonial world?" (10). The signposts in Koostachin's poems seem to point to the overwhelming relationality to land, "essence / trunks of the trees holding our stories safe," and to the "stories living in our Mothers...*IsKweWak* side by side with eyes wide open" (14-15).

Some of Koostachin's most interesting poetic lines are found in the details of the land that the speaker describes with the entirety of her senses: "longing for renewal / unraveling my sweet disorder / stench of rotten berries / stings my nostrils" (21). And some of them are found in many of the dream sequences that move in and out of moments within and between poems: "I take *KoKoom's* hand in mine / we walk out the door / so this is sovereignty?", and later, "*KoKoom* and I dream / we enter the passage way / ... entire relations converse / there is no divide" (28; 30). As another type of passageway, dreaming is a powerful conduit for the speaker.

Poems such as "Watch and Watched" and "Light Switch" are some of the most illuminative poems in showing how memory and dream are working with and against each other throughout the speaker's interior journey. Through difficult references to sexual violence, "Watch and Watched" delineates what is hidden not only by the suppression of memory but by the violence of colonial legal systems and the inheritances of broken lifeways. Through actions of transformation, the speaker in this poem dreams in order to understand how to "dream again" and how to

unlock the door  
 unleash me from his hold  
 I want to breathe again  
 I need to take myself back. (35)

In the second half of the collection, the theme of female protection becomes even more refined, turning those "preying eyes" of the "man with eyes like water" to the "healing warmth of *NiiPii*" which pre-empts a healing a song, "releasing her" (40-41). Indigenous femininity and land shape the protection the speaker seeks. This protection is not formed by turning away from the inheritances and experiences of trauma, but rather by acts of being found: "*Maskwa* finds me / digging me out from the sand / infant spirit untangled" (60). Being watched over by generations of women and the Bear clan into which she was born and who will look after her her entire life, the speaker finds her way out of danger. The speaker finds poetry as her mechanism to release the trappings of violence.

While there are instances throughout the collection where Koostachin names her defiance to intergenerational and epigenetic trauma, those hauntings still "visit her children" (68). But time and again, Koostachin's poetry engages the resistance embodied in Cree language, her means to recall the relevance of its philosophies for living, protection, and healing. Through her poetry, it seems, Koostachin determines a less fractured future.

In the final poem of the collection, "Returning to the Tracks," the poet seems closest to understanding what freedom can mean for her, and it is Cree relatives who signal the directions toward that sense of liberation. By the time the reader arrives at the end of *Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truth*, one may feel she has traveled the pathways with the speaker, tracks lit along the way, telling her she has been accompanied all along toward a home. Fans of Luci Tapahonso, Ofelia Zepeda, Margaret Noodin, and other poets who work with their Indigenous languages may be drawn to Koostachin's debut collection. Others may simply admire a life-long dedication to community—and a poet's documentation of that. *Unearthing Secrets, Gathering Truth* is a welcome addition to the thriving Native poetry scene.

*Molly McGlennen, Vassar College*

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**Steve Russell. *Lighting the Fire: A Cherokee Journey from Dropout to Professor*. Miniver Press, 2020. 350 pp. ISBN: 9781939282446.**

<http://miniverpress.com/book/lighting-fire-cherokee-journey-dropout-professor/>

I first encountered Steve Russell back in the early aughts, when I stumbled onto the forums on Indianz.com, one of the first online Native communities. I was a recent escapee from small-town Mississippi who had somehow washed up in Europe. And I was unexpectedly homesick. Looking back, it wasn't any different from any other internet group I've ever joined where what supposedly bound everyone together was a shared identity as opposed to a personal interest. That is to say, there was a lot of mud wrestling over issues both minor and major. From Bush's (at the time) ongoing "War on Terror" to the even more contentious subject of how to make corn bread, one's kin, quantum, and education always became fair game. Russell, however, tended to stay out of the dirt, and instead dealt with everyone on equal terms, even with an undocumented nosebleed like me who was clearly out of their weight class and generally considered an irritating wannabe. It was some time before I learned that the avuncular gentleman who looked vaguely like my dad in his profile picture (and whom I thought of as a bit of an old fogey as a result) was an accomplished author and scholar.

In fact, Steve Russell, an enrolled citizen of the Cherokee Nation, could crush most arguments if he wished merely by dropping a printout of his curriculum vitae on top of his opponent. A retired Texas judge and professor emeritus of criminal justice at Indiana University Bloomington, his academic output has been extraordinarily diverse. Russell has written and co-authored dozens of articles and chapters on such topics as the jurisprudence of colonialism, the politics of Indian identity, gender and sexuality norms, the racial paradox of tribal citizenship, the practice of law, domestic violence in the court system, corporate crime; the list goes on. But as the title of his memoir indicates, *Lighting the Fire: A Cherokee Journey from Dropout to Professor* does not reflect the *cursus honorum* of academics in American society.

The book has all the sad hallmarks of a Native autobiography. Poverty, abuse, and no small amount of heartbreak and loss, and—of course—overcoming. However, *Lighting the Fire* is actually a deeper exploration of the paths taken and not taken over the span of Russell's seventy-two years. Numerous possible futures play out in the book, but Russell establishes clearly, at the onset, that he was "born a writer" (23). In addition to his achingly familiar childhood dream of someday having a reliable car, a house with no holes in the floor, and regular hot water, eleven-year-old Russell's wish-list included the luxury of a typewriter (24). Now, Russell is an award-winning journalist, with numerous

op-eds to his credit in (among others) *Indian Country Today* and the *Cherokee Phoenix*, some of which have formed the basis for published collections of essays such as *Ceremonies of Innocence* and *Ray Sixkiller's Cherokee Nation*. Currently, he is a regular columnist on *Medium*. And he has indeed always followed the fictional Mr. Dooley's advice that newspapers should "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable" (204).

However, his eventual career as a journalist began not with writing for papers, but rather with delivering them on a Mitsubishi Silver Pigeon scooter, a form of employment that may soon become a thing of the past if digital media outlets continue their conquest of the news (32-34). As someone who loathed being shaken from feigned sleep at three in the morning to help make paper deliveries along a rural route in my father's pickup truck (an ancient Toyota, I seem to recall), I cannot say I have any nostalgia for it nor the stench of warm ink that followed me to school. Yet the historian in me appreciates the much broader sweep of history that contextualizes Russell's life. Political events and social movements are as much a part of the flow of the story as his modes of transport. Things to which he was not a witness, such as the start of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma and the state of Sequoyah that never was, are concisely and informatively incorporated (9-10; 187-88). But it's the detailed account of his own participation in the past that resonates.

In particular, 1968, an especially dark year in American history, marked the turning point in Russell's political awareness. At that time, Russell explains that his "idea of politics still centered on elections" (192). But after the double gut-punch of MLK's and RFK's assassinations, and then the violent chaos of the Democratic Convention, Russell became a full-time activist and—as a result—part-time jail bird (192-93). His life story encapsulates many of the social and political protests of the second half of the twentieth century, both the legendary and the nearly forgotten. For example, as a young journalist, Russell covered the United Farm Workers of America, AFL-CIO, and their fight for improved working conditions; interned with the organization as a law student; and became one of César Chavez's bodyguards (236-40). His autobiography is of immense historical and contemporary value. Writing this review on the eve of the 2020 US presidential election, I hope people follow Russell's example and adopt what he calls his "life of crime," whatever the outcome (215).

Other struggles in *Lighting the Fire* are far more personal and focus on the entanglements of family and identity. Raised in the Muscogee Nation, Russell was blighted by the sporadic presence of a neglectful, if not abusive, mother and haunted

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by the absence of his Cherokee father. At start of the book, the existence of the latter can only be surmised from the "hearsay" of the author's own birth (1). But as he got older, Russell hoped his father—whom he knew from pictures "of a big Indian in a Navy uniform" and a small handful of vividly disturbing memories (65-67)—could help him feel "more Cherokee" (75). He was ultimately disappointed. The only things Russell learned from his father were some small skill with hand tools and a singular expression: "useless as the teats on a boar hog." Unfortunately, it was directed at him (79). And despite the connections later made with his community, Russell remains keenly aware that his upbringing makes him "error prone in Cherokee practices" (302). However, his experiences with people from other tribes and an American society which sees no difference between them changed his sense of self. Russell concludes: "I was born Cherokee and I knew it, but I had to discover that I am Indian" (334).

*Lighting the Fire* also tells the more profound story of how Russell became the man and father that he wanted to be, outgrowing the example that an accident of biology had provided him with. And that tale begins and ends with his elderly, maternal grandparents, Bessie and Jud Russell. They fed him newspapers and books and provided him anything within their limited means if it was "needed for school" (6-7). They form the thread in his story, and Russell often circles his way back to them, whether during his youthful peregrinations or in memory. Their loss meant that having a family would require his "own acts of creation" (326). Determined not to pass on whatever illness his father carried, he eventually had four children, "none of them children of my body unless you count my heart" (313). They are all the evidence he needs that his father was wrong. That he knows what is right, he credits to his actual parents, Bessie and Jud. And it is only when reflecting on them at the end of his book—and quite possibly at the end of his life—that Russell displays the talent for poetry that won him accolades for *Wicked Dew*:

*I still cannot tie a necktie, Grampa,  
but I have taken your name. (331)*

One aspect of Russell's work will not be everyone's cup of tea: his frank discussions of sexual matters. His description of his first time—as a sixteen-year-old in a house of ill repute, no less—was quite explicit concerning both his understandable nervousness and his partner's justifiable boredom (91-93). My own profession entails reading a great many private diaries very carefully expurgated by some long-gone Victorian prude, so I was surprised to see such things in print. But I'm not unused to hearing about them thanks to my own Indian relatives. Certainly, my dad thought my attitudes about sex



(i.e. young people invented it, and old people shouldn't do it or talk about it) hilarious and my blushes amusing. In fact, Russell presents sex as ideally as you could wish: as a thing people do, with varying degrees of intimacy and maturity that hopefully increase over time. The only thing that struck me as inherently disagreeable was his offhand opinion that drinking gin is akin to siphoning gasoline (90). And as for readers thirsty for the intimate details of Native lives—well, they can hardly complain when their cup runneth over.

Even so, some academics will no doubt be disappointed by Russell's memoir. It will not be counted among the class of artificially delineated "traditional" narratives as described by Mick McAllister in his 1997 survey of Native American autobiographies. Anthropologists looking for an "authentic Native source" and an endless litany of information on spiritual beliefs and ceremonial life will have to look elsewhere. And scholars of Native American literature searching for Gerald Vizenor's richly descriptive *Interior Landscapes* will probably also be left wanting. Russell's reporting background and his principles as a journalist, which may earn him "geezer" status in post-truth America, are reflected in the straight-forward writing style to no small degree (200). On the whole, I suspect that his most lauded contribution to academia will remain his 2010 volume, *Sequoyah Rising*.

But I think that *Lighting the Fire* will become his most widely read work among Indians, regardless of official tribal affiliation (or lack thereof), and for two reasons. First, it is testament of survival and then some. As a kid, Steve had Will Rogers to show him what Cherokees can do. And now, kids have Steve to show them what Indians can do if they can avoid the "spirit-killing garbage" strewn in their path (336). Second, it is just a good story. The kind of storytelling I grew up with, and the kind I miss. The kind where the teller always mentions the motorcycle they rode or the car they were driving. Who was there and the arcana of their family ties by blood, marriage, or adoption. Narrow escapes from petty authority, whether teachers or the police. Battles with greater injustices and illness. Some history. Lovers. And at the end, grandparents' memories and the memories of grandparents.

*Thomas Donald Jacobs, Ghent University*

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**Richard Van Camp. *Moccasin Square Gardens*. Douglas & McIntyre, 2019. 160 pp. ISBN: 9781771622165.**

[www.douglas-mcintyre.com/book/moccasin-square-gardens](http://www.douglas-mcintyre.com/book/moccasin-square-gardens)

The stories of Tlicho writer Richard Van Camp tend to alternate between the sentimental and the sinister. Frequently they also are funny and/or sexy. He established this pattern with his first collection in 2002, *Angel Wing Splash Pattern*, and it continues with his latest, award-winning short-story collection, *Moccasin Square Gardens*, which won the 2020 Alberta Literary Awards' Georges Bugnet Award for Fiction.

The sinister element is the most compelling in *Moccasin Square Gardens*. Two stories will create interest in Van Camp's next graphic novel project. "The Wheetago Wars I: Lying in Bed Together" and "The Wheetago Wars II: Summoners" tell of a near-future when monstrous forces have been awakened by the environmental degradation created by resource exploitation. After spending the night with the narrator of "Lying in Bed Together," a beautiful female messenger from the future tells him, "These Wheetago are older than Christ, and they have been counting on our greed as humans to warm the Earth so they can return" (50). The Wheetago are called "Body Eaters," and the narrator, with the help of the messenger, has visions of their arrival; the consequences of that event are described in "Summoners" in fractured, violent imagery of humans struggling for survival.

These stories are part of a project intended as a series of graphic novels that, according to Van Camp, will be "far more terrifying and far more hilarious" than *The Walking Dead* (Black). Other stories in the cycle are included in *Godless but Loyal to Heaven* (2012) and *Night Moves* (2015).

Another short story from *Moccasin Square Gardens* that belongs in the sinister category is "I Am Filled with a Trembling Light." This story participates in a common theme for Van Camp: justice (or revenge) against those who victimize members of their own community. Another common theme found in this story is the struggle within a Native community between the use and misuse of traditional or spiritual medicine. In it, a young man who is dying from cancer seeks reprieve from a debt owed to a notorious criminal, and, in the process, he turns the medicine back on the criminal and onto a police officer who has hurt young people in his community. The story has interesting twists and continues Van Camp's exploration of how members of an oppressed community oppress others.

“The Promise” and “Man Babies” are stories from the sentimental category. They continue the Van Camp pattern of telling stories of male competition or friendship; his male-female relationships are almost always romantic. I deem the two stories sentimental because, by the end of such stories, the differences between characters are resolved, frequently with hugs and declarations of affection. “The Promise” tells of the resolution of a years-long conflict between best friends, and “Man Babies” tells of a conflict between a man and his spoiled, adult stepson.

The term “sentimental” in criticism often is used as a pejorative, but I do not mean it that way. Imagining resolutions to real-world problems and acknowledging emotions are important in the social work of literature. Even though the sentimental stories of *Moccasin Square Gardens* are not as effective as those from earlier collections—for instance, “Show Me Yours” and “Dogrib Midnight Runners” from *The Moon of Letting Go* (2009)—Van Camp’s stories remain committed to imagining paths through hardship and ways to heal broken relationships. He imagines better lives for people in the communities of the Northwest Territories that he has spent his career writing about.

Finally, “Aliens” is perhaps more interesting for what it does not do rather than what it does. It sets up an intriguing context for the story but does not elaborate, despite the world-changing impact of that context. “Star People” have arrived and hover over the world in dark “obelisks” (11) (perhaps in an allusion to Ted Chiang’s novella “Story of Your Life” on which the film *Arrival* was based). The visitors are cleansing the oceans, it seems, but the humans are not sure what else they are doing: “Most people just watch TV or Facebook now, waiting for something to happen” (11). The rest of the story is about a romantic encounter between two characters, Shandra and Jimmy. Jimmy has lived in Fort Smith his whole life but has remained a “mystery... cruising around by himself” (13). After their date, Shandra tells her friends that Jimmy is “beautiful,” but different: “There are no words for what he is...” (21). The second thing the story does not do is tell the reader the exact nature of Jimmy’s difference. Van Camp has set up this narrative gap not only by making Shandra unable to fully articulate her experience with Jimmy but also by moving us one step away from her experience. She tells the narrator and the narrator tells us, so we have no immediate experience of Shandra and Jimmy together. The narrator imagines that Jimmy is “Aayahkwew, neither man or woman but both,” but we do not know that for a fact (22). Not knowing is part of the point; the true nature of Jimmy’s difference is not as important his beauty.

As readers, we suspect the story’s two mysteries are connected: the Star People and Jimmy. That is not to say that Jimmy is an alien; his apparent gender diversity would

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make that a potentially troubling connection. Jimmy has always been in Fort Smith and, as the narrator states, Jimmy's gender or sexuality is not something new to this community—they have ancient words for it. Perhaps the connection is between the cleansing of the world the Star People are initiating and, in the reader's world, the broader, although gradual, cleansing of prejudices against people like Jimmy. "Aliens" first appeared in *Love Beyond Body, Space & Time: An Indigenous LGBT Sci-Fi Anthology* in 2016. Part of the collection's goal is the survivance of Native communities and LGBT Native people in particular. In an introduction to *Love Beyond Body, Space & Time*, Niigaan Sinclair writes, "let love guide us as we understand, work, and change" (19). Van Camp's stories throughout his career indicate he would agree with that sentiment.

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**James J. Donahue. *Contemporary Native Fiction: Toward a Narrative Poetics of Survivance*. Routledge, 2019. 186 pp. ISBN: 9780367185954.**

<https://www.routledge.com/Contemporary-Native-Fiction-Toward-a-Narrative-Poetics-of-Survivance/Donahue/p/book/9780367185954>

While James Donahue's book contributes a much-needed acknowledgement of Indigenous literatures to the field of narratology, this book will be of less interest to scholars working in the discipline of Native and Indigenous Studies for the simple reason that his is not an Indigenous Studies project, though in this respect my interpretation is diametrically opposed to Donahue's own description of his "attempt [to develop] a Native-based literary theory" (22). It seems to me that his orientation emerges quite clearly and very fundamentally from the scholars whose work do not enter into conversation with his. For instance, to my mind, this recent addition to the Routledge series "Narrative Theory and Culture" can be, and really should be, interestingly compared with Helen May Dennis's narratological study, *Native American Literature: Towards a Spatialized Reading* (2007)—also published by Routledge, though in their "Transnational Perspectives" series. However, Donahue does not cite this significant methodological forerunner. Dennis broke relatively new ground by setting aside the literary nationalist debates that dominated Indigenous studies in the early 2000s in order to privilege the narratological analysis of textual form over political and cultural content, a move perhaps most familiar to readers of *Transmotion* through the call made by David Treuer, in *Native American Fiction: A User's Manual* (2006), to reorient the literary analysis of Indigenous texts away from ethnography and towards a greater emphasis on aesthetics. The network of scholarly texts within which Donahue situates his work is characterized by other odd omissions. What he calls "cultural focalization" and "cosmopolitan ethics," for instance, resonate loudly with James Ruppert's *Mediation in Contemporary Native American Fiction* (1995), which is not cited (though Ruppert's less immediately relevant 2015 essay on James Welch's novel *The Heartsong of Charging Elk* is referenced). And while Donahue's modelling of Indigenous fiction through a non-Indigenous methodology bears some similarity to Catherine Rainwater's semiotic approach in *Dreams of Fiery Stars: The Transformations of Native American Fiction* (1999), he distinguishes his project from hers by (mis)identifying a focus in Rainwater's work on "storytelling as opposed to the narrative form itself" that, he claims, leads into issues of orality rather than written literature (22). Juxtaposed with this (to my ears) dissonant claim is the equally misguided account of Elvira Pulitano's *Toward a Native American Critical Theory* (2003) from which Donahue differentiates his work by describing Pulitano's critical model as one that excludes the work of non-Native critics, concluding from her book that "to ignore advances in critical

theory by western critics would force some critics (myself included) to reinvent the wheel" (22-23). This claim must appear strikingly odd to anyone who is familiar with the attacks on Pulitano's book made by Robert Warrior, Jace Weaver, and Craig Womack in *American Indian Literary Nationalism* (2006). Complementing these interpretations of Rainwater and Pulitano is Donahue's proposed alignment of his non-Indigenous project with that of American Indian literary separatism, exemplified by what Donahue claims is Craig Womack's endorsement of multiple "legitimate approaches to analyzing Native literary production" in *Red on Red* (1999)—a claim that radically minimizes the implications of Womack's sub-title, *Native American Literary Separatism* (Womack qtd. in Donahue, 15).

For readers of *Transmotion*, what will be most surprising and disappointing, given the explicit evocation of Gerald Vizenor's work in the title of this book, is Donahue's selection of the primary texts around which his chapters are organized. There is a complete absence of any extended treatment of Vizenor's narratives. Vizenor's concept of "survivance" features prominently in the formulation of this project and Donahue devotes a significant part of his introduction, "Notes Toward a Narrative Poetics of Survivance," to an explanation of how survivance intersects with his focus on the narratological analysis of narrative perspective, voice, and narrators. If there is any contemporary Indigenous author who experiments with perspective, voice, and literary narrators in provocative and truly innovative ways, it is Gerald Vizenor. Instead, Donahue devotes the main text of his book to chapters on each of: James Welch's *Fool's Crow* (1986) in the opening chapter, "Focalizing Survivance, Racializing Narratology" (and Donahue explains that his 2014 essay, published in *JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory*, on which this chapter is based, inspired the book project); Leslie Marmon Silko's *Gardens in the Dunes* (1999) in the second chapter, "Gendered Survivance and Intersectional Narratology"; and Joseph Boyden's *The Orenda* (2013) in the following chapter, "Rhetorical Narrative and Racially Charged Disclosure." The concluding and, to my mind, the most engaging chapter, "Naturalizing Unnatural Native Narrative" surveys the emerging domain of "unnatural" narratological theory and uses Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993) to illustrate his main points of critique concerning the non-Indigenous bias in current narratological deployments of the concept of the "un/natural." All of these novels Donahue terms "paradigmatic," though what paradigm they represent is not entirely clear. Unifying the book is a central concern with the political and aesthetic implications of the act of narrating, linked to what Donahue calls the "narrative transmission of cultural knowledge" (3). But each chapter explores the applicability of a specific branch of contemporary narratology to his chosen text. Here is the strength and equally the weakness of

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Donahue's project: despite his stated intention *not* to use literary texts illustratively, that is precisely where his selections lead. Indeed, he has set himself a rather easy challenge by pairing a theoretical narrative approach with a text that exemplifies that theory in rather superficial ways. Consequently, rather than demonstrating analytically how each text works, he describes the way that the texts model in their content particular theoretical features and ideas.

With admirable honesty, the book blurb promises exactly what is delivered:

Each chapter is read through the lens of a narrative theory – structuralist narratology, feminist narratology, rhetorical narratology, and unnatural narratology – in order to demonstrate how the formal structure of these narratives engage the political issues raised in the text. Additionally, each chapter shows how the inclusion of Native American/First Nations-authored narratives productively advance the theoretical work project of those narrative theories.

The ultimate objective is to show that an Indigenous textual corpus has significant benefits for the field of narrative theory. So, as I claimed at the outset, this is not an Indigenous Studies book. The project is definitively located in the field of narrative theory, as Donahue makes clear. For example, the feminist narratology used in connection with Silko follows from Susan Lanser's 1986 essay, "Toward a Feminist Narratology," and not from the insights offered by the vast body of work that constitutes the field of Native feminisms. Donahue opens the book with an invitation to start a conversation about relations between narratology and critical race theory, an invitation that is welcome—though not so much if what this exchange involves is, in fact, a debate over what Indigenous literatures can give to non-Indigenous narrative theory. So, when the book blurb claims that "each chapter shows how the inclusion of Native American/First Nations-authored narratives productively advance the theoretical work project of those narrative theories," a much more productive question for the present reviewer and, I imagine, for those working in the discipline of Indigenous Studies and on the achievements of Vizenor more specifically, is: how can narratology itself be "Indigenized?" Or, in other words, what might an Indigenous narratology look like? Donahue's book could be one place to start formulating an answer to this question.

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**Santee Frazier. *Aurum: Poems*. University of Arizona Press, 2019. 61 pp.**  
**ISBN: 9780816539628.** <https://uapress.arizona.edu/book/aurum>

The epigraph of *Aurum*, taken from Uruguayan political journalist and writer Eduardo Galeano's poem, "Los Nadies" ("The Nobodies"), introduces the lyrical subjects of Santee Frazier's (Cherokee Nation) latest poetry collection. These subaltern "nobodies" are "owners of nothing," who have no kin and are "nobody's children." They have even been rendered "nobodied" and "dying through life, screwed every which way" (Galeano 1991 73). According to Galeano, the interrelated forces of colonialism, genocide, and capitalist exploitation produce these othered, criminalized subjects: "Who are not but could be. /... Who do not appear in the history of the world, but in the police blotter of the local paper" (73). In his 1971 work, *Las Venas Abiertas de América Latina (Open Veins of Latin America)*, Galeano situates these nobodies in the long 600-year history of the colonization of the Americas. He shows how the "open veins" of Latin America—both in terms of flesh and of mineral ore—have been "transmuted" into Euro-American capital. He explains that colonial capitalism's transmutations work by brutally yoking both human and non-human systems to the "universal gearbox" of capital—"Everything: the soil, its fruits and its mineral-rich depths, the people and their capacity to work and to consume, natural resources and human resources" (1997, 2).

In *Aurum*, Latin for gold and from which the chemical symbol Au is drawn, Frazier lyricizes a colonial capitalist present that forcibly puts together ore and human bodies into the same totalizing system of capital accumulation. He populates this "afterworld" with nobodies who have transcorporeal ore bodies engaged in the "ritual of sunrise, of shovel, and the gearing mechanisms of progress," such as the man in the poem, "Ore Body," who smears "gold into brick" and "suck[s] the gold from a paper bag" (56; 4). If the book lacks any identifiable Indigenous cultural signifiers, it is because Frazier begins with the premise that genocide, removal, and erasure have nobodied so many Indigenous people. Frazier's collection of poetry attempts to respond to an almost hopeless situation: what are we left with when Native language, culture, and identity are stripped away? To Frazier, this question is not simply about accounting for the horrors of colonialism or capitalism. It is a representational problem: how do we represent nobodies as Indigenous subjects or paved city streets as Indigenous land without substituting stripped away cultural signifiers with racial tropes?

Taking up a concept developed by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin White Masks* (1952), the opening poem, "Lactification," explores the role that Euro-American colonial language

plays in transmuting the “open veins” of North America, in colonizing minds as well as bodies. The poem presents a lyrical image of a beaten body that has been taught “to take a switch across the arches.” As though giving advice to a colonial administrator or to a captain of a frontier fort, the poem instructs, “[s]trike behind his ear,” and uses the musical language of a whipping to describe the beaten body’s “forearms lashed and etched.” At the same time, the poem stages the body as an object of scientific study (or perhaps as a corpse in an autopsy), detailing a “[n]ose, misshapen, / fungal curds over a frown ribbed and chapped.” The language of scientific description cannot help but bleed into the language of colonial violence, where a “[n]ubbin” of wounded flesh only “sounds like a clavicle” and no longer resembles an anatomical body part—the body transformed into flesh. Like Fanon, Frazier is not just interested in representing the physical violence of racism and colonialism. Frazier’s nobodies are not helpless, tragic figures. Rather, he is more interested in how the “culling of melanin,” as a colonial and racial project, extends even into the psychological realm, to the level of perception and self-identity, by making available only a racialized “tale of wiry locks, hank of charred skin” (2).

In *Aurum*, Frazier departs from his more narrative-driven debut collection, *Dark Thirty* (2009), and more fully leverages the power of his language’s precise rhythm and sound to disrupt the violent logics of colonial language and to evoke the Indigenous places of his life not only in Oklahoma City (Frazier 2018, 42-43), but also in Albuquerque, NM, Muscogee, OK, and Syracuse, NY (2020, n.pag). He draws upon his experiences in these places to create the lyrical afterworlds of *Dark Thirty* and *Aurum*. However, where *Dark Thirty* takes us on a primarily narrative-focused tour of Indian Country, his latest collection progressively strips away story in favor of a soundscape of lyrical images. *Aurum* moves from the narrative impulse found in poems such as “Lactification,” “Ore Body,” and “Sun Perch” to the bare, sonic image fragments that constellate the last and longest poem, “Half-Life.” Accompanying the poems in the collection are illustrations by Jameson Chas Banks (Seneca-Cayuga Nation, Cherokee Nation), Micah Wesley (Muscogee [Creek] Nation, Kiowa Tribe), and Monty Little (Diné) that offer multiple portraits of the book’s nobodies and mirror the fragmentated and stripped-down quality of Frazier’s images. These portraits are striking; haunting and taunting alongside Frazier’s verse, they accentuate his lyrical style.

Frazier’s tight control of image and sound to render landscape places him in a poetic genealogy that includes Arthur Sze and Jon Davis, whom he worked with at the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA) in Santa Fe, but also, and perhaps especially, Richard Hugo. Both craft exquisitely detailed images of bleak landscapes to explore

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how the accumulated detritus of these places shapes individual subjects. Although Frazier's poems predominantly feature lonely and isolated voices, these voices belong to subjects who have adapted to these landscapes and who enjoy how "the hazy night air stank of burnt tar, / hamburger patties, and dumpsters" (22).

Frazier's allegorical persona, Mangled, first introduced in *Dark Thirty*, returns in Frazier's second collection and echoes fellow IAIA alumna Esther Belin's (Diné) persona, Ruby, in *From the Belly of My Beauty* (1999). Mangled is perhaps the loudest of *Aurum's* choir of nobodies and "embodies the struggle of Indigenous people who were left without a sense of identity, or a sense of culture and a sense of belonging to American society and culture" (Frazier 2018, 38). Mangled is no victim, however. He is one-part postindian trickster (who could belong in a Gerald Vizenor novel) and one-part vaudeville, a nobody straight out of the early twentieth century whose "oily iron" face has a "skillet shine" and who has "[n]o kin to call his own" (24). He sings racist Hank Williams songs and pantomimes "playing his ribs" like an accordion "thumb to pinkie, pressing the flesh between bone, foot tamping pavement" (14). For Frazier, Mangled equally embodies *Aurum's* distinctive lyrical qualities and imagery and is defined by an excess of trickster performativity. But what Frazier wants to emphasize is not just Mangled's visual pantomiming but also his "tune, his humming of the knife, the slow slimming of his lips to song"—the musical qualities of Mangled's performance itself (25).

In the associations of place that sound and image can provoke, Frazier sees the possibility—however partial and limited—of rendering and recuperating nobodied Indigenous subjects like Mangled. The fragmented images of "Half-Life" explore these associations of sight, sound, and smell, mapping out a landscape of Indigenous presence. The landscape that these images produce is nonetheless broken and disconnected by ongoing settler colonial violence, like a plat map that shows the checkerboarding of Cherokee lands after their allotment at the beginning of the twentieth century. Even still, Frazier gives us optimistic "glimpses" of Indigenous presence. We hear the sound of children "leap[ing] a puddle, / dome bellied— / sticky with pop— / plum-dark feet and ankles," even as an image of bodies "crammed through the windshield" of a "T-Bird bottomed-out / in a ditch" follows (30-31). The sound and smell of greasy food such as "[p]into beans, / salt meat melted into the juice" and "[c]an-shaped meat, / sliced, / fried in bacon grease" function as rez food signifiers of kin and community, even as they also function as signifiers of the "[b]ean-scum face" of a railroad locomotive (47). Industry and community in Frazier's landscape

are inseparable, and the industrial production of “grain makes everything smell fried.” Industry “is a bowl of beans smashed with mustard” (53).

The most striking feature of Frazier’s images are not visual; his images proceed first from his language’s sonic and even olfactory qualities, from vibrations of gospel on the radio, “[s]immering corn,” the “guzzle” of a water well, and the “chucking” of “grain toward chickens” (49). To understand the sonic grammar of Frazier’s images—especially the violent ones—you must listen to the “vowels echoing / off the carbon steel” of a head smashed into a desk (55). In fact, Frazier’s images prioritize these sensory qualities to counter overwhelmingly visual colonial representations of Native peoples. “Half-Life” concludes with a slide projection show of racist newspaper headlines and a scientific model of a human skeleton made possible through the genocide of Native peoples. Frazier uses the sound of his images to disrupt the visual colonial gaze of the slideshow. It is this colonial visuality that orders the textbook version of events, that says “your village was razed, grunts smothered, / children left to twirl legless in scorched maize” (61).

*Aurum* is not just an ambitious collection that confronts important political and aesthetic questions about giving voice to Indigenous experience amid the ongoing violence of genocide, settler colonialism, erasure, and capitalist exploitation. It also renders in vivid detail the grounded reality of everyday Indigenous struggle and survival. Frazier’s poems are full of (painfully) exquisite language and searing imagery that offers a truly original poetics of place. The strength of his collection may be in its uncompromising dedication to the power of image and sound to convey the sensory complexity of Indigenous landscapes, to move beyond the colonial dominance of the visual domain, and to weave together other modes of experiencing place. *Aurum* is an enormous achievement and powerfully showcases Frazier’s distinctive and profound lyrical approach. This is a collection full of possibility.

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**Jenny L. Davis. *Talking Indian: Identity and Language Revitalization in the Chickasaw Renaissance*. The University of Arizona Press, 2019. 170 pp. ISBN: 9780816540969. <https://uapress.arizona.edu/book/talking-indian>**

In *Talking Indian: Identity and Language Revitalization in the Chickasaw Renaissance*, Jenny L. Davis discusses and reflects upon the dissertation fieldwork she undertook with and in the Chickasaw Nation in south-central Oklahoma. Members of the Chickasaw Nation often colloquially refer to speaking their language, Chikashshanompa', as "Talking Indian." In this 170-page adaptation of her dissertation, Davis explores the "the intersections of Indigenous community, identity, and language" by asking the principal question "what identities are being negotiated within the Chickasaw Nation in the context of language revitalization?" (4; 27). On both a practical level and a scholarly level, Davis's *Talking Indian* makes important and timely contributions to several fields, such as language revitalization and reclamation. People working at a community level to support Indigenous languages may find Davis's insights useful and relevant when reflecting upon the language revitalization projects and initiatives in which they are involved. Likewise, scholars in related fields may enjoy the ways in which Davis advances discussions not only about the relationship between identity and language, but also how language revitalization can be a lens through which to view and understand Indigenous cultural renaissances.

Davis argues that within the Chickasaw Nation there has been a "shift in the conceptualization of speaking a heritage language from something that someone *does* or a desirable skillset that someone *has*, to something that someone *is*" (28.). In this understanding, for someone who is Chickasaw, speaking their heritage language is not simply a practice they engage in; rather, speaking their language is now recognized as a core part of their identity. Throughout the book, Davis deftly interweaves her practical and theoretical discussions of, and arguments for, the importance and implications of orienting this ideological shift within the entire historical, present, social, political, geographic, and linguistic context of the Chickasaw Nation. For this reason, I urge people to read *Talking Indian* as an integrated whole. Likewise, I feel any attempt on my part to summarize Davis's claims in a short book review runs the risk of decontextualizing them as well as inadvertently rending their dynamism. For this reason, I choose to briefly highlight several elements of Davis's argument that may be of particular interest or utility to people participating in community language revitalization work or undertaking related research.

Early in her discussion, Davis positions herself as a Chickasaw Nation citizen who grew up several hours' drive from the Nation and proposes that both historical and present diaspora and de-diasporization of Chickasaw citizens contributes, in part, to the formation of Chickasaw identity as it relates to an ongoing Chickasaw Renaissance (13). Davis reflects on how, during her research, her own identity as a person of Chickasaw descent and a Chickasaw Nation citizen, coupled with her roles as linguist researcher and non-fluent speaker of Chikashshanompa', mitigated several challenges she may have otherwise faced, or threats she may have been perceived by fellow community members as posing. Ultimately, she explains that these intersecting identities helped situate her as a type of "language affiliate" and someone connected to the language who did not have any recognized expertise as a Speaker within the community (50).

In this vein, Davis addresses the importance of delineating the differences between Speakers and speakers of Chickasaw, explaining that the former (capitalized) refers to a person who speaks the language fluently as their first language, and the latter (lowercase) refers to anyone who produces language in a given context (5). It is important to note that Davis's arguments in support of capitalizing Speaker align with existing movements in related fields to capitalize the first letter in Elders as both a sign of respect and as a way to designate Elders as a category of recognized knowledge holders within their communities.

Davis argues that making the distinction between Speakers and speakers is not only important with regards to marking linguistic ability, but also because it represents specific social, political, and economic implications in terms of how language ability is valued in and by the Chickasaw community (5). As such, the process of "identifying and evaluating Speakers of Chickasaw" is performed, and thus validated, by Chickasaw Speakers themselves instead of by outside academic "experts" (41). It is useful to note how this process subverts the "paradox of expertise" in that members of the language community themselves decide what criteria determine expertise (fluency) in their language and who has sufficient expertise to be viewed as a Speaker (41). The reasoning for making this distinction also reflects an underlying argument that Davis makes throughout the book, which is that (ethnolinguistic) identity is—and perhaps should be—determined by and within the Chickasaw community and not by, or in response to, outsiders or their own expectations or evaluations.

Although Davis regularly acknowledges the complex relationship between Native identity and language and cultural revitalization, she also highlights that language is only one possible contributing element to Chickasaw identity (19). Likewise, Davis

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confronts wider discussions and (negative) perceptions that Indigenous individuals who can speak their heritage language are more authentically or legitimately Indigenous than those who can't: "speaking or not speaking the Chickasaw language, on its own, neither grants nor negates being Chickasaw, but it can, for some, serve as a point of solidifying it" (22). However, involvement with Chickasaw language (whether as a Speaker or someone allied with language revitalization activities) often establishes a certain level of perceived cultural capital and prestige for those involved (26). This perceived capital has also led to increased economic capital within the community, since "if access to economic capital was a primary factor in the shift of Chickasaw to English, then economic capital must also be present to motivate a shift back towards using Chickasaw" (59). For this reason, the Chickasaw Nation has hired Speakers to work as language specialists within different organizations and departments in the community (59).

In her conclusion, Davis explains that, as a whole, her discussion illustrates how the Chickasaw Nation is actively disrupting the "linguistic double-bind" that many Native American communities come up against (144). This "double-bind" has been created through the coupling of: (a) assimilationist language policies that drastically halted the transmission of Indigenous languages with; (b) the development of ethnolinguistic ideologies that equate Indigenous language fluency with authenticity (and thereby de-authenticate people who are not Speakers) (144). Davis uses language revitalization as a lens through which to better understand Chickasaw identity as well as how Chickasaw people are leading a Chickasaw language and cultural renaissance—which necessarily entails working to profoundly disrupt this "double-bind"—on their own terms.

I find relatively little to critique about this book, but I anticipate individual readers may identify sections where they would welcome a more detailed discussion and reflection from Davis. I write this not as a critique of the depth of Davis's discussion or the length of the book, but rather to underscore how this book is relevant to a diverse pool of people (both academic and non) who may welcome further discussions of certain topics that specifically relate to their own work, research, and lived experiences. To end, *Talking Indian: Identity and Language Revitalization in the Chickasaw Renaissance* offers readers an opportunity for both scholarly and practical reflection.

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## Contributors

JEFFERY U. DARENSBOURG is interested in the knowledge of flora, fauna, and people his Atakapa-Ishak ancestors carried with them and wishes to connect this sort of Louisiana-specific knowledge to the knowledge urban Natives such as himself have in negotiating Indigeneity, within the contemporary milieu of city life in our current social and economic climate. He is an enrolled member and tribal councilperson of the Atakapa-Ishak Nation of mixed Native and Louisiana Creole ancestry. His work explores the intersections of cultural studies, mixed ethnicity, and Indigeneity.

FRANCISCO DELGADO is a writer and teacher based out of Queens. His research focuses on Native American/Indigenous literatures and can be found in *Memory Studies*, *The CEA Critic*, *Transmotion*, and *Teaching American Literature: Theory and Practice*. He is a proud Chamorro and, through his maternal grandmother, a member of the Tonawanda Band of Seneca. His chapbook of flash fiction, *Adolescence, Secondhand* was published by Honeysuckle Press in 2018.

LAURA MARIA DE VOS is a lecturer in the American Indian Studies Department and the English Department at UW Seattle and in the American & Ethnic Studies Department at UW Bothell. They graduated from the University of Washington English Department in Seattle with the dissertation "Spirals of Transformation: Turtle Island Indigenous Social Movements and Literatures," advised by Dian Million (AIS) and Habiba Ibrahim (English). Born in Nicaragua from Belgian parents, Laura mostly grew up in Belgium. They received their MA in English Literature and Linguistics and their MBA in Cultural Management from the University of Antwerp, Belgium. They also did selected graduate course work in Gender Studies at the University of Utrecht, the Netherlands. Laura initiated and was the Research Assistant for the Simpson Center for the Humanities supported interdisciplinary research cluster "Developing a Graduate Certificate in American Indian and Indigenous Studies"; the resulting Graduate Certificate is now being offered (since January 2020). They are also an Assistant Editor for [Process: Journal for Multidisciplinary Undergraduate Scholarship](#).

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LISA TATONETTI is a Florida native who lives in a fabulous 1920s house that's in ongoing need of renovation with Samson the wonder cat. While she will always miss the ocean, she has been enchanted by the tallgrass, wildflowers, and deer of the Konza prairie. If you come visit campus in the spring, she may drag you along to a 5am viewing of the elusive Prairie chicken--be warned.

Lisa studies and teaches the texts and contexts of Queer Indigenous literatures. She is co-editor of *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Contemporary Two-Spirit Literature* (University of Arizona Press, 2011) and author of *The Queerness of Native American Literature* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014). In addition to her work in these areas, she focuses on Multiethnic American literatures, 20th-21st century North American literature, and is a proud member of the Cultural Studies track.