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Transmotion

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Special Issue – Transgender, Two-Spirit and Nonbinary Indigenous Literatures, guest edited by Kai Minosh Pyle and Danne Jobin

"Sovereign Bodies", Elijah Forbes (Odawa; copyright reserved by the artist)
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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 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

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Editorial

Yes, you're right, it's about time! It feels like so much has been blamed on Covid19 that it's become a cliché, and we couldn't even specifically point to a way in which the pandemic has slowed us down. We're sure we're not alone in saying that this last year has been busier than ever, though. Is it an institutional thing? I mean they know where we are at every hour of the day, right…? Anyway, we're going to keep this really brief so that you can head straight for the good stuff.

We're really delighted to have worked with Kai Minosh Pyle and Danne Jobin on this special issue devoted to Transgender, Two-Spirit, and Nonbinary Indigenous Literatures. They have brought together a fantastic line-up of authors and subject matter, which they introduce perfectly in their standalone introduction—so we won't do a chapter breakdown here. We will, however, just note the one additional article in this issue. Cassandra Krauss's analysis of David Treuer's *Prudence* offers reading of the ways the novel collapses time and distance to examine the continuities of colonial violence in the context of international warfare. Treating the novel as Indigenous war/historical fiction, but exploring the ways Treuer unpicks and unsettles generic convention, it makes, we believe, a strong intervention.

As ever, our team of review editors have put together an exceptional list of reviews, and we are grateful as ever to all those who work with us behind the scenes to put the journal together and make the journal a valuable contribution to the field. This year, those people include the amazing speakers at the 42nd annual *American Indian Workshop*, organized by James Mackay and held in collaboration with *Transmotion*. The conference was a huge success—deeply thought provoking, moving, and great fun. There will be a standalone special issue in the not-distant future, and keep an eye out for announcements about further online events. In the meantime… enjoy!

As a reminder to our readers, *Transmotion* is open access, thanks to the generous sponsorship of the University of Kent: all content is fully available on the open internet with no paywall or institutional access required, and it always will be. We are published under a Creative Commons 4.0 license, meaning in essence that any articles or reviews may be copied and re-used provided that the source and author is acknowledged. We strongly believe in this model, which makes research and academic insight available and useable for the widest possible community. We also believe in keeping to the highest academic standards: thus all articles are double-blind peer reviewed by at least

two reviewers, and each issue approved by an editorial board of senior academics in the field (listed in the Front Matter of the full PDF and in the online "About" section).

David Stirrup August 2021
David Carlson
Theodore C. Van Alst
James Mackay
Bryn Skibo-Birney

Transgender, Two-Spirit and Nonbinary Indigenous Literatures

Introduction

KAI MINOSH PYLE AND DANNE JOBIN

There is a significant history of depictions of queer and transgender themes in Native American literature, especially since the Native American Literary Renaissance. Writers such as Louise Erdrich, Gerald Vizenor, and Paula Gunn Allen, among many others, have grappled with the complexities of gender and sexuality in Indigenous contexts in their writing. In the past decade, there has also been an increasing number of contemporary transgender, Two-Spirit, and nonbinary Indigenous writers who have published creative work. In recognition of the burst of both creative and scholarly writing that has emerged in the past ten years, we wanted to gather contributions that would specifically consider transgender lives in Native American and broader Indigenous studies contexts. This special issue of *Transmotion* is intended to help address some of the gaps that exist in the scholarly study of queer, trans, and Two-Spirit Indigenous literatures.

Literature and literary analysis have been central to the development of queer Indigenous studies in the past decade. While the scholarly origins of the current field of queer Indigenous studies are often dated to the 2011 publication of the anthology *Queer Indigenous Studies* and the 2010 special issue of *GLQ* titled *Sexuality, Nationality, and Indigeneity*, several years earlier in 2008 there had been a prior special issue of *Studies in American Indian Literatures* focusing on queer figures in Indigenous literature. All three collections dealt with literature as a central facet of their

investigations of queer Indigenous life and experiences. Among the monographs on queer Indigenous studies that followed these three publications, literature remained a prevalent concern, particularly in the work of Mark Rifkin and Lisa Tatonetti. Analyzing both works by queer Indigenous writers as well as queer figures in writing by non-queer Indigenous authors, these academic works made a strong case for the centrality of literature to the analysis of queer Indigeneity as well as the centrality of queerness to Indigenous literature.

These scholars have made the case that gender and sexuality must be attended to in any consideration of Indigenous realities. Indeed, the establishment and policing of binary genders consolidates settler logic and echoes other sets of restrictive classifications. Joanne Barker states that "gender as a category of analysis stabilizes and universalizes binary oppositions at other levels, including sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, and nationalism" (Critically Sovereign 13), while Qwo-Li Driskill, Daniel Heath Justice, Deborah Miranda and Lisa Tatonetti reclaim "sovereign erotics" as a political and spiritual act that "relates our bodies to our nations, traditions, and histories" and whose suppression derives from settler colonisation (Qwo-Li Driskill et. al. S*overeign Erotics* 3). Driskill further points out that the heteronormativity of patriarchal gender systems "undermines struggles for decolonization and sovereignty, and buoys the powers of colonial governance" (*Queer Indigenous Studies* 19). As such, critical attention to sexualities and gender expression constitute a crucial nexus for Indigenous studies.

Despite their disciplinary positioning within women's studies, gender studies and queer studies, trans studies sit somewhat uncomfortably within these fields. Far from being a recent development, transgender realities have long been either obscured or else seen as an appendage to other concerns regarding sexual orientation and gender. Cáel M. Keegan frames trans studies as a truth that cannot be heard

("Getting Disciplined" 4) and defines them as "a story that seeks to illuminate the experiences of transgender people and give an account of our claim to sex and gender, without which we cannot fully appear as other than a problem in someone else's narrative" (4). In order to break free from models that will always treat trans lives as an afterthought, trans studies must develop their own epistemological frameworks (5). Indeed, trans is much more than an allegory for queerness, anchored as it is in the material realities of embodied experience. In addition, trans studies ask whether "bodies simply are certain genders/sexes unquestionably" in ways that "map neatly onto the operations of power" (7). With this in mind, trans Indigenous studies are likely to re-examine and challenge some of the premises that queer Indigenous studies take as a given. What is more, transgender people's experience of embodiment is shifting as medical care becomes more accessible and the discourse around genderqueer, genderfluid and nonbinary identities gains a wider audience. How do Two-Spirit individuals both adopt and resist some of the signifiers mapped onto trans bodies? How can we discuss access to hormones and surgery and the ways in which these have created new possibilities for transgender embodiment that perhaps break away from older categories of winkte, nádleehi, or māhū without reifying questions of authenticity? How important/useful is it to try and maintain continuity with such categories?

While we use "transgender" and "trans" as interchangeable umbrella terms that can encompass, but do not necessarily coincide with, other labels such as 2SQ and nonbinary, contributors may use different terminology. Vocabulary evolves at a fast pace and there are cases where the authors discussed by our contributors use terms to describe themselves that are less appropriate in the context of scholarly discussion (Max Wolf Valerio's identity as a transsexual, for instance). Indigenous communities also have distinct understandings of gender and sexuality and some literary depictions may

not fit comfortably within the categories of "transgender" or "cisgender." Queer Mohawk scholar Marie Laing has written that there is also often significant pressure placed on Two-Spirit, queer, and trans Indigenous people to define what Two-Spirit means in an "easy answer" or a brief soundbite (*Reframing Two-Spirit* 35). We have aimed to handle these complexities appropriately without restricting the full range of identifications. As Laing notes, while definitions are important, becoming tangled up in them can sometimes prevent us from getting to deeper and more urgent conversations.

In this issue, we seek to celebrate and interrogate the exciting emergence of many new trans Indigenous authors, but we also want to recognize that trans Indigenous literature does not begin in the 2010s. Lisa Tatonetti's article, for instance, reminds us of a longer history in the trajectory of Max Wolf Valerio's literary career. Often older records of trans Indigenous writing appear in forms we might not expect. Aiyyana Maracle, whose work has been amplified by younger trans artists like Morgan M. Page and Arielle Twist, was a prolific performance artist in the 1990s, and her article "A Journey in Gender," which critiqued popular Two-Spirit discourse for centering non-transgender experiences, was published over twenty years ago. Diné/Oneida artist Carrie House created the film *I Am*, about queer and trans Indigenous workers, in 1997, while nonbinary Cree filmmaker Thirza Cuthand released her first film, *Lessons in Baby Dyke Theory*, in 1995. Undoubtedly there are many more of these earlier trans Indigenous creators who have yet to come to the attention of the mainstream, whether the Indigenous literary mainstream or the trans literary mainstream. Considerations of more recent work by trans Indigenous artists are enriched by placing them in the context of those who have come before.

Trans Indigenous studies have specific elements to bring not only to Indigenous studies as a whole, but to the field of queer studies as well. For one, Two-Spirit,

transgender and nonbinary Indigenous North American writers represent an exciting juncture in Indigenous literature that articulates new ways of relating and building community. Queer expressions of gender challenge preconceived notions of belonging to outline alternative forms of kinship. More specifically, the articles included in this special issue make it clear that trans people take on very different roles and identities depending on the context in which they evolve, and that their gender identity requires them to renegotiate their positionality and relationships within their communities. How do trans people's lives shed light on family dynamics and the viability of wider communal networks? Another important aspect of trans Indigenous studies is the extent to which the policing of gender and the regulation of monogamous heterosexuality have been part and parcel of the colonial settler project. Kim Tallbear denounces "compulsory settler sex, family and nation" ("Making Love and Relations" 151), as well as "heteronormative settler sexuality categories," as extraneous impositions on Indigenous bodies. This idea is complicated by the Eurocentric impulse to romanticise traditional Native American and First Nation views of gender, which tends to obscures the frequent discrimination of queer subjects by their families and reservation communities as well as the racism and fetishisation that Indigenous individuals face in the dating world. Billy-Ray Belcourt reminds us that "Reserves can be incubators of transphobia and homophobia as a symptom of the Christianizing project carried out by settlers for decades" (*A History of My Brief Body* 111). Thus, trans Indigenous identities often strike a precarious balance between the traditional gender roles disrupted by settler colonialism and more globalised contemporary articulations of gender. These two axes—the definition of transgender identities and the relationships that are disrupted and reimagined in the wake of coming out—run through all of the contributions to this Special Issue.

Exploring the life's work of one of the first trans Indigenous writers, Lisa Tatonetti's analysis of Max Wolf Valerio demonstrates how masculinity tends to be assimilated into a marker of whiteness by Natives and non-Natives alike and interpreted as a negation of the Indigeneity written onto the body. Valerio wrenches masculinity out of the constraints of settler normativity and colonial shame as his transition enables him to draw a joyful, exuberant felt experience from his changing physicality and repair the relational fractures that often affect the lives of queer subjects.

James Mackay tackles the next generation of trans writers in his analysis of digital media's role in contemporary poetry. Applying innovative methodologies to Smokii Sumac's interplay between digital platforms and poetic praxis, he discusses how social media informs trans Indigenous people's experience of gender and describes some of the techniques Sumac employs to resist fragmentation, such as incorporating natural spaces and ceremonial elements into his work.

"Hunger for Culture" represents the coming together of queer/2SQ/trans Indigenous performers Clementine Bordeaux, Kenneth R. Ramos, and Arianna Taylor to offer a unique reflection on the premiere of Larissa Fasthorse's *Urban Rez* production in 2016. Through this rare opportunity to bring their whole queer and Indigenous selves to the stage for a community-focused performance, the co-authors position *Urban Rez* as a disruption of settler logic and a form of visual sovereignty.

Lee Schweninger explores Sydney Freeland's reflections on nádleehí identity in the film *Drunktown's Finest*, a term that lacks specificity in its definition as a "third gender" but nevertheless provides a way for nádleehí to connect to one another. While heteronormativity is framed as a colonial cliché—albeit one that is often reproduced by male Navajo leaders—trans identity enables modes of belonging beyond the biological family through other forms of mutuality and dynamics of interdependence.

In Maddee Clark's reading of Australian Indigenous trans literary accounts, the terms "sistergirl" and "brotherboy" articulate a nuanced and communal relationship to gender embodiment that problematizes western understandings of queer and trans identities. As Clark argues, such community self-definitions and "desire-based" frameworks offer alternative narratives that oppose "damage-centred" research that tends to treat transgender and Indigenous lives in damaging ways.

June Scudeler frames Tommy Pico's Poetry quartet (*IRL*, *Nature Poem*, *Junk* and *Feed*) as a contemporary epic that artfully combines pop culture with theory and Kumeyaay song tradition with urban Indigeneity into an intersectional, queer poetry cycle tracing the seasonality of romantic relationships. Through the character of Teebs, Pico effectively writes his own epic until he reaches the point where Teebs, "becoming himself through his various communities," is no longer defined by relational loss.

Many of the themes that contributors discuss in these pieces are also common themes emerging in Indigenous literatures more broadly. Bordeaux, Ramos, and Taylor's focus on community-driven approaches to Native American performance and Clark's depiction of how Indigenous Australian trans, sistergirl, and brotherboy individuals resist damage-centered research are two examples of how concerns within Indigenous communities and literary studies are refracted through trans and gender-specific contexts. Scudeler and Mackay's exploration of the works of Tommy Pico and Smokii Sumac likewise take up the issue of digital spaces and popular culture that have come to the fore of much present-day Indigenous literature and art. One thing these contributions reveal, then, is the ways trans Indigenous literatures are very much intertwined with broader Indigenous issues. At the same time, they also remind us that their specificity as trans is important. For instance, Tatonetti's reading of Max Wolf Valerio's oeuvre asserts that the transness, or the non-cisness, of Valerio's Indigenous masculinity has important ramifications for reading his work. The interplay between

trans-specificity and broader Indigenous contexts is one area that we might suggest as a fruitful starting point for future investigations of trans Indigenous literatures.

Far from attempting to set any definitive parameters on what trans Indigenous studies might look like, we offer this special issue as an invitation in hopes that more scholars might take up these questions. This issue only brushes the surface of the vast possibilities that arise in thinking *trans* and *Indigenous* and *literature* together. With numerous trans Indigenous writers in the United States and Canada gaining acclaim in recent years—Jas M. Morgan, Arielle Twist, Janet Mock, Lady Dane Figueroa Edidi, to name a few—there is certainly an ever increasing body of literature to work from. Furthermore, beyond Anglophone North America artists such as Dan Taulapapa McMullin, Yuki Kihara, and Amaranta Gómez Regalado have made waves and even challenged the categories of "transgender" and "cisgender" altogether from Indigenous perspectives. We hope that this issue may open up conversations that span the full geographical and temporal reaches of transgender Indigenous literatures in order to more deeply address central questions in Indigenous studies, trans studies, and beyond.

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Joyful Embodiment: Felt Theory and Indigenous Trans Perspectives in the Work of Max Wolf Valerio

LISA TATONETTI

> As I enter my new life, I realize with awakening joy that the ground underneath me has shifted, and finally I am free—to dream and love and to become.
>
> —Max Wolf Valerio, "The Enemy Is Me"

In this epigraph, Blackfoot/Latinx writer Max Wolf Valerio speaks a story of possibility, a story of becoming. Throughout Valerio's body of work, the knowledge of what it means to become who you are, become who you have always been, is marked as a particular type of joy that is held in the body. Numerous Indigenous writers and filmmakers share literary and documentary evidence of somatic exchange serving as possibility, as transformative conduit: they show how Indigenous people create and extend survivance practices through bodily encounter—in singing, in drumming, in praying, in fishing, in fasting, in walking, in writing, in dreaming, in dancing, in making films, in making art, in making out, in making love, and in the felt theory that arises from those embodied avenues of intellectual exchange. These artists return, again and again, how Indigenous knowledges are archived in the body.

Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million offers a particularly fruitful articulation of these exchanges when she argues for affect theory as an important paradigm for engaging Indigenous politics and literatures. In *Therapeutic Nations*, she explains: "I find it immensely important to put an analysis of affect and emotion, a felt theory, back

into our quest to understand both classic colonialism and our present in neoliberal governance" (30). Importantly, Million connects felt theory to Indigenous people's creative output. She maintains "imagination, that effort to see the future in the present," like activism and "good social analysis," has "the ability to incite, as in arouse, *as in feel,* to make relations" (31). Here, then, the affective interactions that generate felt theory are active *processes* rather than singular disconnected entities or one-time activities, and they are, as well, tied to relationality. Cherokee theorist Daniel Heath Justice explains that to claim and form kinship—or "to make relations" in Million's terms—is integral to Indigenous literatures, which encompass particular "ways of thinking about Indigenous belonging, identities and relationships" (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 27). These felt knowledges and affective relations, as I argue elsewhere, present a useful framework for Indigenous narrative, offering a grammar for the ways in which bodily knowledges are experienced and shared among Indigenous people and within Indigenous cosmologies.[1] And, while affective knowledges exist widely across Indigenous texts and contexts, I turn in this special issue to how, when used to read Valerio's essay and autobiography, felt theory reveals embodied ruptures and cultural dislocation/disavowal, or what Million terms "colonialism as a *felt*, affective relationship" (*Therapeutic Nations* 46). At the same time, this essay highlights the ways, in Valerio's stories, felt knowledges offer a map of becoming and a lived route to survivance, healing, and joy.

One of the earliest trans Indigenous people writing in English, Max Wolf Valerio, across all of his texts, represents his experiences of—and others' reactions to—his sex and gender presentations as relational, highly affective processes. Valerio's published works range from pre-transition meditations on Indigenous butch identity in the landmark 1981 collection *This Bridge Called My Back* to two books of experimental poetry—*Animal Magnetism* (1984) and *The Criminal* (2019)—to discussions of his post-

transition experiences in documentaries like Monika Treut's short *Max* (1991)—which was incorporated into Treut's full-length *Female Misbehavior* (1992)—Bestor Cram and Candice Schermerhorn's *You Don't Know Dick: Courageous Hearts of Transsexual Men* (1996), Treut's *Gendernauts: A Journey Through Shifting Identities* (1999), and, more recently, Chase Joynt's *Framing Agnes* (2019).[2] Valerio's best-known work is undoubtedly his Lambda-nominated memoir, *The Testosterone Files: My Hormonal and Social Transformation from Female to Male* (2006), which Reid Lodge situates as part of a small group of early twenty-first century trans autobiographies that "offer radical alternatives to medical discourses of trans identity that denied trans agency and self-interpretation" ("Trans Sites of Self Exploration").[3] The first book by a trans Indigenous person, *The Testosterone Files*, as I'll show, chronicles the affective resonance of Valerio's movement to and through transition as a felt experience of both colonialism and joy.

While Valerio has since had other publications, films, and artistic projects, of particular interest to readers of this special issue would be "Exile: Vision Quest at the Edge of Identity," a piece that directly engages intersections of Indigeneity and trans experiences in relation to his return to the Kainai Nation Reserve in 2008 after a 22-year absence.[4] An excerpt of "Exile" was published in the 2010 "International Queer Indigenous Voices" special issue of *Yellow Medicine River*, a publication that was one of a cluster that marked the contemporary rise of scholarly work in Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous studies (2SQI) in the first decade of the twenty-first century and the beginning of the second. Notably, Valerio published in landmark texts that serve as bookmarks for queer Indigenous literatures and theories—*This Bridge* marking the era in which some of the first overtly queer Indigenous literature was published, and "International Queer Indigenous Voices" marking the twenty-first century rise of Queer Indigenous studies and proliferation of 2SQI artistic production.[5] Yet, surprisingly,

Valerio's work has received sparse critical attention: a handful of essays consider his poetry, essay, or autobiography and, among, these, his place as an Indigenous author often goes unrecognized. With this in mind, I want to acknowledge the import of Valerio's work—*The Testosterone Files* particularly—to 2SQI studies in terms of both his publication history and his engagement with what we can now term felt theory. Valerio directly engages the felt experience of colonialism by highlighting how, despite their subversion of cishet gender regimes, trans masculinities can be interpolated into settler understandings of sex and gender by both Native and non-Native people.

Embodied Knowledge in "My Mother's Voice, the Way I Sweat"

Valerio's writing and film work spans a time of radical change in expressions of queer of color and trans identifications in literature, film, memoir, and the public sphere. Valerio came out as a lesbian in 1975 at the age of eighteen and began reading poetry in the lesbian feminist scene in the mid-1970s at the University of Colorado. He explains in an interview with Trans studies scholar/poet Trace Peterson, "there was a lesbian caucus and women's liberation coalition, and so that's how I first connected" (qtd. in Peterson, "Becoming a Trans Poet," 532) He then moved to San Francisco where he studied at the Naropa Institute with Allen Ginsberg. It was in the vibrant arts community of San Francisco that he met Gloria Anzaldúa.

Valerio began publishing in the 1980s, during a crucial period of political and literary visibility for queer folks of color. Anzaldúa, a major figure in that movement, invited him to contribute to *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981). This first collection of literature by woman of color, which Anzaldúa co-edited with Cherríe Moraga, included five openly queer Indigenous writers. Valerio's essay in *This Bridge*, "My Mother's Voice, the Way I Sweat," is a precursor of his later autobiographical work: in both his memoir and his pre- and post-transition essays, he bluntly speaks his mind, challenges

romanticized images of queer and/or Indigenous cultures, and consistently pushes against tacitly accepted gender expectations, both cis and non-cis, both settler and Indigenous.[6] In a period where many queer Indigenous artists were writing about the importance of reclaiming the place of queer peoples within their nations, and at times sometimes romanticizing Indigeneity in the process, Valerio instead poses a strongly worded *critique* about how gender circulates on his reserve.

More specifically, Valerio offers a lesbian feminist perspective that overtly challenges the gender expectations of his Kainai community, writing as someone who grew up returning to the reserve with his family yearly, inheriting his mother's ties to land, family, and community: ties that he marks as particularly affective. Valerio explains that his mother's first language was Blackfoot and that his great-grandfather was a holy man named Makwyiapi, or Wolf Old Man ("'It's In My Blood, My Face'" 42-43). Specifically, he narrates lines of kinship and speaks to the relevance Indigenous tradition had to him as he came of age. He describes the overwhelming experience of his first sweat at sixteen as "so miraculous . . . it was as though God appeared before me and walked about and danced" (43). As a young activist, Valerio joined the American Indian Movement and visited Wounded Knee during the 1968 siege. He explains, "There was a time . . . when I was so angry so proud I wanted so much to reclaim my *language* the symbols and sacred gestures the land" ("'It's In My Blood, My Face'" 41, italics/spacing in original). The doubtful "but now?" that follows this statement signals his troubled response to the normative behavioral expectations he encountered during a several-month stay on his reserve in southern Alberta in his early twenties.

Valerio bluntly frames this 1977 trip as a moment of troubling realization: "I went back to the reserve for two months traditional cultures are conservative and this one is patriarchal" ("'It's In My Blood, My Face'" 41). Discussing how gender expectations

can be used to constrain, Valerio problematizes interpretations of tradition, using the Sundance as a point of entry. He recounts a discussion with his mother in which she noted the holy woman had been chosen to open the ceremony because "she has only been with her husband and never any other man and it makes her a virgin of sorts" (41). Of this, Valerio asks, "What does it mean that it's a holy *woman* that sets up the Okan [Sun Dance]? and why does it make her holy that only one man has touched her?" (41). He questions whether the woman is holy because of her fealty to her husband—"because she has been a good little piece of property to that one man"—or because of women's power in Kainai culture—"a hearkening back to earlier matriarchal times (41)? By citing two potentially contradictory readings, Valerio alludes to the fact that gendered hierarchies—as opposed to gender complementarity—can arise in certain spaces deemed "traditional." Moreover, Valerio's questions suggest that heteropatriarchal norms can be instantiated and regulated under the guise of tradition, a fact highlighted by contemporary scholars in 2SQI studies. Two-Spirit Métis/Anishinaabe scholar Kai Pyle notes that "While it is admirable that people are concerned with addressing gendered colonization, we must take care to question where tropes [about Indigenous gender roles] come from and what purposes they serve" ("Reclaiming Traditional Gender Roles" 111). In addition, Driftpile Cree poet/theorist Billy-Ray Belcourt comments that tradition:

> is a sort of affective glue that sticks some objects together, sticks us to bodies and to ideas we often do not know—conversion points that make something or someone traditional through proximity or performance. Here, a politics of tradition refers to the ways tradition produces and deproduces some corporeal forms, how some bodies pass below and beyond the aegis of the senses and, in this, sidestep theory's ocular reach and thus disturb the traditional itself. ("A Poltergeist Manifesto" 29)

When experiencing the reserve as a butch lesbian, Valerio locates the queer body as a disruption of the sort Belcourt describes—a fact evident in his description of standing outside gender expectations. This fissure aligns, as well, with what Justice terms a relational "rupture, a word that invariably refers to violence to bodies: human, geological, political" (*Why Indigenous Literature Matter* 186). Ruptures sever relationship and deny kinship, a fracture mirrored in Valerio's discussion of the silence he felt compelled to keep about his queerness. He comments, "I am gay. Perhaps in the old days, in some way or other, I could have fit in there. But today, my lesbianism has become a barrier between myself and my people. . . . It is hard to be around other people talking about their lives and not be able to talk about your own in the same way. It causes a false and painful separateness" ("'It's In My Blood, My Face'" 39). At this moment in Valerio's life, "tradition" serves as a boundary rather than a teaching, and the gender expectations of his nation a potential barrier to his full inclusion in his Blackfoot community. As such, Valerio refuses a vision of Indigeneity in which being queer, trans, and/or what many people ten-plus-years later would term Two Spirit, allows for a seamless integration of gendered, sexual, and/or Indigenous identifications at a particularly early moment in Indigenous literary history. This contrasts distinctly with work from writers like Maurice Kenny (Mohawk) who, along with other queer Indigenous poets and fiction writers of the period, was trying to recoup a queer Indigenous history and reclaim that space in the present.[7]

With this in mind, we can look toward how the text overtly wrestles with the ways the author's perception of settler gender norms impact the felt experience of queer Indigeneity. Valerio depicts gender disparities and cishet normativity as factors that potentially splinter his identification with Blackfoot culture: "that is why I sometimes don't want to think about being Indian why I sometimes could really care less these days it's sad" ("'It's In My Blood, My Face'" 41). As Pyle asserts, the point

is not whether or not something is "traditional," but whether gender practices are harmful in the present. Pyle explain, "Regardless of the fact that these may have been part of Indigenous gender roles in the past . . . they are contiguous with heteropatriarchy to the extent that they may be complicit in its perpetuation" ("Reclaiming Traditional Gender Roles" 115). Faced with just such damaging heteropatriarchal narratives, Valerio describes his pre-transition queerness, not as joy, but as "one of the barriers between myself and the reserve" ("'It's In My Blood, My Face'" 44). This forthright conversation gestures to the complexities of queer Indigenous experiences and markedly undercuts the idealized visions of Indigeneity that were (and sometimes still are) being cited in white queer culture as a way to authorize dominant iterations of queerness.[8] While this is not a comfortable stance, Valerio bears witness to a common experience of the period and, as such, uses his platform in *This Bridge* to narrate what Million calls "the social violence that was and is colonialism's heart" (*Therapeutic Nations* 59).

Notably, while Valerio's earliest autobiographical piece interrogates normative cishet gender expectations, in the same essay he depicts Indigeneity as inherently relational, a felt and even precognitive recognition of being. This affective knowledge is situated in the body. Valerio explains, "I cannot forget and I don't want to. It's in my blood, my face my mother's voice it's in my voice. My speech rhythms my dreams and memories it's the shape of my legs and though I am light skinned it is my features. . ." ("'It's In My Blood, My Face'" 41). Further, Valerio joins such corporeal realities to his felt experience of his grandfather's home and its surrounds. Celebrating the reserve as a site of embodied pleasure, he recalls "standing on the porch and smelling morning blue sky rolling hills . . . there seemed to be balance then before I knew the meaning of the word" (41-42). The physical, psychic, and emotional experience of landscape is expressed as a deeply held delight. Thus, while he critiques

potential heteropatriarchal aspects of his culture, Valerio describes his experience of Indigeneity as felt knowledge, archived in the body and tied to specific experiences of place.

The writing and film projects Valerio creates and participates in for the next thirty years suggest the seemingly irrefutable embodied knowledge of Indigenous relationship to self, family, and land described in "'It's In My Blood, My Face'" can be short circuited by cis-normative gender demands that, in their respond to trans Indigeneity, create a narrative rupture—what Justice termed a "violence." In non-Native contexts, Valerio describes how certain feminists and queer folks read his masculinity as necessarily white; in Indigenous contexts, he describes a trans masculinity written out of Indigenous relationality. In both cases, as we'll see, different types of transphobia hinder Valerio's ability "to make relations" (Million 31) when others question his felt knowledge of what it means to be a Blackfoot/Latinx transman.

The Weight of Masculinity, or, "'Now That You're a White Man'"

In the 2002 follow-up to *This Bridge Called My Back*, Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating's *This Bridge We Call Home,* Valerio, now Max Wolf Valerio, discusses his transition and returns to autobiography. In his contribution to the collection, "'Now That You're a White Man': Changing Sex in a Postmodern World—Being, Becoming, and Borders," Valerio considers how perceptions of masculinity shape the way his gender behaviors and Indigenous identity become legible to others. Though the piece deals in binaries at times, implying, for example, that medical transition is a more authentic version of trans identity than others, it simultaneously presents a valuable window into the potential concerns and confrontations experienced by some Indigenous trans folx.

Valerio describes how the intersections of trans Indigeneity can become a tightrope. His title alludes to this experience in its suggestion that his Blackfoot heritage is, according to his interlocutor, erased by his maleness. He writes: "How did I get . . . to where I am today? An ostensibly 'straight' man who is often asked (usually by lesbian or feminist-identified women who met me for the first time), **'Now that you're a white man, and have all that male privilege—how does it feel?'**" (240, bold in original). While previously Valerio suggested his Blackfoot ancestry was written on the body, perceptions of masculinity appear to disrupt that embodied narrative. Valerio's bolding of the question itself speaks to the sharp impact these words hold for an Indigenous person. Like a slap, they imply his movement into the space of masculinity and, concurrently, heterosexuality, carries with it the weight of whiteness. As such, his male embodiment becomes intelligible only through the all-encompassing lens of settler privilege.

Along with depicting a jarring experience of racialized erasure in "'Now That You're a White Man,'" Valerio also discusses his transition. He begins by citing a key passage from "'It's In My Blood, My Face'" in which he related a childhood story of dreaming to be a boy. Using those memories as a touchstone, Valerio describes early moments of longing: *"I yearn for my body to have the texture, smell, and look of a man's body. To possess a physicality I don't comprehend, but at that moment, I instinctively know this physical self is male"* ("'Now That You're a White Man'" 242, italics in original). Though this passage ruminates on the physical body, it is *affective meaning*—what Million terms felt knowledge—that serves as the central concern. Thinking about Valerio's previous claims, while Indigeneity was read *on* his body, the felt knowledge of gender is *archived in* the body—depicted here as a lived, pre-cognitive understanding. Valerio returns to this idea in *The Testosterone Files*, commenting, "Knowledge is rooted in the body, without cognition, yet articulate. Not

only expressed *on the body* as in self-expression or self control, but emanating *from the body* itself. An effortless and driven knowing . . ." (Valerio 143). Across his writing, Valerio depicts the assumptions he encounters—whether in his pre-transition years as a young lesbian feminist or in his later life as a transsexual person—as tying masculinity and men to a negatively inflected sense of transgression and, more specifically, to damaging settler understandings of male identities.[9] In this configuration, masculinity, indexing both whiteness and privilege, stands in direct opposition to lesbianism. For example, in his community of lesbian feminists, "maleness became 'bad,' the 'other,' the 'oppressor'" ("'Now That You're a White Man'" 242). Trans Two-Spirit writer Daniel Brittany Chávez describes a similar experience, saying, "Within this feminist framework, my masculine physical presentation is made to represent patriarchy, violence, machismo, 'wanting to be a man,' succumbing to the enemy, and much more" ("Transmasculine Insurgency" 59). In light of such perceptions, Valerio attributes a heavy weight to his decision to transition: "To take this leap, to become part of a class of people I had once believed were in some sense the 'enemy' was an enormous risk—like stepping into the path of an oncoming tornado" ("'Now That You're a White Man'" 242). And that fear was not without merit given that, in the largely white world Valerio describes, he repeatedly encounters the imposed weight of a hegemonic masculinity that relies on settler paradigms.

In both "'Now That You're a White Man'" and *The Testosterone Files*, published four years later, Valerio critiques feminist and genderqueer folks precisely because of the frequency of his encounters with transphobic attitudes that flatten all masculinities into a monolithic norm. Feminists, ciswomen, and even other non-trans gender-nonconforming people are not exempt from holding such ideologies; instead, he argues, queer-identified folks often "have strong expectations about what my behavior and attitudes should be" ("'Now That You're a White Man'" 244). One such example

arises in questions from a class that viewed Monica Treut's 1992 short film *Max* in which, at one point, Valerio boxes the camera. The students' questions, as Valerio perceives them, critique his performance of masculinity *precisely because* it meets normative measures of masculinity: his masculinity is not "sensitive" enough, not feminist enough, *not queer enough.* While Valerio sees the boxing scene as a moment of masculine energy and embodied joy, the students imply that it involves the enactment of a hegemonic masculinity. Valerio humorously quips, "I know everyone would be much happier if I was knitting" ("'Now That You're a White Man'" 245). That comment works together with Valerio's later observation that "Before, these gender role expressions were charming and rebellious; now they might seem 'sexist' or 'macho.' In other words, if I'd boxed the camera while I was still Anita, most of the class would have been delighted" (245). These contrasting examples read the same action as, on one hand, resistance, on another, complicity. Thus, just as when he addressed the racialized dynamics in questions about his trans masculinity, Valerio again suggests a settler binary is instantiated. In this equation, butch performance threatens cis-het masculinity; trans masculinity conforms to it. Among the reactions Valerio describes, there's little differentiation between attitudes toward cis and non-cis masculinities. Whether trans or not, masculinity is threat rather than protection, individual mandate rather than reciprocal responsibility. Such readings elide understandings of Indigenous masculinity, which have, in many cases, centered issues of communal responsibility and protection.[10]

For Valerio, relational spaces therefore become fraught, a circuit in which his gender performance and sex are frequently disavowed. He narrates his experience at a San Francisco lesbian bar, Francine's, which he visited regularly pre-transition. After his physical shifts manifest and he enters Francine's as a man Valerio comments, "These women will abide my presence, but they will no longer welcome me" (*The*

Testosterone Files 150). He greets this slow-blooming realization with equanimity; it is, he suggests, a sign he has passed over into maleness. Concomitantly, he sees long-time acquaintances like "Spike, a strapping butch punk dyke" abruptly turn heel and walk away upon discovering that Valerio's not only trans but "a *straight man*" (*The Testosterone Files* 166). This clear rejection places Valerio outside the queer community to which he'd long belonged and erases trans realities beneath a perceived position of heteronormativity. To consider just the two examples offered here—the previously referenced responses from the students to whom Valerio spoke and his experience at Francine's—we can see how these oppositional approaches to trans masculinity cause him to defend a male identification that has been hard won, gained at significant financial and personal cost. And, painfully, in both examples, feminist and queer folks translate trans masculinity as hegemonic, thereby foreclosing relationship, foreclosing kinship. Driving gender into the realm of settler desires, such readings of masculinity *enact* hegemonic masculinity's power to segregate, to isolate. Afforded the authority to erase and contain, the specter of white, cishet masculinity fragments relationship—wielding influence even in its absence.

What does it mean, then, that settler masculinity looms so large in these encounters? Or perhaps we can use C. Riley Snorton's question from *Black on Both Sides*, "what does it mean to have a body that has been made into a grammar for whole worlds of meaning?" (11). This question is especially fitting given that in each of the described interactions, Valerio's interlocutors are acutely aware that he is non-cis man; thus, it is his trans masculinity, particularly, that is put to question and found lacking. In many ways, Valerio describes a zero-sum equation in which *all* masculinities are perceived as toxic, a charge folks in Indigenous masculinities studies have been working against in their examination of and calls for responsive, culturally informed, and accountable masculinities. What does it mean to write every masculinity as toxic?

Scott Morgensen argues that such erasures are inherently tied to settler ideologies. In an analysis that addresses the presence of Indigenous resurgence in trans contexts, he comments that "the imperial power of universal gender discourses . . . become geopolitically settler-colonial when they naturalize Western thought on indigenous lands as evidence of their own universality" ("Conditions of Critique" 198). Such readings of trans masculinity place a normative whiteness at the center of understanding leaving no space for the trans Indigenous.

Furthermore, among the feminists Valerio describes there concomitantly seems to be a negative reaction to the sheer joy he finds in masculinity—an embodied joy his audience, as he depicts them, would prefer to be a more palatable shame. His reaction to those attitudes is worth quoting at length as it both addresses such negative responses and also provides a window into how Valerio's representation of his felt experience can evoke discomfort. He comments:

> I understand the enormous suspicion and seething resentment beneath these questions [about privilege]. Rigid sex role expectations have hurt women and damaged men. We all want to reinvent our lives free from gender stereotypes' binding constraints. However, real life always intervenes in utopian landscapes. The truth hurts. I wasn't knitting, and I would rather be boxing the camera. My sex drive did go up when I took testosterone, as did my energy level. I experienced great changes in my emotional volatility, my sense of smell, even an alteration in my visual sense. The stereotyped differences between the sexes that I've resisted my entire life do make more sense to me now. ("'Now That You're a White Man'" 245)

The Valerio who in *This Bridge* in 1981 condemned gender binaries, in 2002 describes finding himself at home in such structures post transition. He further decries expectations that because he is trans, he must necessarily be genderqueer or gay-

identified or "above or beyond expressing traditional male sex roles" ("'Now That You're a White Man'" 245). There's no doubt that Valerio rejects the socially constructed view of masculinity he held as a lesbian feminist. Further, though Valerio still professes feminism (with some reservations), he often portrays feminists, and especially lesbian feminists, as shrill attackers, killjoys who disavow his lived experience of his male body and psyche.[11] Lesbians and genderqueer folks routinely take the brunt of the criticism in his work since Valerio feels condemned by lesbian feminists who perceive him as a gender "traitor." Valerio's experiences highlight the pressing weight of settler masculinity as the felt experience of colonialism while also challenging any sense that non-cis masculinities must always transgress, that non-cis masculinities are always already queer. To use Valerio's words, "I'm so straight in such an absolutely twisted—paradoxical and trickster-like way—that *I am way too far gone.* So are other transsexual men . . . We soar in an arena defying easy interpolation or assimilation by a nontransexual-originated 'queer' label" ("'Now That You're a White Man'" 252). In these ways, Valerio offers a stark window into divisions between and among those in the queer and/or feminist communities that become visible precisely because of varying interpretations of masculinity.

Concomitantly, just as we saw in "'It's in My Blood, My Face,'" Valerio's later work also troubles the seams of racialized and gendered expectations and highlights moments of rupture. In fact, as trans journalist and author Jacob Anderson-Minshall comments in his review of *The Testosterone Files*, Valerio is not afraid to look at "the dark sides of masculinity" ("Changing Sex, Changing Mind"). For example, in Valerio's detailed observations about his experience of psychological, physical, and, eventually medical transformation from a butch lesbian woman, to a transgender person, to a transsexual man, he argues for a hormonally driven gender/sex binary. He presents masculinity as a biological shift in which buoyant energy, a high sex drive, and defined

masculine behaviors are bound to testosterone and male-identified bodies. Valerio comments, "Let me emphasize, I have nothing against anyone exploring any identity. Although I don't actually believe gender is 'fluid'" ("Now That I'm a White Man" 244). Further, Valerio critiques noted queer theorists like Jack Halberstam and Leslie Feinberg, who, in his estimation, get the experience of transition, masculinity, and trans realities wrong in their work. As a whole, Valerio's autobiographical writing and his responses bring up a weighty question—do non-cis masculinities necessarily subvert what settler scholar Sam McKegney terms the "socially engineered hypermasculinity" (*Masculindians* 4) of Indigenous men simply because they are not cishet structures?[12]

Embodiment, Joy, and Affective Anger in *The Testosterone Files*

In the first decade of the 2000s, a period in which trans narratives became more visible, Valerio served as a significant voice for trans experiences. Yet, mirroring the gap he described in "Now That You're A White Man," his own writing and film appearances during this period often leave little room for intersectional concerns. A paradigmatic example of this absence is his brief appearance in Tyler Erlendson's 2011 documentary *Straight White Male*. In it, Valerio's comments about transition and masculinity include no mention of his tribal affiliation or Latinx heritage, which, if discussed, ended up on the cutting room floor. Consequently, given the topic and documentary title, there is an inherent assumption that he and the rest of those interviewed in the film, refer to trans experiences in the context of white masculinity. Such erasure is all too common. Morgensen notes in his discussion of trans scholarship that "a plethora of published and online commentary on trans and feminism still makes no mention of race or nation as conditions of their debates" ("Conditions of Critique" 193-194). Likewise, *The Testosterone Files* takes the experience of transition as its central concern and the few scholars who address the text follow that lead.

One of a handful of scenes in which *The Testosterone Files* engages Indigeneity is in relation to Valerio's chosen name. He describes mulling over possibilities, talking with friends, and trying ideas out until he lands on "Maximilian Wolf Valerio." Valerio first cites his own familial connection to a Maximiliano, his great-uncle on his father's side who he recalls with fondness. He then continues:

> A middle name came effortlessly. Wolf. On the American Indian side of my family, many of the names of my male Blackfoot ancestors contained some variation of "wolf": Big Wolf, Wolf Old Man. Big Wolf was my great-great-grandfather, a well-known warrior and the owner of a sacred medicine-pipe bundle. Wolf Old Man was my great-great-grandfather. One of the last traditional medicine men on the reserve, he'd been a weather dancer in the *Okan,* or sun dance and a well-known healer. He could hold live coals in his mouth without getting burned. I would honor these ancestors and the Blackfoot side of my family by taking Wolf as my second name. (*The Testosterone Files* 126-127)

With this description, Valerio ties masculinity to both familial history and Kanai iterations of spirituality, thereby linking trans formation to a sense of the sacred. Yet while this story hinges on the familial, in accordance with his mother's wishes, as I'll discuss in this essay's final section, Valerio does not return home during this period. The sort of felt knowledge of Indigeneity and land narrated in *This Bridge* is therefore markedly absent from the memoir.

Yet while what we might call a sort of an intersectional fragmentation recurs in Valerio's texts and film, there is more to his narrative than tragedy. In fact, in many ways Valerio's descriptions offer an ode to masculinity. He writes:

> When I dance, the energy is phenomenal. Power surges through my body. I feel like I can jump through the ceiling! This energy is vigorous—it feels organic, not speedy, as though rooted inside my muscles and bones.
>
> When I go out running, I feel as though an invisible hand is pushing me. The joy of it! (*The Testosterone Files* 154)

Such productive aspects of masculine performance align with the sort of recognitions proponents of Indigenous masculinities studies forward in which masculinity has (and must have) constructive possibility. For example, Kanaka ʻŌiwi scholar Ty P. Kāwika Tengan's work in *Native Men Remade* describes the strong connections Kanaka Maoli men make through sharing "joyful experiences of brotherhood, fellowship and camaraderie" (188). In a world that aligns Indigenous masculinities with violence and loss as a rationale for colonialism, the act of naming and reclaiming such spaces is essential.[13] Valerio's descriptions of his body and his affective experience of testosterone—his ongoing transformations—are daily processes in which masculinity becomes a cause for deeply felt celebration. "Taking testosterone," he notes with exhilaration, "is like having rock and roll injected into my body" (*The Testosterone Files* 154). His physical changes are met with wonder and a heady exuberance as Valerio becomes the man he knew himself to be.

Valerio's joy in this transition often arises in relation to the chemical awakening he experiences as seismic shift. He jokes about getting acne and undergoing a second adolescence. He describes "feelings of liberation and exuberance" (173) and a visceral elation as his body thickens in places, becomes thinner in others, and his muscles become more defined. Even "peeing becomes more visual, more complex—possibly more fun" (186). The body becomes his object of study, and, in the process, an avenue of delight. This deeply embodied pleasure is something long denied Indigenous men, who are taught by the media and hegemonic cultural expectations that, depending on

the context, their bodies are dangerous and/or disposable. Through such dominant cultural narratives Indigenous men are primed to feel shame about rather than joy in their bodies. Shame is, in fact, a long-standing affective colonial technology, what Million in her discussion of felt theory calls a "debilitating force" (*Therapeutic Nations* 56). Considering the affective power of shame and masculinity, specifically, Sam McKegney explains:

> "Shame" manifests as a tool of erasure cutting [boys] off from the pleasures of the body, enacting a symbolic amputation—or one might even say a symbolic beheading—that denies integrated, embodied experience through the coercive imposition of a form of Cartesian dualism. The mind is forced to treat the body as that which is other than self, creating conditions in which . . . the body can become a weapon. ("Pain, Pleasure, Shame. Shame" 14)

In light of such troubled and troubling histories, Justice argues, "We need to see the body—the male body—as being a giver of pleasure, not just a recipient of somebody else's acts, but a source of pleasure for the self and others" ("Fighting Shame through Love," *Masculindians,* 144). It is here, then, that Valerio stakes a much-needed intervention into conversations about masculinity—*The Testosterone Files* shows readers, again and again, what it looks like to love a masculine body becoming. And to claim love for a trans Indigenous male body, in particular, is a valuable lesson indeed in a world where trans bodies are attacked and legislated against daily and where, statistically, Indigenous trans folks are especially at risk.

Coming Home: "Exile: Vision Quest at the Edge of Identity"

In this final section, I return to this essay's opening, where I argued that, along with detailing the roadblocks he encountered as a trans man, Valerio described his felt knowledge of his identity as a map of becoming, an atlas that charts a route to

survivance, healing, and, joy, ultimately showing that non-cis genders can, at times, serve as medicine.[14] To consider this possibility, I turn briefly to "Exile: Vision Quest at the End of Identity," in which Valerio shares a new chapter of his life, combining poetry, fiction, and memoir to reflect on what it means to return, as a trans man, to Indigenous community.

Valerio performed "Exile" in a number of venues including the 2009 Queer Arts Festival, where he collaborated with Timothy O'Neill, who created a soundscape background of ambient music that includes "sounds of nature and samples of traditional Blackfoot music" ("Performance Description"). In the published excerpt, readers encounter a multi-genre piece in which voice, tone, and genre shift rapidly. The excerpt begins with a poem, which is followed by an italicized monologue narrated by the Blackfoot trickster, Napi or Old Man, as told through Valerio, and concludes with a narrative in which Valerio first describes Napi's travels and then segues to a personal reverie on his own homecoming, when he returns to the Kainai Reserve for the first time since 1986.

The opening poem in "Exile" outlines a journey, in which a human or other-than-human being is "traveling on / . . . midnight roads" (93). When the light dawns, Valerio invokes Blackfoot cosmology with "Natosi / Sun, who was creator . . . and Napi—the trickster" (93). The piece is imagistic, beautiful, and includes classic Indigenous iconography—drums, dances, and more. Yet moments later, the next section (marked by a line separation and switch to italics) pulls the rug from under readers' feet. Enter our narrator, Napi, who, "talking to you through this guy Max here" (94), mocks both the opening and the assumed reader expectations that go along with it:

> *So is that Indian enuf for ya? Is that Native American eco-shaman spiritual enuf? Am I a real Indian? Am I a TV Western Indian circling the wagons? Listening with*

> *my ear on the ground for enemy? Or am I a militant—transgressive Native American fighting against neocolonialism and litter? Or maybe I'm just me, a guy who happens to be a mixed-blood Blackfoot Indian and, incidentally, as you know, also a transsexual man.* (93, italics in original)

"Exile" highlights the specific collisions that occur in the intersections of Valerio's life as a trans Blackfoot/Latinx man. And while Valerio describes how non-Native onlookers erased his Indigeneity in "Now That You're A White Man," here he vehemently rebuffs not only that settler masculinity, but also hegemonic expectations of Indigeneity more broadly: he challenges correlations between his Blackfoot identity and shallow ecological discourse and a confrontational Red Power masculinity. Thus, in his classic forthright fashion, Valerio takes what he thinks his audience expects of him and smacks it out of contention.

With this deployment of a trickster narrator, Valerio joins a host of other 2SQI writers who have used such figures to engage gender play and queerness. Like Beth Brant's and Deborah Miranda's coyotes, Valerio's Napi, too, subverts gender expectations—in this case joining "the Pride Parade" in "a shimmering gown and high heels" (95). As trickster stories trade in sexual puns, gender reversals, and humor across many Indigenous nations, Valerio, like Brant and Miranda, riffs off classic Indigenous storytelling traditions. Further, Valerio's trickster narrator offers a buffer of sorts as they recount Valerio's very real exile from home in the third person:

> *Max's mother, Agatha, she's from the Blood reserve and she forbade him to ever return after he transitioned to become a transsexual shaman. . . . Now, Max reminded his mother one day on a long-distance phone call, in the old days, people who lived as the sex opposite to their birth were inspired to do so by dreams, and these people were often honored and respected. Max waited through a long silence on the other end of the phone. Finally, Agatha spoke*

> *with a chill in her voice, saying, "That was a long time ago."* (94, italics in original)

While the story is painful, Valerio's trickster uses humor to defuse the weight of relational rupture by suggesting Max's identity as a trans man comes with "*newly acquired shamanic trans power*" (93). Though tongue-in-cheek, this statement situates trans identity in a space of productivity that flies in the face of Agatha's damning reaction as Napi turns trans positionality into spiritual power. At the same time, the piece addresses transphobia in *Indigenous* contexts head-on. To this point in Valerio's essays and memoir, settler masculinity was the product of onlookers and editors, the outcome of non-Native desires and expectations. By contrast, "Exile" speaks directly to the ruptures created when settler ideologies infiltrate Native communities as seen when, invoking a settler temporality, Valerio's mother assigns the expansiveness of Indigenous gender traditions to the dust bin of history.

If some non-Native folks read Valerio as holding a seemingly unavoidable white male privilege after his transition, thereby construing masculinity as an a priori marker of whiteness, here the character of Valerio's mother sees trans masculinity as incommensurable with ties to home and to the affective relationships with family, land, and nation the Blackfoot community represents.[15] To be trans, in this logic, is to give up ceremony, to give up the embodied experience of the reserve, to lose access to a path of return. In other words, to be trans, in such an estimation, is to be forced into a space outside Indigeneity. Cree poet Arielle Twist similarly writes about the painful experience in which some family members deny and dead name her in "What It's Like to Be a Native Trans Woman on Thanksgiving," saying, "funny how colonization touches all things, from the beauty of my being to the way family can no longer see it" (2013). Cree-Métis-Saulteaux writer/theorist/curator Jas Morgan situates such experiences as a site of recurring contradiction, saying, "After all these years, I still

don't know how to talk about homophobia and transphobia on the rez. I'm not supposed to say the truth and give in to settler desire to consume my trauma. . . . I don't know how to deal with the tension between respecting my Elders and not accepting homophobic behavior" (*Nîtisânak* 50.) Valerio's story likewise highlights the intersections of settler ideologies and iterations of transphobia, which he experiences from both non-Native and Native communities presenting one side of the affective coin, or what Million, as we've seen, terms a "felt experience of colonialism."

At its heart, though, "Exile" is not a meditation on rupture, but a story of return. And just as Valerio writes his physical transformation and masculinity as a space of pleasure, so too does he imbue this sometimes-painful narrative with embodied delight. His homecoming involves his relatives, who, he explains, greeted him with "joy" and "appeared to be very accepting of me as I am now, a man" (97). And, together with that familial welcome, Valerio meditates again, some thirty years after *This Bridge*, on the affective meaning of the reserve, crafting his embodied tie to his family and the land as a relationship that has "the ability to incite, as in arouse, *as in feel,* to make relations" (Million 31). Homecoming, as an affective process, involves place as well as people. To that end, Valerio offers a detailed description of his journey back—seeing "the land . . . still wild with spirits," where his grandfather's house, corral, and barn are "deeply familiar." They are, he explains, "one of my oldest memories of belonging and family and magic . . . . the container of so much more emotion . . . than any other place in my life" ("Exile" 96-97). Despite Valerio's long absence, "the North End of the Blood Reserve is the closest place to a remembered and cherished home and place of origin" (97). Ultimately, in writing "Exile," Valerio denies the cultural, physical, and psychic separation of settler dispossession and the legacy of gendercide that accompanies it.[16] If felt knowledge is also theory, here Valerio posits an

understanding that refutes transphobia and cultural amnesia, heals past ruptures, and forges new iterations of kinship.

I close by thinking more broadly of Valerio's place in 2SQI literatures. From his first published essays to his most recent, Valerio confronts the relational fractures experienced by many queer Indigenous people. Moreover, his essays and autobiography make visible the violence of settler masculinity, highlighting the ways it can be wielded like a weapon, even between and among queer folx. Valerio suggests that when such damaging masculinities are read as the standard for all masculinities, trans, Indigenous, and trans Indigenous experiences are elided. Further, Valerio's insistence that masculinity equals joy rather than shame is a claim with powerful implications in Indigenous contexts. Collectively, Max Wolf Valerio's work, while sometimes challenging, has much to contribute to Indigenous, queer of color, and trans studies by forwarding joyful embodiment as trans Indigenous possibility.

Notes

[1] Building on Dian Million's work, I use "felt theory" and "felt knowledge" interchangeably here. In her chapter "Felt Theory," Million speaks of and with Indigenous women, noting, "we seek to present our histories as affective, *felt*, intuited as well as thought" (*Therapeutic Nations* 57). In this analysis, Million explains that though often not recognized as such in academia, embodied, or felt knowledges, *are* theory. For more, see Tatonetti, *Written by the Body.*

[2] This list represents only a selection of the documentaries in which Valerio has been a commentator/interviewee.

[3] https://lambdaliterary.org/2006/04/lambda-literary-awards-2006-2/

[4] Valerio was born in 1957 in Heidelberg, Germany into a military family. His Latinx father, Steve Valerio, is descended from Sephardic Jews and from generations of farmers and sheepherders of Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico, while his mother, Margo, is from the Blood or Kainai Nation Reserve in what is currently Alberta, Canada.

[5] Mohawk author Maurice Kenny published in queer zines in the 1970s; outside Kenny's work, early queer Indigenous literature was first published in the mid to late 1980s. See Tatonetti, *The Queerness of Native American Literature* for more.

[6] The frank writing in Valerio's personal essays and memoir differs radically from his fascinating, but often opaque experimental poetry. See Peterson, "Becoming a Trans Poet," for a reading of Valerio's first chapbook, *Animal Magnetism.*

[7] I'm thinking here of pieces like Kenny's well-known poem "Winkte," which was first published in the 1970s and claimed a "special" place for queer indigenous people. I want to be clear, as well, that I'm not holding one of these approaches above another. Instead, I'm highlighting how unique Valerio's work is in its frankness at this particular moment in queer Indigenous literary history.

[8] See Scott Morgensen, *Spaces Between Us.*

[9] In the essays "Now that I'm a White Man" and "Why I'm Not Transgender," Valerio vehemently disavows the term "transgender" as a potential erasure. In the latter piece, Valerio explains that transgender "desexes and defangs the term 'transsexual.'" He further comments, "transgender is now used to describe everyone . . . people who might actually have very little in common with me. While I'm not against these people expressing their gender, I do have a real fear: The word transgender has the potential to entirely erase who I am" (Valerio, "Why I'm Not Transgender").

[10] See Innes and Anderson's *Indigenous Men and Masculinities*, Ty P. Kāwika Tengan's *Native Men Remade*, and Sam McKegney's *Masculindians* and *Carrying the Burden of Peace*.

[11] There are many examples of this rhetoric in *The Testosterone Files*, as well as scenes in which women are objectified or female sexuality is cast as dangerous. At the same time, Valerio makes comments that imply he recognizes the dangers of toxic masculinity. In an online interview, for instance, he states: "Because testosterone drives masculinity, in a sense, does not excuse sexism. There is never an excuse for bad behavior. Certainly, I came to empathize with men's experiences, and understand more where they were coming from, however, bad behavior is not excused. People misunderstand this I think, and are afraid that if men are primed biologically in a different way from women, that bad male behavior is excusable. Bad male behavior, like any bad behavior, is never excusable" (Valerio, "Five Questions With Max Wolf Valerio").

[12] I think here of Jas Morgan's comments: "A toxic trans bro is still a toxic bro. . . . Like with any other form of toxic masculinity, there's a difference between the consciousness-raised, tender trans masculinities, and trans masculinities that reinforce dangerous colonial scripts. . ." (*Nîtisânak* 30).

[13] Tengan's comment to McKegney resonates here: "I think all those stereotypes were instrumental to someone else's agenda. For the violence of conquest you needed a violent opponent, so you created this image of the Native as a violent warrior" ("Reimagining Warriorhood," *Masculindians,* 79)

[14] Here, I riff on Two-Spirit Oji-Cree writer/theorist Joshua Whitehead's words, in which he considers the transformative power, of non-cis genders as "medicine" (*Jonny Appleseed*, 80; Whitehead, "Why I'm Withdrawing from My Lambda Literary Award Nomination").

[15] In Monika Treut's short film *Max*, Valerio briefly discusses coming out as trans to his mother, who had noticed his voice changing after he began taking testosterone. To this point in the documentary Valerio has laughed often, reveling in his discussion of the physical shifts of transition--energy, high sex drive, facial hair. In this conversation, Valerio joked about his mother noticing his voice changing: "I didn't know what to say. Finally, I told her, you know, that yes, there *is* something different about my voice, you're right." In response, an off-camera Treut asks: "And she wasn't shocked?" Valerio noticeably sobers, saying, "She was totally in shock." Following Valerio's subsequent pause, Treut queries: "Did you tell her the whole thing, right away, on the phone?" To which Valerio responds: "Well, let me tell you, it was one of the most difficult things I've ever done. And I would have preferred to have never had to do it. But one has to do it."

[16] I refer here to Deborah A Miranda's theory of gendercide as detailed in "Extermination of the *Joyas*."

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"#morelove. always": Reading Smokii Sumac's Transmasculine First Nations Poetry on and beyond Social Media

JAMES MACKAY

queer bright
ktunaxa and proud
two spirit is a
responsibility a
relationship with
all of creation
but most of all with myself
and i'm just learning
to be kind to be
unapologetic so
please let me breathe deep
into who i am
(Sumac 14)[1] [2]

Smokii Sumac is a member of the ?Akisq'nuk Band of the Ktunaxa Nation as well as a citizen of Canada, a poet whose excitable generosity of spirit shows in the dedication of his debut collection *you are enough: poems for the end of the world* (2018) to more than 125 individually named people (some of them likely non-human). In a review essay written for *Transmotion* in 2017, and therefore coterminous with the creation of that book, Sumac describes himself as follows:

> I am queer, nonbinary, transmasculine, and a poet. I am a writer, a PhD Candidate, and an instructor of Indigenous literatures and creative writing. I am cat-dad, an auntie, an uncle, a sibling, and a child. I am hyper-aware that even

> as I write this, my experience of gender is shifting, changing, and growing. ("Two Spirit and Queer Indigenous Resurgence" 168)

This series of identities is given in a way that both complicates and refines Sumac's original description of himself as Two-Spirit, and goes a long way to explaining the joyfully expansive sense of multiplying identities that resonates throughout *you are enough*—which also includes reflections on being a recovering addict and self-harmer. Sumac is clear that Two-Spiritedness in itself is not a noun of identity so much as it is a verb of performing responsibility, and that this responsibility is specifically decolonial. In so doing he shares in a long lineage of Two-Spirit writing that seeks, in Qwo-Li Driskill's phrase, "a return to and/or continuance of the complex realities of gender and sexuality that are ever-present in both the human and more-than-human world" (55), and which have been disrupted by the colonial project.

There are also some distinctions that need to be made when thinking about Sumac's writing in such a context. Much previous scholarship on Two-Spirit voices has concentrated, rightly, on the ways that creators such as Chrystos, Beth Brandt, Maurice Kenny and Paula Gunn Allen primarily work to overcome erasure. Such an attitude can be detected in the defiant title of Chrystos's first collection, *Not Vanishing* (1988), or when Janice Gould describes a feeling of "being disloyal and disobedient to the patriarchal injunction that demands our silence and invisibility," for example, just for "speaking about lesbian love" (32). Craig Womack's novel *Drowning in Fire* (2001), published only twenty years ago and one of the first full-length novels with an LGBT Native American protagonist was marketed as "groundbreaking and provocative." And Lisa Tatonetti, in an overview of thirty years of the journal *SAIL*, observes that academic criticism's explicit engagement with queer contexts did not emerge for the first twenty years of the journal's existence: it is only with Qwo-Li Driskill's 2004 essay "Stolen From

Our Bodies: First Nations Two-Spirits/Queers and the Journey to a Sovereign Erotic" that "conversations about sovereignty and sexuality entwine" (Tatonetti 154).

However, a strong focus on erasure does not quite do justice to the current situation. Sumac is not contemporaneous with the group described above, but is rather a part of a new generation, inheritors of decades of activism. While homophobia, transphobia and settler erasure of Indigenous identities very much remain active forces in 21st century Canada, Sumac and his peers are able to access far greater resources and longer traditions of LGBTQIA+ (and particularly Two-Spirit) writing. With the sole exception of Max Wolf Valerio, discussed by Lisa Tatonetti elsewhere in this special issue, there are almost no literary transmasculine Indigenous forebears for him to draw upon. Yet there are far greater resources than would have been available even a decade previously, including historical recovery work and contemporary trans* Indigenous groups.[3] Gwendolywn Benaway demonstrates this in her essay "Ahkii: A Woman is a Sovereign Land" not only by being able to discuss trans* historical personages and provide archive photographs of trans* people, but also by noting that one of the problems she encounters is that her interlocuters "don't want to wear the label of racist or transphobe" (114). In other words, while people with transphobic views continue to have powerful platforms, it is transphobia that is now increasingly seen as a cause of shame in mainstream culture. Sumac's short career as a writer also includes working with an entirely Indigenous publisher, Kegedonce, which had been promoting First Nations voices for twenty five years when it accepted his manuscript. He has also won Indigenous Voices Awards in both the inaugural year of that crowd-funded Indigenous-only prize and the following year. All of this makes for a better and more public support system than any Indigenous trans* writer of even a decade previously could have enjoyed.

In this article I explore the effects and ramifications of one specific venue for that community. Sumac's poetic practice is, I would argue, intimately bound up with social media. In an interview we conducted in February 2020, he confirmed that many of the poems from the collection were first posted to his Facebook account under the hashtag #haikuaday and that publication had not originally been a goal (Mackay, 120). It was only after meeting people who had enjoyed the poems that he decided to collect them, and his publisher also approached him after becoming aware of the poems on social media. He was also clear that social media affected the form, stating in interview that "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!'" (120). As I explain below, even the cover of the collection is inspired by social media, being modelled on an Instagram feed. Clearly Sumac is comfortable within digital environments, and finds them both nurturing and sustaining. One could even argue that the social media environment has worked its way into the very language of the book: in creating the word cloud I explore in the final section, I discovered that the second most common word in the book, iterated 76 times across 98 pages of poems, is "like."[4]

There are many further ways in which spaces such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter are very far from being neutral areas for self-exploration. Designed to maximise user interaction, the better to generate data to sell to their customers, the platforms utilise complex machine algorithms to determine the placement of content within the feed, literally determining how many other people will see anything self-published on the platform. The result is the creation of millions of mini-communities, each centred on one person, in which the platform and the individual collaborate to filter out unpleasantness. The environment itself is characterised by, among other things, the haptic experience of users sliding their finger

across a smartphone and receiving feedback in the form of vibration and sound alerts, the stress on "clean" design elements in each of the major platforms, and the fact that these platforms are available 24/7, often as an escape from boredom or stressful situations, all of which further serve to alienate the user from everyday life in the service of multinational corporations' mission to monetise everyday life.

In this article, then, I intend to explore the ways that Sumac creates a Two-Spirit transmasculine role for the 21st century within such an environment. I begin by looking at the cultural implications of Sumac's choice of cover images, comparing these with the choices of his trans* poet peers, and use this as the springboard to a discussion of Sumac's use of social media tropes, particularly hashtags, that situate his poetry as the product of a specifically digital environment. This, I argue, is simultaneously a welcoming space for trans* and Indigenous people to find community and develop communal identities unaffected by physical distance, and also a space that carries particular dangers not only for both groups, but also for creative artists, in its flattening of affect. Finally, I look at the poet's use of natural environments and images, and the ways that these function to balance and indigenize a shifting and uncertain digital no-space.

Cover Story

Recent years have seen a surge in the number of poetry collections, chapbooks and anthologies of poetry by writers who identify as trans*. While this genre cannot be said to have become widespread enough to be predictable, a certain sameness does seem to have crept into the covers for trans* authors' work. In making this statement I draw on two sources: the GoodReads list titled "Poetry collections by trans / nonbinary / genderqueer etc. non-cis authors" (Takács 2017), which as of June 2020 contained a sampling of 139 such collections, and the finalists for the Lambda Literary Award for

Best Transgender Poetry since 2015 ("Previous Winners"). Four major strands of cover design stand out. First, as is common in 21st century publishing, some collections, such as those from Julian Talamantez Brolaski, Kari Edwards, Elijah Pearson and Melissa Jennings, opt for simple typography as the major visual element of their covers (Figure A). A particularly common trope (which may also reflect general trends in poetry publishing, but seems particularly motivated in the case of transgender authors) sees covers use abstract or non-figurative art to suggest concepts of change (Figure B), with a positively deleuzoguattarian visual language that emphasises rhizomatic lines of flight (Ching-In Chen, Xandria Philips, Andrea Abi-Karam), holes (Jos Charles, Yanyi), or maps and/as rhizomes (Ryka Aoki, Ashe Vernon & Trista Mateer). Other covers depict the human figure, but use stylized art to situate it as becoming or escaping, as in the examples from Gwen Benaway, Joy Ladin, Kayleb Rae Candrilli and Max Wolf Valerio, as well as TC Tolbert and Trace Peterson's edited collection (Figure C). This trend is developed in the last major strain of cover art, where the poet them/him/herself is the subject (Figure D). As can be seen from these examples from Vivek Shraya, Morgan Robyn Collado, Pat Califia, DarkMatter, Dane Figueroa Edidi and Xemiyulu Manibusan Tapepechul, the self-presentation is designed to highlight a singular identity as genderqueer and/or trans*. These photographs emphasise the writer's completeness, self-awareness and comfort under (or in defiance of) the world's gaze, something that suggests a journey either finished or at least having reached a way station.

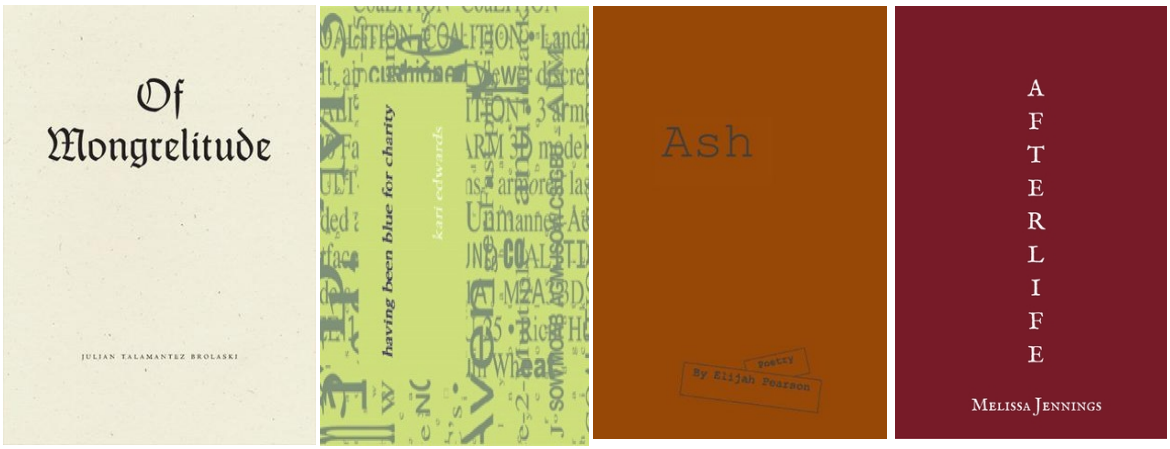


FIGURE A – Typographical covers

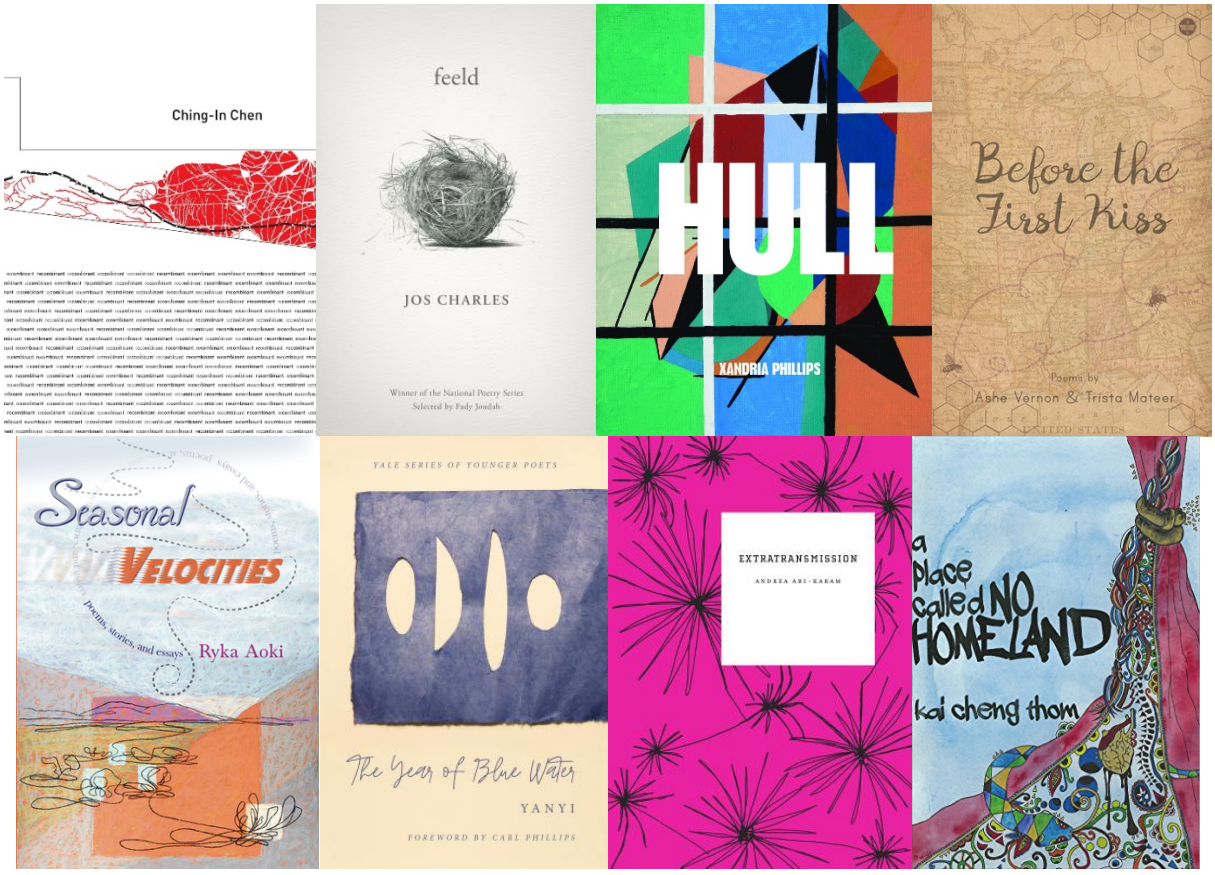


FIGURE B – Rhizomes, holes, maps, lines of flight

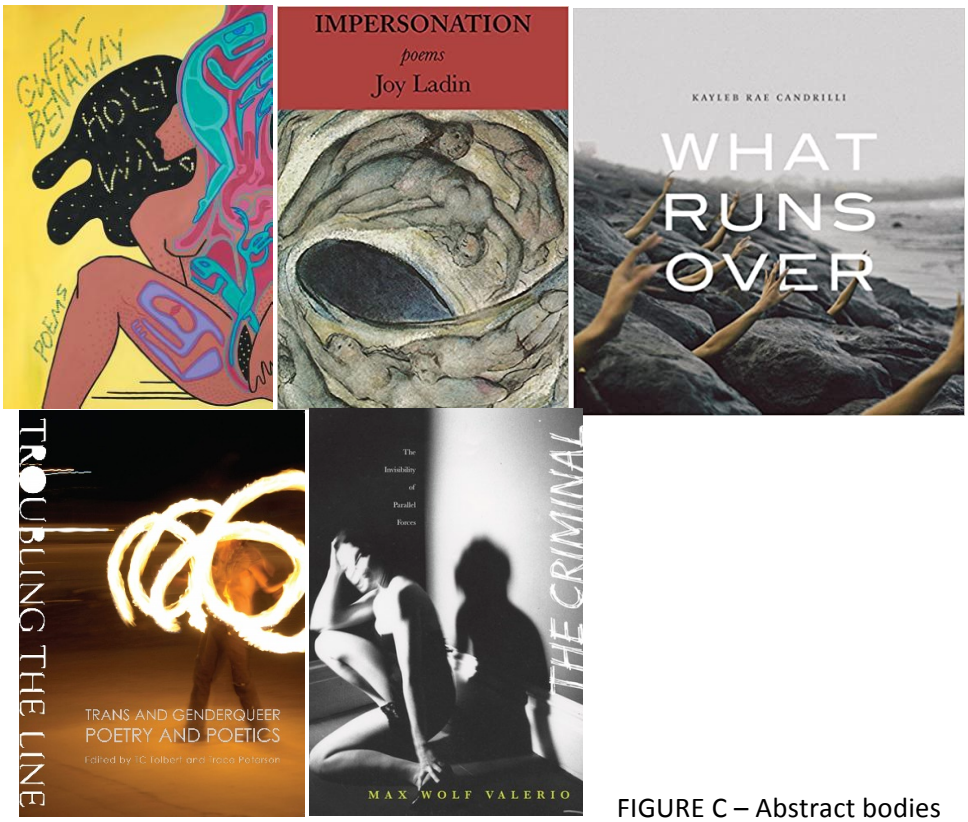


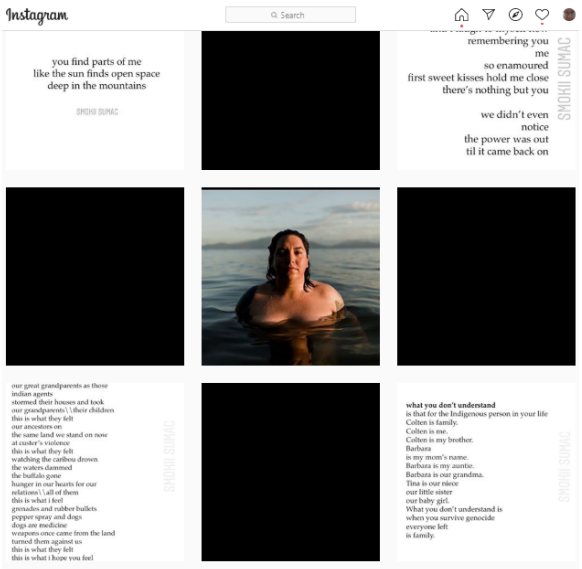
FIGURE C – Abstract bodies

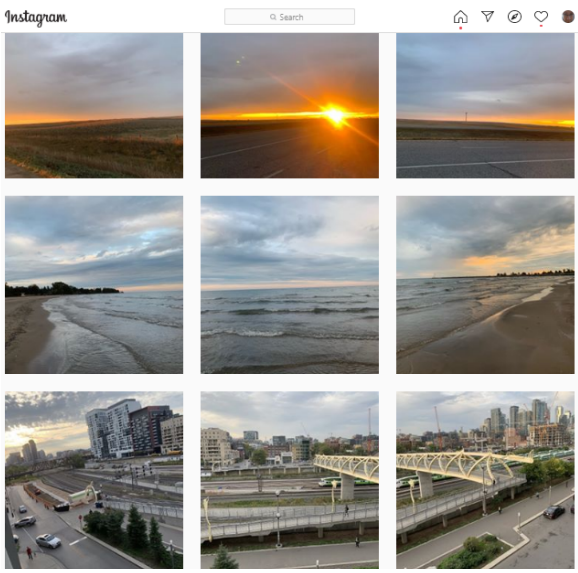
FIGURE D - Portraits

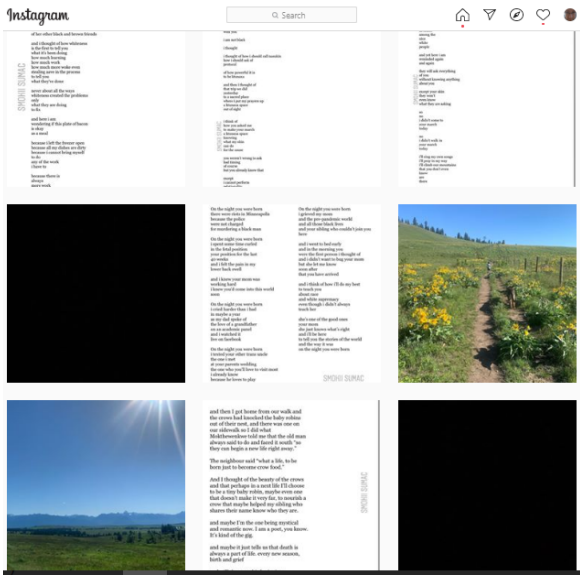
you are enough: poems for the end of the world (2018), Smokii Sumac's debut collection, clearly stands at a distance from all four of these possible trends. As in

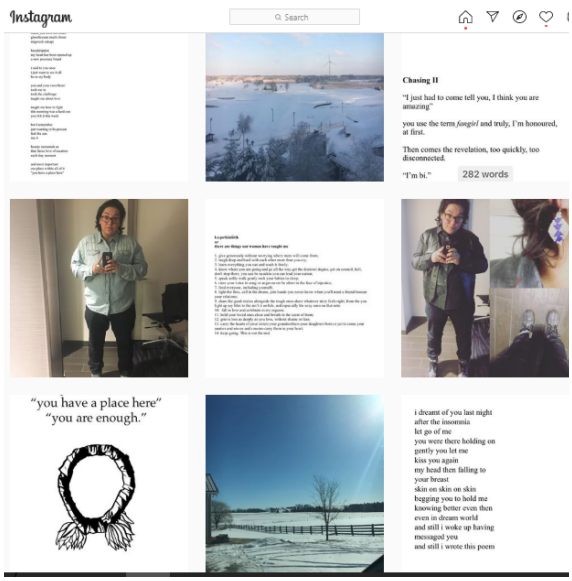
Morgan Robyn Collado's cover, reprinted here, the poet becomes his own subject in a number of poses. But where Collado's photos are staged performances of her identity as a LatinX working-class femme, Sumac's are candid and seem like a collage of personal photographs. Unlike almost any other trans* poet that I have been able to find, Sumac's cover—which he confirmed in our interview he was heavily involved in designing—does not frame the body as either in a state of becoming via abstraction, or in a state of arrival via decisive self-presentation to the camera. Rather, these photographs create a multi-faceted and intimate portrait, with Sumac presenting in different shots as butch, femme, Indigenous, white-passing, playfully queer, or serious. The flatness of the format and the non-chronological sequencing of the images means that no identity is privileged, with the possible exception of the first top left photograph of Sumac wearing some particularly gorgeous "watercolor earrings" by Navajo jeweller Meek Watchman, which clearly signify as American Indian art and hence emphasise indigeneity.[5] Certainly there is no sense of a journey with either definitive start point or destination. Instead, the interleaving of photos of landscape and natural features declares a more definitive sense that the poet has nowhere to travel to, since he already belongs to this Indigenous land.

Significantly for the discussion in this article, the grid of squares pattern is also very reminiscent of the Instagram platform. Indeed, some of the photographs show up as posts on Sumac's publicly available Instagram account. Instagram also gives further evidence of the fact that he takes great care over visual as well as verbal self-presentation, as the following screen shots of artfully staged and arranged photographs attest:









Sumac, as a millennial and digital native, is at ease with the visual grammars of the internet, and his Instagram presence shows some familiarity with the specific form that poetry has taken in the social media age, while the cover design analysed above demonstrates the interpenetration of social media and poetic presences. In itself this is not surprising: Sumac is a millennial writer, after all, and it is almost part of the job description for a modern poet to keep their social media game on point. However, as I indicated in the introduction, such digital spaces are far from neutral.

Being Two-Spirit and Trans* Online

> Something most cisgender people won't know about, when they read this story, is the wealth of knowledge and connection that the internet has given transgender people (and Indigenous people, for that matter, and I'm sure there are many other people who face different forms of oppression who can say the same.) (Sumac, "Just Make Me Look Like Aquaman")

There is a surprising lacuna concerning digital spaces in Jack Halberstam's otherwise comprehensive discussion of gender variability, *Trans** (2018). Although he thoroughly discusses issues such as the perceived tensions between radical feminist ideology and trans* identities, the difficulties of representing the transitioning body, and the challenges that trans* identities throw up for concepts of family relationships, the digital landscape is mentioned only briefly and always in dismissive asides. Indeed, Halberstam seems to find anything to do with the internet annoying: the fact that "today Facebook famously offers you fifty-one ways of identifying yourself on their site" (6) comes in for some mockery, while in a chapter on the difference between the various generations of trans* people there is a clear resistance to pesky youngsters

"increasingly discover[ing] information about themselves online" rather than learning directly from older activists now seen as "as potential predators […] and viewed with suspicion" (64). This may reflect a changing dynamic in the 21st century. Surgical and hormonal interventions to correct and reassign gender have been available throughout the 20th century, beginning with Karl Meir Baer's pioneering surgery in 1906, and continuing through such cases as Alan L. Hart and Michael Dillon, while trans* people have been recorded throughout human history, including ceremonial or sacred third gender roles such as the Omani *khanith*, Indian *hijira* or Thai *kathoey*. But as Halberstam observes:

> If I had known the term "transgender" when I was a teenager in the 1970s, I'm sure I would have grabbed hold of it like a life jacket on rough seas, but there were no such words in my world. Changing sex for me and for many people my age was a fantasy, a dream, and because it had nothing to do with our realities, we had to work around this impossibility and create a home for ourselves in bodies that were not comfortable or right in terms of who we understood ourselves to be. (1)

Given this history, it is easy to see that the digital interconnectedness of the 21st century has changed trans* lives in the West out of all recognition. As opposed to having to seek out specific locations and subcultures usually based in heavily populated urban centres (for instance the New York ballroom scene or the Polari-speaking drag cultures of 1950's London), young trans* people are now easily able to connect with one another across the planet, to inform themselves about gender dysphoria and their legal rights, and to investigate multiple possible modalities of trans* expression. In previous decades the common trope of being "born in the wrong body" continued to reinforce a binaristic view of sex, in that the trans* body was seen as an error of biology that could be corrected, with the surgically altered body sent out

to fulfil a destiny as a now heterosexual woman or man (it should be understood that I am discussing public perception here, not reality). But with the coming of the internet and its potential for building communities of often anonymous yet like-minded people, new potentialities for trans* figuration came into view. As one of Richard Ekins and Dave King's informants, Janice, puts it, "It was the Internet effect: that no matter how small a minority you belong to, you could at last find your community" (28). Andre Cavalcante makes the point that in the digital age transgender people have had "access to hundreds of transgender themed websites, online forums, and chat rooms in seconds," and that as such the digital world has formed a welcoming space for trans* people to experiment with different identities (114). Indeed, the internet is "central to surviving and thriving" for trans* people, Cavalcante argues, as it is often easier to work, date and just hang out in virtual spaces, which provide space not just for big issues such as "gender reassignment surgery and political advocacy," but also for "the smaller, mundane issues that define everyday life such as clothes shopping" (117; 119).

Sumac clearly participates in such digital economies. In one poem, for instance, he describes himself as a "trans tribe grindr dream" (33), while in another he mentions learning from the online magazine *Autostraddle*, while yet another mentions "Chase Ross, youtuber and trans 101er" (36), referring to the author of a Youtube series that includes such titles such as "Pre-packed Underwear for Trans Masc Folks (GMP) Review" (2019). The entire poem is even dedicated to a web company, Transthetics, which manufactures products for transmasculine men. Such positioning in virtual spaces does not only take place in poems focussed on transition. Advocacy and political work for First Nations and environmental causes also requires investment in digital identities. So one poem mentions, for instance, the hashtagged campaign for "#justiceforcolten," referring to the campaign following the acquittal of Colten Boushie's murderer (43),

while others mention "Trying to stay offline / news i can't look away from" (52), and a morning routine where the poet needs to "block a few people / unfollow more / politics" (91). More significantly, the entire collection is structured into six sections, each titled with a hashtag – "#nogoseries": "#courting"; "#theworld"; "#recovery"; "#ceremony"; "#forandafter" – suggesting a view of the world heavily mediated by social media experience. Additional evidence comes in the form of an essay written by Sumac in 2015 about the #IdleNoMore movement, in which he recalls "tweeting and Facebooking the hashtag along with thousands of people across the world," and states that "For me, Idle No More created a sense of Indigenous community that I had never been a part of before, and it did so through social media" (98-99).[6] Although as I will explore later in this article Indigenous identities have a complex relationship to the digital world, Sumac clearly has found social media to be as nurturing a space for First Nations collaborations as it is productive for the development of trans* identities, as he explains in the quote that begins this section.

However, if the digital landscape in Sumac's work is generally positive and uplifting, that does not mean that there are no challenges to negotiate. While the studies I previously quoted held that the online community of the 1990's and early 2010's contained revolutionary potential, others argue that the effect of social media and increased trans* visibility has been to "*unqueer*" trans* discourse through a fixation on narratives of passing (Siebler 81). Kay Siebler, for example, suggests that "Transgender bodies are discussed, displayed, and regulated much more rigidly on the Internet than the physical bodies of others within the queer community" (83). Some of the blame for this, Siebler suggests, can be placed at the door of dating apps which prioritise physical description, on chat room discourse which centres on shorthand such as A/S/L, and on companies which seek to profit by selling products designed to assist in passing. We can see ripples from these pressures in the four poems that finish the

#courting section of *you are enough*. The section as a whole has been structured around questions of love, consent and acceptance (particularly in the central poem "at 29 i lie naked on the beach and think of you," to which I return below), finishing with the poem sequence "haiku / consent series or / #makesexgreatthefirsttime" (27-31), and its imperative to "forget the bad sex / I want to read the good."[7] The last sequence takes up a specifically trans* journey into sexuality, with the first poem consisting of the speaker's first use of the app Grindr following a name change and beginning HRT. In this interaction he is literally reduced to a body part:

> question \ \ ftm / / question
>
> "do you have a penis or a vagina?"
> question
> "i love bonus hole boys" (33)

The four poems seem to have been ordered in line with the poet's transition. In the first the poet is a "bonus hole boy" who has his lover "slide into you" (the poem is written in the second person). In the second he mentions purchasing a strap-on harness as a replacement for one stolen by a previous lover, but specifically ties it to a queer rather than trans* identity by mentioning learning how to wear a harness from the magazine *Autostraddle*. The third poem is a depiction of mutual erotic ecstasy ("we didn't even / notice / the power was out"), while the fourth and final poem, self-explanatorily titled "'do you want to take the Cadillac for a ride?': Or: a love letter to Transthetics / the company that made my prosthetic dick," makes the speaker's pleasure in his new penis clear ("I look down // and I am transformed" (36)).

Siebler sees such narratives as reinscriptions of conventional ideas of gender. While trans* visibility has increased, and there are many examples of entirely positive representations of trans* experience in contemporary media, the inherent reductionism of digital chatrooms feeds into a general emphasis on the correction of the

misgendered body. Siebler argues that "Today transgender people see hormones and surgery as a way to 'pass' in a heteronormative world that mandates a rigid gender/sex binary" (77), becoming willing and active consumers within a capitalist model that sees trans* bodies as sites for profit. Sumac's poem, in such a view, partakes of the fantasy that a pharmacocapitalist product is necessary to transform and thus improve a person, literally becoming an advertisement for a company where the owner, himself a transman, promises that "where there's a willy, there's a way! :)" (Alix). Chase Ross, the YouTuber Sumac mentions, is one among many who have posted regular updates on their transition over a ten year period: such video series, structured in part to fit the algorithmically-controlled environment of Youtube, form a kind of spectacularisation and regulation of the ftm trans* body.[8] Sumac, too, confesses to having made – but not posted – a "*this is my voice 1 month on T*" video, and to have spent much time on the trans* internet watching such transition videos. Where Susan Stryker sees a potential in trans* studies to "denaturise and dereify the terms through which we ground our own genders," the digital world has in Siebler's reading ended up re-reifying precisely those concepts of gender that emerged from the Enlightenment period of taxonomisation that is so bound up with colonial and imperial thinking (63). To say this is not in any way to invalidate trans* personhood, but it is to ask whether trans* identity is not itself in danger of being colonised by an overly medicalised capitalist discourse which uses marketing techniques to externalise and "solve" a specific mode of being. If Sumac's aim in *you are enough* is to find a way to a poetic identity that is not only transmasculine but also "queer bright / ktunaxa and proud / two spirit," with that poem's implied challenge to whitestream cultures, then this flattening of potential represents a real danger to his project.[9] Sumac's resistance to this discursive reductionism can be seen at the end of "'do you want to take the Cadillac for a ride?'"

where the speaker's transition is not in fact achieved with a prosthetic, but rather with a sexual connection to another person – "and with her, I am transformed" (38).

A similar issue might exist with the sense of "Indigenous community" that Sumac found through social media and hashtag activism. The phrase, which also turns up a lot in discussion of the similarly internet-boosted #NoDAPL protests, carries inherent challenges in its singularity, given the wide diversity of Indigenous cultures found in North America. Gerald Vizenor, for one, has warned frequently and loudly of the dangers of collapsing all tribal identities into a single *indian* signifier: however, in this case the pressure is less one created in the self-justifications of settler societies, and more the result of a specific and ever-narrowing tendency of digital spaces towards monoculture. As of 2020, most of the top social media sites most visited from the Canadian region (e.g. Instagram, Twitter, or YouTube) use some form of algorithm to rank and prioritise content, as do commercial sites such as Amazon. (Wikipedia, the main searchable source of algorithm-free information, has its own issues with a non-diverse editor base.) This environment introduces an inevitable and systemic set of biases. The racist and misogynistic potentials of Big Data processing have been comprehensively covered by researchers such as Safiya Umoja Noble, who notes that many "algorithmically driven data failures […] are specific to people of color and women" (4). But the more subtle and insidious effect of social media is in the filtering and narrowing of experience and of the potential for expressions of difference in communal "bubbles" defined by a high degree of social homophily, especially in the context of a platform designed to maximize user engagement via manipulation of dopamine release in compulsion loops (Deibert 29). In the context of First Nations cultures specifically, there is a potential danger of a loss of cultural diversity within a heavily online group, driven away from tribal plurality by the algorithm into a pan-Indian average of user preferences.

There is a specific danger for Indigenous Two-Spirit youth in the existence of highly stratified digital spaces, moreover. This is exemplified at the start of Joshua Whitehead's novel *Jonny Appleseed* (2018). The eponymous Jonny, "Two-Spirit Indigiqueer and NDN glitter princess," moves in the first two pages from masturbating over late-night silent pirate TV showings of *Queer as Folk*, through listening to "Dan Savage and Terry Miller on the internet telling me that *it gets better*," to hooking up on the internet via "Facebook and cellphones [and]… chatrooms on a gaming website," to "the photo-sharing apps and cam sites" that allow him to make money as a virtual sex worker (7-8). While the internet has allowed him to self-actualize, it also leads to his leaving the reserve—where he has been the subject of homophobic abuse and assault (91-92)—and operating in a Grindr world of non-Natives that constantly fetishize his First Nations citizenship ("everyone on that damn app was obsessed with New Age shit like […] hipster shamans who collect crystals and geodes looking for an NDN to solidify their sorcery"(18)). As in Sumac's poetry, the digital therefore becomes a space that is both appealingly accepting and potentially threatening both to tribal autonomy and also tribal nations' cultural integrity. How Sumac navigates this challenge from online no-space will be the subject of the final part of this article, but for now I want to turn to a third area in which the digital space may be said to influence production—in this case not just to content but also to form.

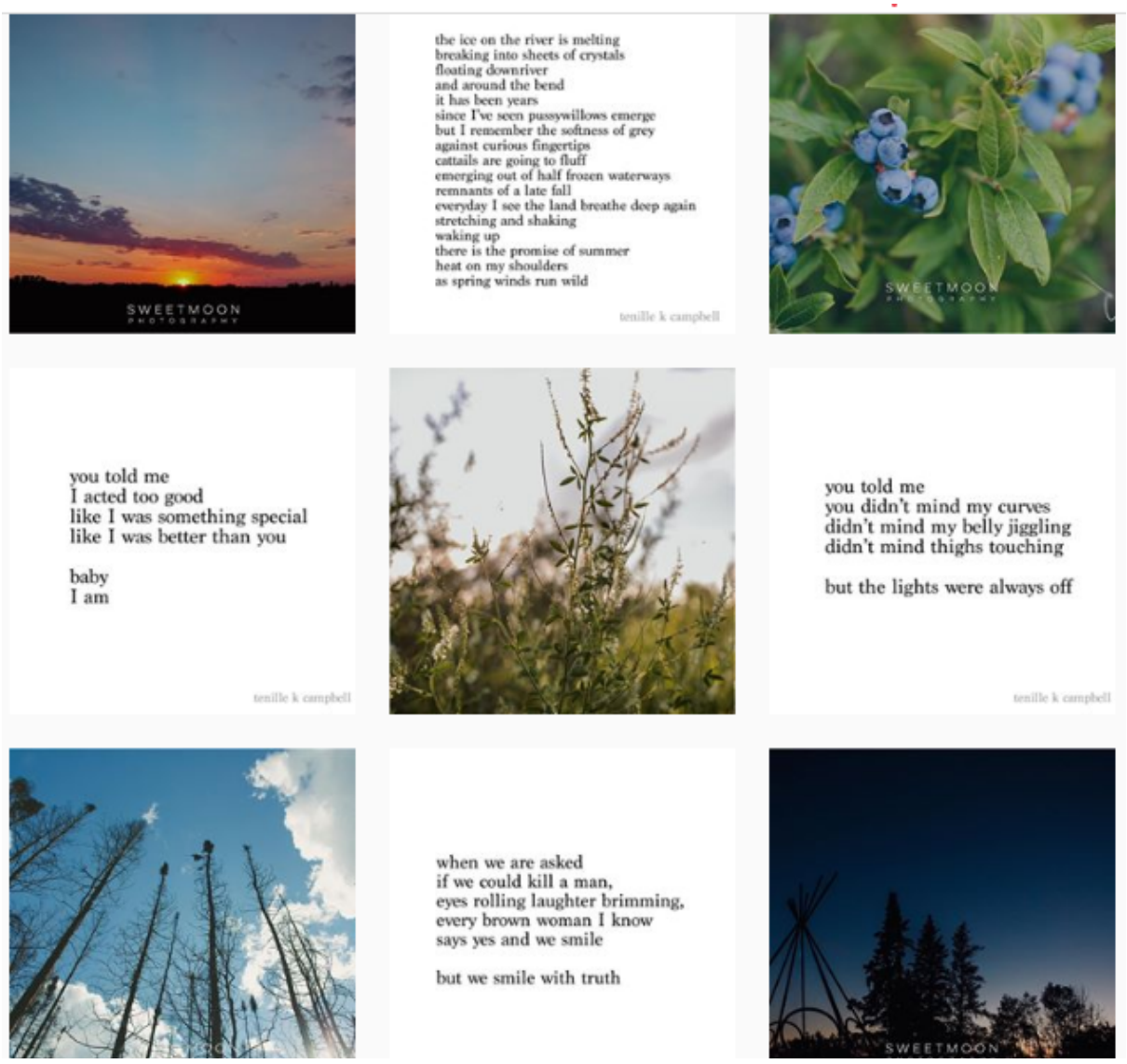
The poetry of likes

The popularity of poetry on social media, particularly Instagram, in the past decade has been unprecedented. While popular poetry has always existed, the sales of poets who first came to prominence via the Instagram platform have been incredibly strong, especially in the case of previously unknown writers. The standout is Rupi Kaur, whose collections *milk and honey* (2015) and *the sun and her flowers* (2017) have not

left the Amazon top ten list for poetry sales since publication. Her publisher, Andrews McMeel, has become a central player in poetry publishing, having published collections by r h sin, Amanda Lovelace, Courtney Peppernell, Najwa Zebian and Pierre Alex Jeanty among many others. Often these writers are labelled "Instapoets," a term that both recognizes their emergence from the Instagram platform and also serves to denigrate much of their writing as instant and disposable—for this reason, the label is frequently rejected by poets such as Lang Leav (Shah). However, there are commonalities in this group beyond their mode of production.

Posts to the Instagram platform depend on visual appearance for gaining likes and shares. The power of the instant feedback loop such likes provide can be seen in the fact that Instagram executives in 2019 felt the need to begin hiding likes on accounts based in Canada, in a bid to protect the mental health of its users (Yurieff). As mentioned before, such likes have a physical effect in the dispensation of dopamine, and it seems reasonable that this would affect poetic practice, encouraging writers to reach as wide an audience as possible by removing complexity from their work. The Instagram feed of Tyler Knott Gregson, where he has published over 3,000 typewritten poems and almost as many daily calligraphed love haiku, shows the rote mechanical effect of such a practice (this is only a short excerpt):

Gregson is unashamedly commercial, as are his fellow Instapoets r.h. sin (Reuben Holmes) and r.m. drake (Robert Macias), the latter of whom in fact denies that he is a poet at all. A better example of the pressure to produce particular types of content can be seen in the Instagram feed of the Dené poet Tenille Campbell, who Sumac name-checks as an inspiration in finding self-love (36), and with whom Sumac collaborated on the essay "Just Make Me Look Like Aquaman." Campbell, a photographer as well as an academic and poet, curates her feed to alternate between images usually drawn from nature, and short poems, as in the screengrab below:



If, crudely, the success of a poem on Instagram can be judged by the number of people inspired to demonstrate that they like it by clicking a heart icon below the poem, then it is very noticeable that the longer and more complex nature poem at the top of this selection had garnered only 403 likes by the 3rd August 2020, and the poem at the bottom with the racial signifiers gained 749. The middle poems, on the other hand, with their lack of specificity and superficially feminist message, had scored 834 likes for the right-hand poem and 1,136 for the one on the left. In other words, the more the poem fits an image of a self-empowered and sexually autonomous woman,

the more cultural capital it accrues—and, unlike previous generations of writers, social media poets receive such feedback in real time. As Millicent Lovelock remarks in a conference paper, à propos Rupi Kaur:

> her frequent use of simple, direct, and unambiguous language on the subject of trauma and healing can be understood […] as a reproduction of a pervasive neoliberalism which centres the self as a site of labour and ignores the specific societal conditions which might produce trauma.

Instagram's machine learning generated algorithm prioritizes posts for display that other users are more likely to "like," based on a complex series of factors including who else has already liked those posts or other posts by the same user with similar hashtags. The effect for any one writer on any one poem is arguable at best, but the overall pressure is undeniable. And this is not just true as regards content, but it also applies to form. Instapoets specialize in short poems that are brief and direct, such as the haiku—at least, the anglicized version of the haiku, which requires only attention to syllable count and often does not pay attention to the Japanese form's requirement for kigo or kireji—and simple free-form verses formed from one or two sentences with little or no attention paid to metrical patterning.

Facebook, where Sumac's poetic journey began, differs from Instagram in that there is less of a visual element and users are mostly only broadcasting to "friends" and followers on the site (hashtags being only a small element of Facebook interaction), meaning a more focused audience, but the pressure towards small word counts and direct statements exerted by the "like" function and by the requirement to generate a poem for public consumption per day still remains. Some of Sumac's poems certainly have the direct simplicity of Instapoetry, as in this example:

offer what i can
but emotional labour
takes its toll
rest now (61)

Or this:

> "we have everything we need"
> when you said it that first time
> it took everything to try and believe
> but when i woke up today
> angry that they tried to make me forget it
> i think i understand
>
> i am everything i need (67)

Claire Albrecht coins the term "therapoeia" to describe the trend of social media poetry, driven by the pressures outlined above, towards "readymade self-love and acceptance," particularly poetry created by millennial and Gen-Z writers in Western societies among whom levels of anxiety and depression are at an all-time high (Albrecht). Sumac, who devotes one of the six sections of the book to "depression and addiction" and who has been open about his own struggles with such conditions, certainly enters this mode many times. These fragments are not presented as discrete poems, and this fact forces them into dialogue with the greater complexities of identity and belonging in other poems in the collection: nonetheless, their existence demonstrates that Sumac's poetry is subject to some of the flattening of affect observed in Instapoetry. While the digital environment that shaped his early poems certainly has not had a completely deadening effect on his writing (one only needs to compare Sumac's syllabic control to the free-form chopped-up prose of a Courtney

Peppernell to see this), certainly it makes sense to situate him within this community of digital creatives.[10]

As with the previous discussions of online trans* and pan-Indigenous communities, it is not my intention to demonize social media poetry. Not only is poetry publishing globally in a rare rude state of health following the success of the Instapoets, but the genre has created an opening for voices who have rarely been at the forefront of English language writing in settler cultures. Young female voices of colour from immigrant communities are particularly strongly represented, including Rupi Kaur (born in India), Najwa Zebian (Lebanon), and Lang Leav (Cambodia), none of whom, crucially, centre their writing on their experience as ethnic or gender minority subjects. As Leav pointed out to me in an email, the seemingly unmediated level of access provided by social media has also allowed for a generation of working class voices to be appreciated by a wide audience, where such voices might have been either excluded or ghettoized. It might also be observed that the "perform your truth" ethos of the new poetry (which also owes something to slam poetry events) benefits writers like Sumac, and other trans* poets on Instagram such as Mia Marion and Hunter Davis, in creating an audience willing to appreciate and celebrate his identity as a queer, nonbinary, transmasculine, Ktunaxa citizen. However it is obvious that an uncritical set of therapeutic generalities also carries the danger of forming what Lauren Berlant calls an "intimate public": a body of sentimental texts bound by a common recognition of pain, which gives its readers "permission to live small but to feel large; to live large but to want what is normal too; to be critical without detaching from disappointing and dangerous worlds and objects of desire" (Berlant, loc 197). Such an intimate public is "juxtapolitical" (loc 103) rather than political, usually expressing a desire to return to the conventional—one can see how the hashtag #justiceforcolten

might not easily garner likes within the bright and happy space of Instagram in the same way it can do on Twitter.

This is where Sumac can be clearly differentiated from the crowd of Instapoets, for *you are enough* is by no means purely in the mode of therapoeia, and it certainly does not always insist on establishing commonality. To explain, I compare two representative poems. The first is from Atticus, a leading Instapoet:

> Don't fear,
>
> her father said,
> sometimes
> the scary things
> are beautiful as well
> and the more beauty
> you find in them
> the less scary
> they'll become. (loc. 737)

We are not told who the anonymous "you" of the passage is, but there seems little from the context to suggest that this is a specific person. Rather, as with the omnipresent "you" in r.h. sin's poems, this is a generic female addressee given as few markers as possible, the better to provide a blank space for the (coded female) reader to identify with. By contrast, here is a typical excerpt from Sumac on the same subject:

> when the rest of the world grieves for a world they think is gone,
> when we've awoken to a nightmare we didn't think was possible,
> when i am afraid that i can't make it to the next sunrise and i
> don't know if the tears will ever stop,
> when smiling seems like it might be a failure.
>
> on days like these i find strength in your presence—

like a lighthouse on fire in a storm i
couldn't find my way out of alone.

You once told me the kitchen floor is the best place to cry;
("there are hierarchies of grief," 46)

Both poems deal with finding the strength to move through difficult emotions. However Sumac's poem is a threnody dedicated to specific people, as evinced by the precise details that collect throughout—"your generosity flowing from fingertips on that piano you don't play." These form a private set of symbolic images, which cannot be fully comprehended by anyone who does not know the intimate details of the relationships being shown. Indigenous signifiers threaded through the poem ("i think of how you taught me to carry and take care of / the feathers" (47)) also explain what is meant by the titular hierarchies of grief, how the individual's grief is given context and weight by wider griefs at the loss of "a world." Here we see how Sumac's poetry, emerging from an online space, nonetheless avoids the weightlessness of much social media poetry by engaging with tradition and ethnicity embodied in natural imagery in phrases such as "[you] showed me where your little star so / strong brought down a tree so we could be with the / water" (47). And it is to water that I want to turn in the final section of this article, to look at the ways that Sumac uses natural spaces and ceremonial imagery to ground his poetry even in the digital context.

Smokii on the water

The illustration overleaf is a word cloud made up of all the words (including poem titles and individual poem dedications but excluding acknowledgments, section titles and copyright information) in the collection *you are enough*.[11] Such word clouds, as Samuels and McGann have argued in their article "Deformance and Interpretation,"

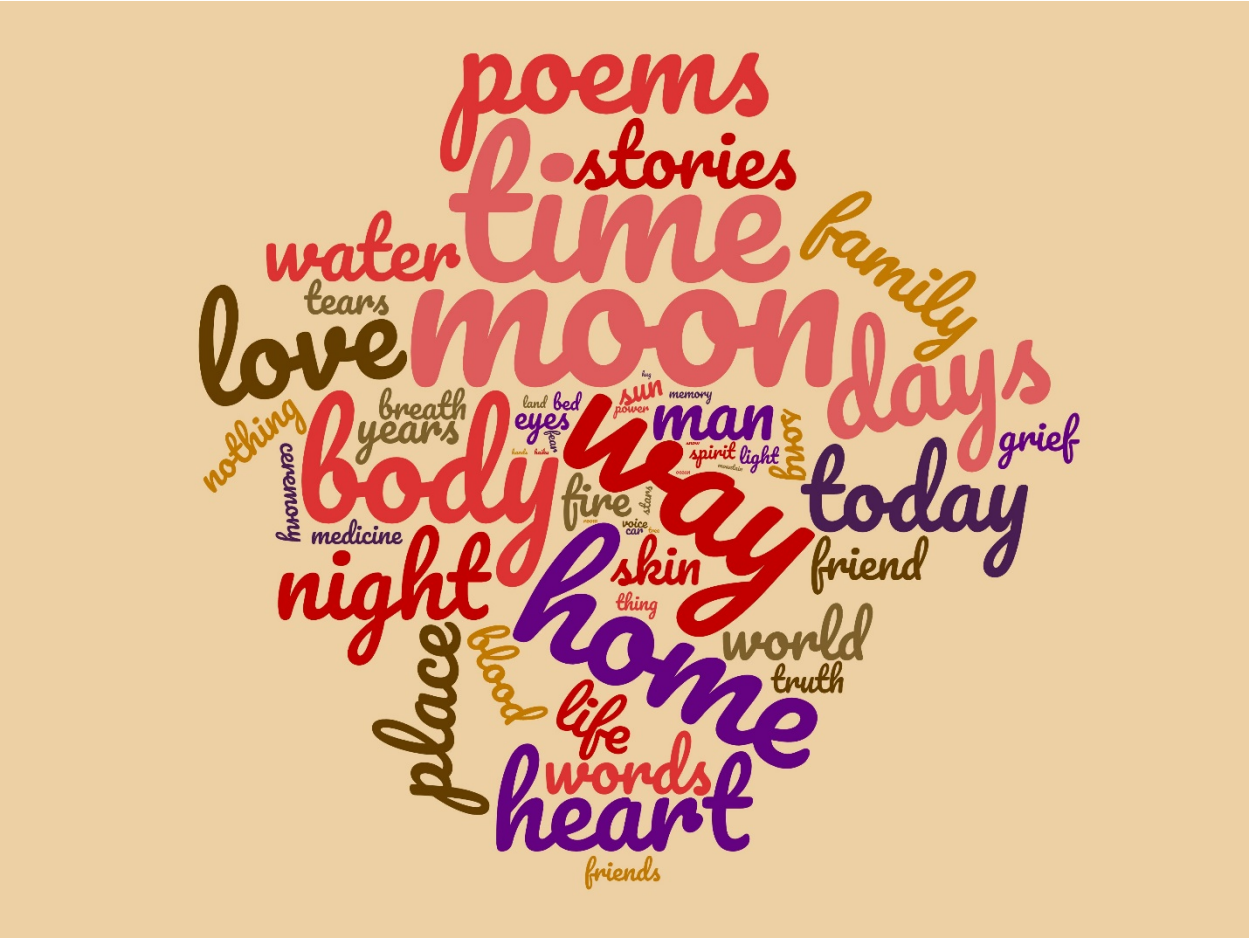
continue the work of traditional criticism in deforming the text to reveal and interpret hidden codings (152).

In the words of Amanda Heinrichs, they "suggest both an immediate, impressionistic 'grokking' of the underlying 'data patterns' of the thing they remediate and they invite the reader to perform the searching, delicate, sometimes-clumsy work of meaning-making that is close reading" (408). Certainly such digital methods seem appropriate to an author whose practice I have argued is very much bound up with digital contexts. And indeed a list of the most common words in Sumac's writing, in order of frequency, practically becomes a new poem in its own right:

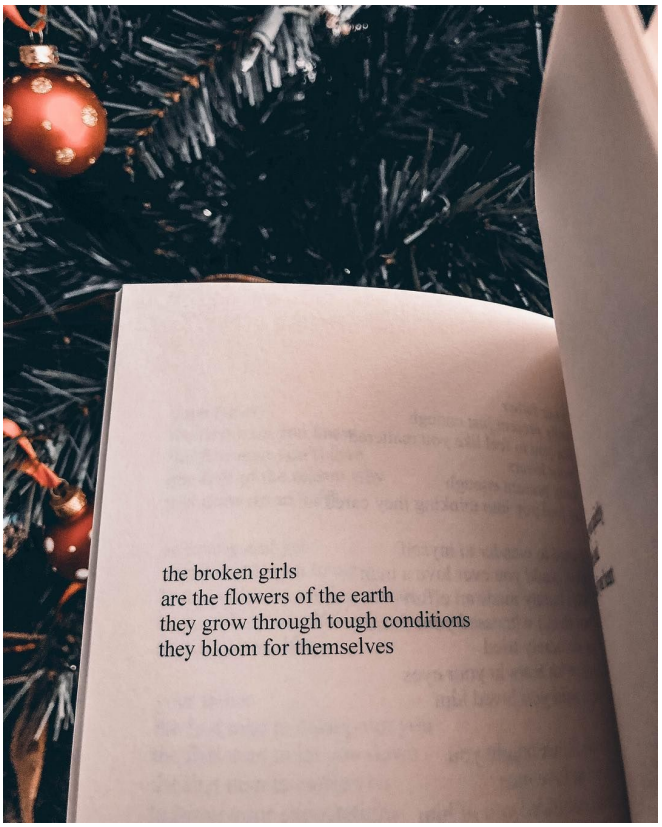
Word	**Weight**
now	82

like	76
just	61
love	58
time	53
know	52
will	51
one	45
can	44
see	41
still	39
think	39
enough	33
way	32
back	31
First	31
Home	30

This "tabular poem" already shows the simplicity of language in Sumac's poetry and its major themes of desire and the (re)claiming of space as home. A look at the full database confirms this initial impression: the vast majority of words are common monosyllables, and the primary verbs almost all express either emotion or introspection for personal growth ("love," "know," "think," "feel," "need," 'breathe," "learn"). But a second word cloud, this time concentrating on nouns, is more revealing:[12]



Many of the most significant words of the collection, as can be clearly seen, are to do with time and seasonality. In particular, the combination of "moon," "time," (and time-related words such as "today," "day," "night"), "heart" and "body" show, I believe, Sumac's investment in a cyclical temporality and in images of renewal: one poem-fragment reads, for example, "this will be last time / the next time we come" (20). The frequent use of "way" and other travel signifiers also show that Sumac, a poet who is deeply invested in ideas of home, sees being "at home" not as stasis but as a form of movement, often in the form of interior development. Of course, these sentiments are shared widely in therapoeic social media poetry. Take, for instance, this untitled poem by r.h. sin, though there are an almost infinite number of possible examples:



More interesting is the prominent appearance of the word "moon". Another excerpt from Sumac's poems demonstrates the personal symbolism behind this word:

> and so i chased the sunset driving against my instinct back east and south and up that big hill past the teaching lodge where i went to my first full moon ceremony to pray for the journey this body was about to start

While the moon functions as a female symbol in many cultures, frequently due to a cultural association between menstrual and lunar phases, here Sumac relates such natural cycles to his transition to masculinity. As he puts it in his article "Just Make Me Look Like Aquaman": "The gender binary has consumed my ability to understand that the moon is not judging me; I am. The moon still shows her face to me. The moon still

holds me like the tides." The same article also states that this was his only full moon ceremony, implying a potential goodbye to femininity.

As can be seen from the second word cloud above, other words relating to natural phenomena ("skin," "sun," "fire," "blood") are used frequently in his writing, nowhere more so than in the "#ceremony" section, in which poems on just the first page celebrate "the kiss of the prairie moon," "river rocks" and "tap[ping] the snow off cedar" (85). Such use of natural imagery within a ceremonial context serves to ground Sumac's writing in a specifically Indigenous, land-based system of belief, and acts as a strong counter-measure to the digital flattening effect traced above. It is also significant that in his poems Sumac gives very few details about the actual ceremonies. This honours the spiritual imperatives against sharing with outsiders common across pan-Indian religions, allowing Sumac instead to discuss the spiritual and ethical lessons learned from the land ("the mountains told me / carry knowing in your body (92)).[13]

For a special issue primarily concerned with trans* and Two-Spirit writing, perhaps the most significant natural symbol Sumac uses—another word that is repeated frequently—is "water." This focus on water imagery may reflect elements of Ktunaxa cultural understandings and/or Ktunaxa politics, as like many First Nations the Ktunaxa government are often in negotiation with settler authorities for *de jure* and *de facto* access to and use of waterways within their ancestral homelands (see, e.g., Locke and McKinney 204). More, it should be remembered that the collection was written in the shadow of the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline, hashtagged #noDAPL, in which the Standing Rock Sioux and their allies argued that the proposed (and now operational) oil pipeline represented a serious threat to the tribal nation's water supply and to waterways guaranteed under treaty, so water was a major element of pan-Indigenous discourse at the time. However the poem "at 29 i lie naked on the beach and think of you" (24), perhaps the most confrontational piece in the entire collection,

shows that Sumac feels he has a more direct and intimate relationship with water. In this poem, placed within the pivotal "#courting" section and one of the first poems in the collection with a specified title, Sumac's speaker remembers an ex-lover ("and i saw you on instagram smiling at pride. // you, the baby dyke / that doesn't even like going down"). The speaker undresses himself on a beach and walks to the water, observed by a voyeuristic older man who "just sits, his erection and my knowing / between us," a form of attention that places him in a position of power, and in fact seemingly empowers him towards the realisation that "i am someone you could never understand." Although the "you" of this statement is superficially the ex-lover, it also seems to be aimed at the reader and maybe even contains a realisation for the speaker himself, as in the next line he enters the cold water, which absorbs his tears of loss and anger. After a momentary dissolution into pain, the speaker is reborn—an idea that, Sumac makes clear, is not an uncomplicated one for an adoptee ("this gasp is like the one i took bursting forth from the womb of a woman / who wouldn't even look at me"). The poem ends with the speaker celebrating his "ktunaxa skin," buoyed up by the water.

The significance of this image-memory for Sumac can be seen in the fact that, after entering transition, he re-staged the scene of stripping off and entering the water in a photo-essay collaboration, ""Just Make Me Look Like Aquaman": An Essay on Seeing Myself," which appeared on the blog "tea & bannock" in February 2020.[14] Although the voyeuristic male gaze is absent, Sumac in the series of photographs for this piece is again being witnessed, this time by the photographer Tenille Campbell, and again sees a bald eagle (mizigi) flying overhead. In a progression of images, he disrobes and eventually faces the camera. In the accompanying text, Sumac discusses harder truths about his life that are only glanced at in the poems of *you are enough*—"the molestation at 12, the rapes at 15, 17, 21"—which clearly underscore the

elements of rage and grief in the earlier poem. As in "at 29 i lie naked on the beach and think of you," Sumac as "Aquaman" again conveys an experience of transcendence, but this time frames it more academically in terms of overcoming more familiar representations of Native American peoples in mainstream culture ("Too many people still want to photograph the Indians with their own Edward Curtis-like agenda."). A transmasculine man, his breasts clearly on display, standing thigh-deep in the ocean with his prosthetic penis touching the water, is nobody's "vanishing" Chief Joseph: Sumac affirms his Two-Spirited transmasculinity as being a native product of North American Indigenous lands, a gesture of profound survivance.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this article, I demonstrated the ways in which Sumac's art was founded in, and is in some ways a product of, a digital landscape, particularly of certain social media platforms. I argued that this landscape continued to have an effect on the finished product, and that this could be seen in the cover imagery, the actual form and language of the poems, and in some of the ways that Indigenous and trans* themes were approached in the poems. I gave some air time to the arguments of Kay Siebler, who argues that a loss of queer potential was occurring through an algorithmically driven pharmacocapitalist environment that enforced a new form of gender normativity for young trans* people, and extended this discussion to incorporate concerns regarding the algorithmic manipulation of Indigenous communities online and the flattening of affect seen in popular poetry generated for a click and like economy. I am aware of the risk that, being as I am a white male cishet Gen-X scholar born into privileges of class, race, sexuality and gender, my negative feelings about social media and changing identities may simply reflect the usual generational concerns about a changing world and young people today, but I have provided evidence from a number

of different sources to justify this investigation. As someone who is not Ktunaxa or First Nations, and cannot bring either detailed knowledge or experience of ceremony to bear, I have also chosen to focus on those elements of Sumac's poetry which particularly stand out to me, which I acknowledge may also be a by-product of my having been in the limited digital Facebook audience for early versions of some of his poems.

What the final section of this article begins to demonstrate, however, is the way in which Sumac's work not only embraces all of the identities to which I referred in the introduction, but also starts to weave them into a coherent whole. Water and moon imagery, both universals but ones that carry particular meanings in the poet's recovered Indigenous culture, serve as springboards to assert a selfhood that can incorporate the poet's trans* present and future without rejecting his female past, an Indigenous futurity that does not ignore the poet's out-adoption and upbringing, a queer sexuality that refuses to settle into a singular label. As such, it presents the strongest possible challenge to Siebel's contention that the multiplicity and potentiality of queerness is challenged by contemporary normative trans* digital cultures, or similar concerns about the homogenising effect of digital culture on Indigenous nations. I would also contend that Sumac's writing should make us re-evaluate the practice of more mainstream/commercial Instapoets who have emerged from the social media bubble. The hashtag is a potent organising principle in Sumac's collection, both in the section names and in the #haikuaday with which it began. It should also draw our attention to the arrangement of the poems, where it is not even entirely clear where one discrete poem ends and another begins. As with hashtags in the digital world, the hashtags in Sumac's work serve to restructure the poems away from being singular units and into becoming fluid and interlinked units of a larger discussion, removing impediments to a free flow of energy and desire across his writing. As such, it

represents a potent evolution of Indigenous writing into the interlinked realities of a digital world.

Notes

[1] I would like to thank Smokii Sumac for his generous comments and feedback on an earlier version of this essay. The editors of this special issue, Danne Jobin and Kai Minosh Pyle, also gave me feedback that improved the final version, as did the anonymous peer reviewers. My gratitude to all.

[2] Sumac's collection *you are enough: poems for the end of the world* (2018) contains multiple untitled poems, and it is not always clear from spacing, page layout, etc., whether poems are meant to be taken separately. In this article, therefore, I will mention when a poem carries a distinct bold-text title (e.g. "five months" (90)), but will otherwise reference as though the book were a single poem.

[3] In this article I will follow the practice of Jack Halberstam in using the term trans*, where the asterisk stands in for such terms as transsexual, transgender and/or transitioning. As Halberstam explains it, the "asterisk modifies the meaning of transitivity by refusing to situate transition in relation to a destination, a final form, a specific shape, or an established configuration of desire and identity" (4). As will be seen in this article, such a refusal of narrow categorization is entirely in keeping with Smokii Sumac's poetic persona.

[4] Sumac is not the only poet inspired by this environment. Take AE Stallings's "Sestina: Like": "So we like / In order to be liked. It isn't like / There's Love or Hate now. Even plain 'dislike' // Is frowned on: there's no button for it. Like / Is something you can quantify: each 'like' / You gather's almost something money-like."

[5] Sumac credits the artist in the original Instagram post of this photograph. The description of the earrings as "Watercolor" is from Watchman's "Arial Poet" artist statement.

[6] This article was published under a different name, and is still listed as such on the journal website. However, I have chosen to follow the guidelines to avoid deadnaming in academic citation suggested by medievalist Jonah Coman. As Coman writes: "[C]oncern about your readers' ability to retrace a citation when it appears under different names is mostly misguided, and at worst malicious. The availability of quick information-finding technology enabled by the spread of the Internet has made ethically-informed citation practices possible and imperative." In other words, if any researcher wants to find the article, even though it was published under a different name, it should take them no longer than a minute to do so.

[7] There is an untitled poem on page 32 but it does not appear to be a part of the preceding sequence.
[8] The dependence of trans* Youtubers on the algorithm can be seen in the regular articles about algorithmic homophobia when a change results in the demonetization of trans* creators. See, e.g., Priddy.
[9] Sumac clearly thinks of his transmasculinity as being within but not supplanting the concept of Two-Spiritedness. This is not the only possible understanding of the relationship between these two labels. Joshua Whitehead, in an open letter titled "Why I'm Withdrawing from my Lambda Literary Award Nomination," states that "My gender, sexuality, and my identities supersede Western categorizations of LGBTQ+ because Two-Spirit is a home-calling, it is a home-coming. I note that it may be easy from an outside vantage point to read Two-Spirit as a conflation of feminine and masculine spirits and to easily, although wrongfully, categorize it as trans; I also note the appropriation of Two-Spirit genealogies by settler queerness to mark it as a reminder that Western conceptions of "queerness" have always lived due in part to the stealing of third, fourth, fifth, and fluid genders from many, although not all, Indigenous worldviews."
[10] Peppernell's *Pillow Thoughts* series is known for its colourful backgrounds more than it is for verbal dexterity. A sample:

[11] This image was generated using the open-access platform wordclouds.com.
[12] Given that word clouds can seem like a short cut, or even automation of literary critical work, I found it interesting how much interpretation was involved in this process. I needed to compensate for, first, the fact that in English a word such as "love" can be a noun, a verb or an adjective, dependent on context. This required using the word search function to go through the manuscript and make individual decisions. I also decided to add the scores for singular and plural forms of the same noun together, in order to more accurately reflect its importance in the manuscript, and ascribed the score to whichever form appeared more often. I mention all this to reaffirm that this is a

playful and deformative practice of interpretive criticism, not an attempt at scientific objectivity.

[13] There are scant references to ceremonial signifiers such as sweat lodges, powwow and four directions, but these are not explained in detail. This decision likely also reflects the poems' intended largely Indigenous audience.

[14] I will not reproduce the images here: they should be seen in their correct sequence and context.

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Hunger for Culture: Navigating Indigenous Theater

CLEMENTINE BORDEAUX, KENNETH R. RAMOS AND ARIANNA TAYLOR

Introduction

Two young Indigenous performers stand on a small, raised stage, under a bridge near a concrete-encased river in downtown Los Angeles (DTLA). The DTLA skyline in the south and the Los Angeles gold line metro train on the overhead bridge, connecting Chinatown and Lincoln Heights to the north. The young man is a slim, handsome, and energetic performer. The young woman is slightly older, but not by much, and she has a short build with straight dark hair and a determined face. They turn to each other, take a deep breath, turn to face the crowd, and shout, "HUNGER FOR CULTURE!"

The two performers were Kenneth Ramos and Jennifer Marlowe, two professional actors cast in the 2016 world premiere of *Urban Rez,* written by Larissa FastHorse, directed by Michael John Garcés, and produced by Cornerstone Theatre Company (CTC). At the time, the circumstances of an Indigenous-led production, like *Urban Rez*, were somewhat a rarity. *Urban Rez* represented a keen moment in American Theater where a predominantly Indigenous cast performed a play written by an Indigenous playwright. *Urban Rez* was distinctive from other American theater shows in production style, narrative form, and community engagement methodologies, especially for Los Angeles.

In the seventh installment of CTC's "Hunger Cycle," the *Urban Rez* production undertook the task of crafting a response to the yearning for culture in Los Angeles County. The metropolitan area of Los Angeles often boasts a culturally diverse and LGBTQ+ inclusive landscape but regularly erases Indigenous populations. Los Angeles

also holds the highest percentage of urban-based American Indians in the United States but has frequently forgotten to include non-federally recognized tribes in the region, including Tongva, Tataviam, Acjachemen, and Chumash communities. *Urban Rez* draws attention to the multifaceted ways Indigenous populations might hunger for culture, while it also utilizes theater-based practices.

Our essay looks at the *Urban Rez* show as a theater production that demonstrates how an Indigenous play offers a queering of US-based performance. *Urban Rez* utilizes sovereignty to discuss belonging, relationship to place, and representation. First and foremost, *Urban Rez* operates within the limitations of a white heteropatriarchal theater landscape that often erases Indigenous narratives. We demonstrate that the 2016 *Urban Rez* production established a queer Indigenous presence within a colonial theater space. The *Urban Rez* production disrupts the linear models defined by American theater, which do not allow for the complexities of an Indigenous experience, let alone a queer Indigenous experience. Overall, the experience of *Urban Rez* not only challenges narrative expectation but disrupts the audience, cast, and crew production experience beyond heteropatriarchal structures.

Our analysis of *Urban Rez* weaves together an opportunity to understand a theater experience not grounded in the confines of settler logics, with one of understanding Indigenous theater as a space for inclusive and relational representation. Like the groundbreaking works produced by Indigenous performance artists and Indigenous-led theaters such as Spiderwoman Theater in the 1970s, the *Urban Rez* experience brings attention to assimilation, political oppression, and settler confinements while also including significant LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit narratives. The production experience explores ideas of relationality as defined by being a *Kuuyam*, meaning "guest" in Tongva, as theorized by Charles Sepulveda. Overall, the play's

premise challenges audiences to think about the impact of the myriad of settler colonial projects of North America.

This essay is a collaboration between three performers from the show. The authors have all grown up on our home reservations outside of Los Angeles city limits, and we all identify as queer, Two-Spirit, or trans. Two co-authors joined the *Urban Rez* processes in the early moments of the production timeline through their involvement with the American Indian Community Council and a local university. The other co-author joined later in the production through their involvement with the Red Circle Project (a defunct Two-Spirit health organization in Los Angeles). Through our friendship, artistry, and collaboration, we address the ways *Urban Rez* offered a shift in our discussion of performance, theater, community work, queer, and self-representation.

Hunger for Analysis

A young Apache woman enters the audience space. She is wearing a beautifully crafted Rainbow headpiece; she begins to dance. She is deliberate in her movement. Each drum beat—a recording played over the main speakers—guides her in gentle, rhythmic dancing. She slowly ends the dance, and the play resumes as she exits the staging area. The audience just witnessed the first time a trans-woman and Apache performer had performed the Rainbow Dance in public. Before the performance, the trans-actor never had the courage or the support required for this endeavor. As an Apache trans-woman, she struggles with settler colonialism's lasting impact and legacy on her cultural dances. As a trans-woman, she had never found a safer space to perform such a dance, and without the support of the cast, crew, writer, and director, she would not have ever attempted the dance.

Through the work of Indigenous creatives and allies, *Urban Rez* mobilized narrative and performance styles that demonstrated and asserted self-representation in the face of aggressive settler colonial frameworks. When we reference settler colonialism, we utilize Indigenous Studies scholars like J. Kēhaulani Kauanui, Scott L. Morgenson, Mark Rifkin, Shannon Speed, and Patrick Wolfe. Settler colonialism within a theater context reflects the hindrance of heteropatriarchy, the erasure of other-than-human kinship, and the uplifting of stereotypical Indigenous characters. *Urban Rez* continues to grow in our imagination. Every time we re-evaluate the experience, we remember the show's profound impact on shifting and expanding our understanding of settler logics.

The Indigenous community experience in Los Angeles differs depending on our positionality. As Indigenous settlers in Tongva territory, our approach to land and story varies from the LA Native communities with ancestral ties to specific geographic places. *Urban Rez* continued to mold and craft conversations of Indigeneity as a "counterpart analytic to settler colonialism" (Kauanui xiv). However, not a main character, the presentation of a trans-Apache woman as a part of everyday *Urban Rez* life is a prime example of how community experience in the production reflects our queer lives. As the tactics of settler colonialism are one of erasure, the narratives created and recreated for the show included queer conversations and conversations with land and place.

We also utilize terms like Two-Spirit and queer because our journeys through self-identification continue to shift and grow. As a result of the politicization of Indigenous identities and communities, co-authors have experienced the forced removal and isolation from settler LGBTQ+ spaces. We come to Two-Spirit identities from the activism of Indigenous communities in the 1990s. We use the term similarly to how Qwo-Li Driskill outlines it in their scholarly work (84). We utilize the term queer,

especially articulating the interventions of Indigenous feminist scholarship and queer affect as they have appeared in the work of Joanne Barker, Sarah Deer, Jennifer Denetdale, Dian Million, and Melanie Yazzie, et al. Our queerness and Two-Spirit identities came out of necessity. We first and foremost identify as Apache, Kumeyaay (Iipay), and Lakota.

We would further posit that the *Urban Rez* production is a queering American theater space because the production employs community-based, interactive, and reciprocal work through the writing, rehearsal, production, and outreach process. Queer affect from Indigenous feminist scholarship offers a critique of non-settler normativity (Barker 6). By Indigenous, we mean culturally grounded, culturally relevant, and culturally conscious protocols and perimeters defined through tribal accountability. And by feminist, we mean encompassing a gendered understanding of the world that opposes heteropatriarchy. As we consider what the play itself produced for and with the community, the research was produced for and with the community.

The nuances of sovereignty on stage create a way to contend with western art spaces that force Indigenous artists into an identity-driven practice. Within the context of our analysis, sovereignty addresses both the complications of artistic representation and the issues faced by the *Urban Rez* characters, cast, and playwright. In her 2011 article, Jolene Rickard unpacks visual sovereignty, shifting the focus of a colonial interpretation of Indigenous art into transforming the growing space of sovereignty to include an intellectual scope for aesthetic theorization (478). Rickard uses visual examples to demonstrate that sovereignty is bound to concepts of power. The power structures within spaces like theater indicate that federal policy regulates Indigenous visibility, complicating a lack of relationality or reciprocity.

In our view, *Urban Rez* counters possessive logic and disrupts the nation-state. The production occurred in two different places in the city of Los Angeles: one in stark

contrast with the downtown area and the other nestled by a practically hidden freshwater spring on the west side of the city. The balance of the two performance sites reflects a resistance to the conceptual idea that settler colonialism—as a structure—actively destroys tribal ideology, place, language, culture, etc., to replace it with the dominating society (Wolfe 388). By reimagining relationships with these places, *Urban Rez* actively resists colonization while also rejecting the logics of possession, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson theorizes through the domination of an oppressed nation (xii). Not only were voices of queer Indigenous people uplifted and put in the center of a performance, but the physical land was reimagined again as Indigenous space.

Hunger for Native Theater

The theater production was not ordinary. During the rehearsal, we shared tears during the rehearsals, mostly when we connected with historical and intergenerational narratives of trauma and pain. But we also shared more laughter than not. *Urban Rez*'s narrative form challenges American Theater to consider what constitutes "good" theater by centering (Los Angeles) and continuously refocusing on local communities. We hungered for new ways to connect beyond the stage. The multivocal production experience often left the crew and production company unsure about the final result. The disruption of settler logics, done by infusing gendered, queer, Indigenous, and community-focused material, was often hazy theoretically discussed. But the moment the play started, the simultaneity of the story and performance experience opened new opportunities for expression for the audience, cast, and crew.

Indigenous theater, or Native American theater, or American Indian Theater—the terminology depends on the decade—covers a broad intervention of storytellers that approach the medium of American theater to tell stories of Indigenous content. Indigenous theater can range from ancient modes of oral storytelling to cultural modes

of expression through song and dance or professionally staged productions. Indigenous performances can include current spaces—such as intertribal pow wows, the recent wave of social media platforms—and highlight the diversity of cultural performances. Indigenous theater has permeated American theater in various forms that have ebbed and flowed with changing dynamics of the theater landscape in the past fifty years.

Indigenous-centered ensembles, production companies, and a wide range of Indigenous playwrights have made their way into mainstream circles. The attempt to operate within the mainstream theater landscape can often mean neglecting essential narratives or characters for the sake of mainstream non-native audiences. For example, a trans character on stage is a plot point or oddity, but we were simply auntie and cousins in the *Urban Rez* landscape. The push to make an Indigenous character legible to a non-native audience continues to be an issue with mainstream theater that does not include Indigenous trans-characters. We, as Indigenous performers, have all, at one time, played into a trope on stage. The reasons are numerous and would warrant an entirely different essay.

Theater roles continue to be limited and opportunities scarce. The only Equity Indigenous theater company in the United States is Native Voices at the Autry ("About Native Voices").[1] Native Voices was established in 2014 "to more fully support the extraordinary talents of its Native actors, writers, musicians, directors, designers, and producers" ("About Native Voices"). With Indigenous production at the core, Native Voices caters to a predominately white audience as frequented by the Autry Museum of the American West. Like Native Voices, other Indigenous theater spaces continue to function as a medium motivated by members of or descendants of tribal communities in North America. However, Two-Spirit representation still operates at the fringes of dominant theater spaces and rarely within mainstream Indigenous narrative making. A

queer character is rarely a main character; so, even if our main character *Max* presented as a cis-heteronormative body, his queerness was important to us. That is not to say Two-Spirit performers are omitted but often play straight characters or present a straight persona in public.

The Native Voices Theater Company, as the premiere Indigenous theater in the United States, is often used as the go-to company to engage with Indigenous performance and content. However, they rarely produce Two-Spirit narratives, showcase queer characters, hire openly gay actors, or create collaborative productions with the community. They host an annual short play festival that solicits new plays from the larger North American Indigenous playwriting community, but the call for scripts often frames similar themes of Indigeneity. We do not mean to dismiss the extensive work Native Voices has done for theater on the American landscape. Still, we continue to see limited Two-Spirit representations on mainstream theater stages.

Urban Rez firmly demonstrated a positionality grounded in relationality in two ways that also differs from a typical mainstream theater playwriting process. First, the approach to gathering communal narratives required a deep reflection of place and positionality. The story circle method employed by Cornerstone Theater Company calls for community members to join in a group gathering to share personal narratives where each participant answers a general question or responds to a specific theme. For example, the playwright asked *Urban Rez* participants to describe their individual and collective experiences as Indigenous people in Los Angeles. From these stories, we were able to see our trans auntie embodied in "Tasha" as a character on stage. The story circles—conducted by the playwright, Larissa FastHorse, and CTC staff—happened with various groups, including local tribal communities and urban relocated communities.

Each line of the play eventually reflected a story FastHorse utilized from the story circle method, unlike the classic narrative form of American theater, which includes three linear acts in episodic and climactic form. Our stage was not stagnant. The *Urban Rez* often presented stories simultaneously, across and around audience members (Arcos). Again, the interweaving of stories throughout the production demonstrated the simultaneity of our queerness interwoven into the plot without making our queerness an oddity. Our characters were seen not as queer characters but as complex relatives. Performers weaved in and out of a predominantly standing audience. The playwright was strategic in highlighting moments of sovereignty, uplifting diverse representation, and demonstrating through the collaborative writing process that addressing issues like federal policy and oppression can result in a different type of autonomy on stage.

The simplicity of having queer actors, trans-actors, and characters on stage was not always a possibility. The founding of Indigenous theater ensembles and theater companies have continued to focus on the infusion of Native characters that frequently rely on stereotypical characterization. Furthermore, American playwrights include Native characters that continue to perpetuate these stereotypes to be seen by a mainstream audience. Critiques of the "American Indian" image emerged across academic fields but rarely within popular culture. In the 1970s, Robert Berkhofer, Jr. demonstrated a connection between federal Indian policy and the impact on the idea of the American Indian in the American psyche. More recently, within psychology studies, Fryberg et al. document that racial mascots impact the self-esteem of American Indian youth. Many other scholars emphasize the negative impact of "playing Indian," as theorized by Phil Deloria (2007). Yet again, Two-Spirit critiques are not at the forefront of media or theater discussions.

Hunger for Representation

At the end of an *Urban Rez* performance, where we had a high concentration of local tribal community members, a Tongva Auntie approached us.[2] The Auntie thanked us for the performance and said, "I'm so glad this wasn't Indian Romeo and Juliet"[3] We all laughed in response. When we asked her to explain further, she clarified that most theater performances in Los Angeles with an Indigenous narrative continue to position Indigeneity as a deficit. She explained that the shows she recently watched centered life or death relationships, presented a coming-of-age story or coming-of-identity narrative, or presented a historical account of Native characters. Her comment was a high compliment. We thanked her for supporting our show and felt confident in *Urban Rez* not reproducing an "Indian Romeo and Juliet" trope.

Playwrights, like FastHorse, continue to craft stories that challenge stereotype characterizations. When thinking of Indigenous stereotype characters within dominant society popular culture, phrases like "noble savage" or "Indian princess" might come to mind and have also been perpetuated in the theater. In her book *Celluloid Indians*, Jacqueline Kilpatrick explains three ways of understanding Indigenous stereotypes in films. Kilpatrick highlights mental, sexual, and spiritual representations and issues that continue to reside in new media. Audiences can view the mental stereotype as the encompassing of the other two tropes since words like "stupid" or "dumb" are replaced by "filthy" or "noble." In American theater, we see this in stereotypical characters like "Tiger Lily'' in J.M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1911), or the nameless American Indian characters in Irving Berlin's *Annie Get Your Gun* (1946; both shows are still produced on Broadway, nationally). Stereotypical characters place the Indigenous individual inferior to the settler, enabling the over-sexualization or damaging view of the "primitive heathen."

Unfortunately, stereotypical characters specify the lack of American comprehension and creation of "otherness" on stage, even in Indigenous-focused performances. We hunger to break free from Indigenous stereotypes. Frequently there is a drive within mainstream theater landscapes to create legible characters by including narratives that contain some version of an Indigenous stereotype (Brandes). *Urban Rez* did not utilize tropes and created many characters that counter these ahistorical stereotypes. The characters and performers ranged in tribal affiliation, age, sexual orientation, gender, and experience. FastHorse demanded predominantly Indigenous performers and characters, which resulted in a 15-person cast representing 14 different tribal Nations. The play did not have an Indian princess, a noble savage, or any characters still seen in mainstream media or theater.

Our ancestral identities were at the forefront of how we experienced and continued seeing the world. We want to exist outside the gaze and performance of stereotypes simply. As queer and Two-Spirit community members, we recognize our own "ongoing radical resistance against colonialism that includes struggles for land redress, self-determination, healing historical trauma, cultural continuance, and reconciliation" (Driskill 69). Our queerness—tied to our ancestral identity—became secondary rather than being dissected and looked at through a colonial or a Eurocentric lens of gender and sexuality. As a theater production, *Urban Rez* provided intellectual and emotional space for radical imagination that engaged with the decolonization process, not as a fixed finality of the process (Driskill 70). Max and the other queer character were central to carrying the storyline forward, and both were continuously rooted in an ancestral identity that connects to self, place, and community.

We do not want to romanticize Indigenous communities but continue to produce research that serves the community differently. The work of *Urban Rez* was at

times uncomfortable but ultimately actively working to meet the community where they needed stories told. We observe that the process of crafting *Urban Rez* provided a safe and open space to create beyond the confines of the typical American theater. Max, the main character, reflected a similar experience to those our urban and local communities face with the settler logics of erasure. *Urban Rez* was a shift because it was the first experience where we did not adjust gender presentation or physical identities to conform to the American theater standard.

As demonstrated by Auntie's relief in our production, the community wanted fewer stereotypes and a more well-rounded representation. We did not have an "Indian Romeo or Juliet." The opportunity to perform fully realized characters quickly taught us and reminded us of who we are, where we come from, and the ancestors that connect us to the land. To perform in *Urban Rez* meant that our identities were simply understood instead of being dissected to fit the confines of current American theater stereotypes. The character formation was tied to a demonstration of relationships, not just showing the failure of those relationships.

The three co-authors were bemused when we first discussed *Urban Rez*'s idea as a queer theater production. We have all had to justify or defend our queerness in other performance spaces, including drag, student leadership, or community organizing. Although we live as queer, Two-Spirit, and trans people, those parts of our lives are sometimes under a microscope. But in the *Urban Rez* landscape, we did not have to perform ourselves on stage. The ability to engage as a whole character, operating outside the confines of stereotypes, allowed for nuanced representations of our experience in the show. We were seen as relative and self-determining, occupying Indigenous space wholly.

Hunger for Sovereignty

A man dressed as Uncle Sam yells from the back of the crowd, "…only the federal government is empowered to recognize tribes as legitimate or not." The crowd responds. Some people are surprised; other audience members nervously laugh. One man whispers loudly, "let's tie him to the train tracks." An Auntie character asks, "Who invited the federal government?" The Uncle Sam character responds, "The American government does not need to be invited. We're old friends."

Articulating visual sovereignty to a non-native company was difficult. However, CTC continued to support the work and challenge themselves as a non-native organization to show up, listen, and support. They hungered to support an Indigenous process, supporting and uplifting particular types of sovereignty expression as theorized by scholars like Vine Deloria, Jr, Gerald R. Alfred, Audra Simpson, and many others. The company continued to be patient and let Indigenous voices be a driving force of the production.

The narrative and characters of *Urban Rez* addressed sovereignty in two ways. The first way was to address the day-to-day dealing with the federal government regarding tribal citizenship. The plot centers on the experience of the main character Max, a non-federally recognized California Native artist dealing with garnering federal recognition from the United States government. Max wants to sell his art, and yet, according to the Indian Arts and Crafts Act (IACA) of 1990, only individuals enrolled in federally recognized tribes can sell "authentic" American Indian arts and crafts ("Indian Arts and Crafts"). The second way was through an act of visual sovereignty, as introduced by Jolene Rickard. Visual sovereignty provides an encompassing approach for understanding the intersecting gaze of empire, the disentanglement of representation, and Indigenous narratives.

Within the play, Max struggles to sell his work and negotiates with the "federal government" to accomplish the impossible task of gaining federal recognition for his

small tribe. Max's character brings up gaming, blood quantum, and sovereignty to comply with the government and convince his family members to join the cause. The harder Max tries to comply, the more he struggles. The play utilizes the real-life experiences of community members to craft a narrative centering on federal Indian policy and personal relationships with governmental laws. Throughout the performance, different moments of discussion highlighted the impact of the Marshall Trilogy by addressing citizenship, land, and trust responsibility (Fletcher 3). As the play progresses, policy and law issues come into stark contrast on stage.

As Max spirals further in his quest for federal recognition, he falls further and further away from tribal connections to land, community, and culture. Although Max does not directly state his struggles with a federal definition of sovereignty, the audience can see his conflict. Max can never maintain or achieve the sovereignty that the federal government demands (Maaka and Anderson 325). By the end of the play, we see that relationships to Indigeneity from a tribal-specific perspective are more critical for Max than federal recognition.

Sovereignty can be a complicated concept and can mean many things for tribal nations. As a European term, sovereignty can be helpful when navigating colonial systems but has little use within an Indigenous context (Alfred 54). The federal government forces colonial relationships with the land, citizenship, and Indigenous history to become complicated for many tribal nations. The process of creating *Urban Rez* addressed the limitations of attempting to work within a colonial structure while also undoing the visual limitations of colonial expression.

FastHorse's script and process led audiences to a new way of engaging with Indigenous stories that include queer representation. In the introduction to *Critically Sovereign*, Joanne Barker states that "We do not know whether the stories are true, only that they tell us who we are" (1). The sovereignty we reflected in our *Urban Rez*

characters ensured that we did not compromise who we were or continue to be. The stories created a shift, not only for the characters but also for performers. It was the first experience where we did not have to compromise our Indianness or queerness. We did not even have to talk about it to establish our queerness on stage.

The 2016 production created a unique process of having each performer imbue their attributes into their characters on stage. We made our characters specifically queer, trans, or Two-Spirit, although the script did not call for it. In the play, the audience witnesses multiple queer, gay, Two-Spirit, and trans-actors and characters on stage. We did not have to wave pride flags on stage to represent ourselves as a part of multiple communities. The complexity of each individual was accepted and shared fully on stage.

We recognized the nuances of our representation in FastHorse's weaving of our words; as queer performers, we had not seen our everyday-ness demonstrated adequately in other theater work. As performers, we could embody so many parts of our Indigenous selves openly without performing a settler version of queer. The play uplifted our intersecting voices and was the first time some of us felt like our stories and narratives took center without being a deficit relationship to other identities (Clemenco). The narrative honored the queer, reservation-bred, and complicated story of ourselves by showing up and listening to our Indigenous voice, our queer voice, and our gendered voice.

Hunger for Relationality

Two women adorned with weaved basket hats, multi-stringed abalone necklaces, tanned deerskin tops, and tule weed woven skirts stand before a slender Lakota woman named Larissa. The women stand surrounded by the cast, crew, and audience of *Urban Rez* in the beautiful production setting of the Kuruvungna Springs in West Los

Angeles (Gabrielino Tongva Springs Foundation). They hand Larissa a wooden instrument called a clapper stick used in Tongva song making. Acjacheman community member Jacque Nunez, one of the two women, posted a statement about the experience on Facebook, "Gifting her with a clapper. I loved the truth, humor, and accuracy of our journey as an unrecognized California tribe. It was painful but comforting to see our truth articulated so well." The memory of the image still brings a heightened emotional response.

The accountability we demonstrated through the production considers the engagement of reciprocity between the playwright, cast, crew, and audience. We hunger for relationality. Framing a reciprocal relationship between the community and land requires acknowledging positionality through a lens of cultural norms that broadly engage with community-based knowledge. In his book *Research is Ceremony*, Shawn Wilson states, "an Indigenous methodology must be a process that adheres to relational accountability" (77). We were accountable to each other. As insiders/outsiders to the urban Indian community, the privilege of writing about the *Urban Rez* production establishes how our responsibility to the urban community informs our work and how we continue to serve the local tribal communities in Los Angeles. Furthermore, the production demonstrated a sustained relationship as a guest and then relative to place.

The *Urban Rez* experience unsettles the performance of the nation-state while also unsettling what it means to belong. The creative process of the *Urban Rez* production demonstrates ideas of kinship and being a guest, as theorized by Acjachemen/Tongva scholar Charles Sepulveda (52). We introduced the theoretical concept of being a "guest" to guide and focus our discussion on *Urban Rez.* Sepulveda introduces "Kuuyam [as] an Indigenous theorization that disrupts the dialectic between Native and settlers through a Tongva understanding of non-natives as potential guests

of the tribal people, and more importantly—of the land itself" (41). Kuuyam frames a broad Indigenous methodology to center a specific geopolitical community. The play is for and about communities in the Los Angeles basin, and so too is the research.

Each performance was at a place of importance to Tongva communities. The first half of the production occurred in downtown Los Angeles (DTLA) near the LA River and the Tongva village of Yaangna, one of many Tongva village sites. During the initial occupation of Yaangna (ancestral name of LA), Spanish settlers enslaved many Tongva tribal members to work in agricultural fields near the river (Bogany). As we began rehearsals at our first location, many Tongva tribal members reminded us that these locations were places of violence (Kudler). During the (re)occupation of these spaces, especially in DTLA, Indigenous voices created a moment of physical resistance.

In the grand opening of our show, we asked a Tongva community member to help us welcome the performance into the space and provide community care for the show. Craig Torres sang a coming home song for the land and stories shared throughout our performance. Torres spoke of the healing we were bringing to the space. He told us that he was calling the ancestors to the place. *Urban Rez* demonstrated that "indigenous peoples exist, resist, and persist" (Kauanui 1). Although never explicit, our goal became to occupy the land in disruption of settler logics physically. The performances created new meaning and recreated relationality in places of erasure.

In the second production location, we performed at the Kuruvungna Springs site in West Los Angeles. These natural springs are a historical and cultural site for Tongva and other California Native communities. The performance at Kuruvungna brought an entirely different feel to the production. In one instance, the Springs, located on the campus of University High School, are a point of pride for the primarily non-native institution. Yet, the nearby apartment complex would continually call in noise

complaints to the local police department in the next moment. As Scott L. Morgensen posits in their text, "the processes of settler colonialism produce contradictions, as settlers try to contain or erase Native differences so that they may inhabit Native land as if it were their own" (123). Another critical essay could be written about public land use for the performance, including class, income, and ethnic demographics for each space. Performing at Kuruvungna Springs created beautiful moments of contradiction.

As Lakota, Kumeyaay (Iipay), and Apache relatives, we have had to think about our positionality in the play and on Tongva lands. We consider our essay a demonstration of inter-reflexivity as theorized by Yazzie and Risling Baldy. Inter-reflexivity between the co-authors, the playwright, cast, crew, and the community became making and remaking our understandings of representation, relationships, and reciprocity. We imagine our queer and Two-Spirit narratives as accountable to being a guest on Tongva lands while also profoundly reflecting on how to relate to each other as Indigenous kin, characters in the *Urban Rez* production, and guests living a particular Los Angeles experience.

We were challenged and welcomed by the local tribal communities and the diverse Indigenous Urban community. We had multiple audience members come to both production sites. Their perspectives and our perspectives were a challenge and a gift. The challenge is to understand the audience's positionality and how a performer might interpret the narrative. We had a wide variety of tribal communities visit, and many audience members attended multiple shows at each location. The co-authors never experienced questions about our queerness, nor was the production challenged about having Two-Spirit characters on stage. *Urban Rez* allowed the space to explore ideas of Indigeneity because we were *Kuuyam* (guest) first.

Hunger for our queer selves

Max stands confused and frustrated, opposite the government official. Their application for federal recognition is denied; Max is defeated. His community on stage rallied around him, all speaking words of encouragement and belonging, "You want to be a part of something. To know that you're not alone, we're our own tribe today; we are all a part of the circle…" Max turns to his community and reiterates, "It gives all of us a place to belong." The *Urban Rez* community turns to the audience and sings a round dance song, inviting everyone to join. At the end of the song, the crowd erupts with celebration and embraces.

We continue to face challenges as we struggle to articulate the nuanced conversation of *Urban Rez* but are ultimately searching to express how we can exist as whole characters on a performance stage. On the one hand, we address theater history to communicate ideas about representation, narrative form, and audience engagement. Yet, we have often only engaged with performance space as straight characters or in drag. On the other hand, we engage with broad Indigenous studies concepts to understand the intersections of sovereignty, federal policy, and settler colonialism. But are reminded that issues of Two-Spirit representation historically have been pushed out of heteropatriarchal structures like the United States government. We turn to queer theory and queer representation to tease out and fill in the gaps.

The *Urban Rez* narrative asserted self-representation in opposition to settler imaginaries to define and establish an alternative to heteronormative, sexist, and exclusivist frameworks. For example, Indigenous writers exercise self-determining actions and reflect a queering of stories to radically reimagine Indigenous futures that see Indigenous and queer communities as central to existence. The stories of *Urban Rez* draw visibility to queer, Two-Spirit, and trans relatives that did not have to separate themselves or perform to be part of a narrative that reflects deep histories and tribal

consciousness (Ramos). The affirmation of queer, trans, and Two-Spirit characters and actors on stage uplifts self-representations not defined by settler logics.

We have not argued extensively why other theater companies do not employ queer practices of creating theater within an American context. Partially because the narrow representation of characters on a theater stage often reduces a persona to a single type of character (i.e., queer or Indigenous), reflecting stagnant American storytelling. We posit that *Urban Rez* "directly denaturalize[s] settler colonialism and disrupt its conditioning of queer projects by asserting Native queer modernities" (Morgensen 11). We focus on Max because his queerness on stage was through the lens of a nephew, cousin, and leader of the *Urban Rez* landscape. In addition, the building of interrelationships on stage results in a perceptivity central to imagining the peoplehood of the region, harkening back to ideas of maintaining being a good guest and relative in Los Angeles (Rifkin 35). The diverse *Urban Rez* characters result in nuanced relatives on stage rather than a narrowed reflection of a settler imagination.

Near the end of CTC data gathering, Larissa asked what was missing from the play. Now fully embedded in the early production stages, a co-author automatically suggested she needed more Two-Spirit representation. Without a pause, Larissa and CTC immediately began to organize a story circle with The Red Circle Project (RCP), which resulted in two trans characters, "Tasha" and "Arianna." At the time, RCP was the only HIV prevention and AIDS education program in Los Angeles County that specifically targeted the Two-Spirit community. The engagement with RCP reflects the legacy of how Two-Spirit communities continue to grow and change with "Indigenous community formation" (Driskill *et al*. 15). The inclusion of Two-Spirit narratives aided in the richness of the experience.

Before *Urban Rez*, themes of Indigeneity in American theater have relied on stereotypical character and plot paradigms that echo stereotypical representations of

tribal communities. Driven by community voice, the story of *Urban Rez* was a push to decentralize stereotypes to focus on narratives by and for Indigenous people to provide alternatives to the limitations imposed by settler colonial subjectivity (Morgensen 46). Instead of recreating the same stagnant stories of the struggle of an LGBTQ+ experience in the community, *Urban Rez* viewed our characters and ourselves as whole and integral. By utilizing queer community voice, *Urban Rez* captured the communities' often complex issues within broad American Indian metropolitan culture.

We did not, and do not, want to see a fractionated version of ourselves on stage. We must reimagine our relationships to place, community, and narrative and address the emplacement of heteronormativity on articulations of Indigenous peoplehood (Rifkin 10). Through our participation in the *Urban Rez* experience, we attempted to address the complicated ways Indigenous narratives have been removed, shifted, adapted, or rendered invisible by settler colonial formations (Rifkin 315). We want to be a part of the circle as the gay Kumeyaay (Iipay) cousin, the Two-Spirit Apache sister, and the queer Lakota auntie.

Conclusion: Hunger for a Future

The *Urban Rez* experience was an interactive and multivocal theater process that we continue to validate and analyze as an Indigenous and queer methodological and theoretical model to address the limitations of American theater. We used Indigenous studies concepts to center our positionally as guests on Tongva land and to challenge our work to be accountable to each other and the community. Utilizing queer theories, we demonstrated that the *Urban Rez* production presented an opportunity to express ourselves as nuanced Indigenous characters on stage. Finally, our co-authorship reflects our relationship as guests and then relatives through the *Urban Rez* experience.

We consider our collaborative writing process a reflection of being a guest, especially queer Indigenous guests. Sepulveda's theorization of Kuuyam focuses on the relationship to rivers and land while also critiquing the deficits of western academic methodologies. We see our multilayered relationship as queer performers, queer academics, and queer guests to hold our writing accountable to the land and other-than-human kin. The writing process provides a place for us to share and hold each other culpable to the Indigenous narratives of *Urban Rez* beyond the confines of the performance space.

Through Indigenous feminist and community-based methodologies, a reciprocal relationship establishes a framework of self-reflective positionality that we employ generously. The co-authors experienced moments of reclamation that stemmed from the production. We found a theater community that was not reacting to or upholding white supremacy. We found the support to come fully into our queerness and transness as Indigenous people. The production continues to be a touchpoint for the safety of our identities.

Academic writing is often an isolating process, and historically, we would have told stories together. Indigenous scholars like Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Shawn Wilson provide models of navigating insider/outsider research issues. We attempt to model how to conduct research as a guest to Tongva land together as insiders and outsiders to both the American Theater stage and settler academia. Indigenous Education studies scholar Bryan Brayboy demonstrates that collecting the experiences of communities and honoring their beliefs provides an entree for educational anthropologists to rethink traditional fieldwork methods (22). Similarly, we imagine our project has moved forward with a collective framework honoring Kuuyam and reimagining queer kin beyond the stereotypes.

In conclusion, Indigenous queer narratives within the larger American theater context are challenging because of time, convenience, and reception. *Urban Rez*, fortunately, allowed for engagement with the Indigenous community in a way that benefits the indigenous research narrative and presents a long-term commitment to queering American theater. We try to imagine how to better navigate art and performance within the larger framework of Indigenous studies. *Urban Rez* continues to be an entry point in understanding the complexities of our identities as reservation-raised yet urban living performers

Notes

[1] The *Actor's Equity Association* is a union that represents more than 51,000 professional Actors and Stage Managers nationwide.
[2] We use the term "Auntie" as an honorific for a respected female older than us but not yet in their elder years.
[3] We also use Native, Indigenous, and Indian terms interchangeably to reflect the current dialogue within our communities.

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Nádleeh and the River: Third Gender and Interdependences in Sidney Freeland's Film *Drunktown's Finest*

LEE SCHWENINGER

In a late scene in Sidney Freeland's 2014 film *Drunktown's Finest*, the family elder and medicine man, Harmon John (Richard Ray Whitman), sits down with his adult, transgender grandchild Felixia (Carmen Moore) to tell a Navajo story about the cultural importance of *nádleeh*. "A long time ago," he begins, "all the Navajos lived alongside the great river, the men, the women, and the *nádleeh* [which a subtitle translates as "third gender"]." After arguing about who was more important, men or women,

> they decided maybe they were better off without each other. The men rafted across the great river, and they took the *nádleeh* with them. For a while everything was fine. Then the men began to miss their wives and children, but they were too proud to go back so they sent the *nádleeh* back to check on things, and they returned with the message that things weren't so well with the women and that they missed the men and that they had no one to hunt. It became apparent both sides needed each other the men needed the women and the women in turn needed the men, and they both needed the *nádleeh*. To this day we carry this lesson, this balance. (minutes 79-81)

Harmon John leaves undefined what he intends with the word *nádleeh*, yet the viewer is left to assume that his grandchild, Felixia is *nádleeh*. More than that, the viewer does not get.

The *nádleeh* story, though it comes well into the film (minutes 79-81 of a 90-minute film), suggests an important theme running throughout—that of the

fundamental and inherent need for a place for the *nádleeh* in Navajo life and culture. And, given that the story does come late in the film, the viewer, while watching in the present moment, must look back mentally though what has just been seen in order to reconcile Harmon John's account of *nádleeh* and the river in the context of Felixia's experiences to which that viewer has just been witness. In that context, this essay delineates the ways in which *Drunktown's Finest* challenges heteronormative culture, on the reservation and in the border town, as it depicts and makes visible a range of views of the realities of Navajo people's experiences, including experiences centered on, but not limited to, issues of gender identity and politics. One of the central realities is the interrelatedness of different characters. Before analyzing the film's three interwoven plots, the essay contextualizes aspects of gender politics as it might play out in the film.

Although the film glosses *nádleeh* (with a subtitle) as "Third Gender," that gloss might not be as specific as it could be or perhaps as specific as is necessary. According to Wesley Thomas, writing in a different context, Felixia may well be more appropriately associated with what he terms the "feminine-male" a "fifth gender," as distinct, for example, from the masculine-female gender, that is "female bodied nádleeh/masculine females." (161). In her study "Navajo Worldview and Nádleehi," Carolyn Epple quotes one of her informants in the context of categories and definitions: "P.K.: In terms of types of queers, everyone is different here. Time and events and classification and categories, that's how you Anglos try to put everything. You get so caught up, you don't see people as humans responding to situations" (178). Furthermore, referring to her informants, Epple writes that "while *nádleehí*, as an identity, was acknowledged, the particulars of the identity remain variable… How then to define *nádleehí*? Presently, it would appear to be a nearly impossible task. Western epistemologies do not accommodate persons who are both herself and himself as well

as everything else" (184). Furthermore, according to Epple, Navajo culture understands everything in the universe as process, and thus "inseparability deals with the interconnectedness of the universe" and "individuals are also transformed into those processes" (176). One of Epple's informants declares that "the individual is inseparable from the air by which she or he survives or the ground on which she or he lives" (176). Because of the fact of this inseparability and this idea of process, Epple maintains, "we must adopt a different way of perceiving the universe, one that is processual, interconnected, and dynamic" (184). One option Epple offers, based on one of the informants, is that we see *nádleehi* "'as humans responding to situations,' that is, in terms of their interconnectedness" (184).

Alternatively, however, one might ask how important "labels" might be in an effort to more fully understand the implications of the filmic presentation of Felixia and of the challenges a transgender person faces. That is, in other words, how does the film portray the *nádleeh* character of Felixia? Director Sydney Freeland herself skirts the issue of labels. When, in an interview with Lauren Wissot for *Filmmaker Magazine*, she was asked about her character Felixia, Freeman reflected that

> labels are tricky. I am a member of both the Native community and the LGBT community. However, my goal with this film was to not go into it with an agenda. I simply wanted to tell the best possible story I could tell. My thinking is, if I can get someone from New York City to relate to the plight of a Navajo transsexual on an Indian reservation, then that kind of negates the need for labels. (Wissot np)

Despite this apparent feeling of ambivalence toward labels, however, in the same interview Freeland acknowledges the importance of casting a trans person for the lead role, reflecting on the discovery and casting of Felixia as extremely serendipitous:

> For the role of Felixia, it was very important that we cast someone who was transgendered. I'm very grateful to have met Carmen Moore, who is both trans and Navajo… [S]he brought a depth and authenticity to the character that very few people would have been able to. (Wissot np).

Cherokee scholar Qwo-Li Driskill offers an array of ways to understand some terminology related to *nádleeh* (though that particular word does not come up in the essay itself):

> The term "Two-Spirit" is a word that resists colonial definitions of who we are. It is an expression of our sexual and gender identities as sovereign from those of white GLBT movements. The coinage of the word was never meant to create a monolithic understanding of the array of Native traditions regarding what dominant European and Euromerican traditions call "alternative" genders and sexualities. The term came into use… as a means to resist the use of the word "berdache," and also as a way to talk about our sexualities and genders from within tribal contexts in English… The process of translating Two-Spiritness with terms in white communities becomes very complex. (2004, 52)

Driskill suggests that certain terms might not suffice—Queer, Transgender, Gay, for instance—and, in the context of colonialism, makes reference to "people with extra-ordinary genders and sexualities." As Native people, writes Driskill, "our erotic lives and identities have been colonized along with our homelands" (2004, 82). This linking and exposing of the interconnections between colonization, the land, and erotic lives and identities help viewers of a film like *Drunktown's Finest* see the same connections presented cinematically. Indeed, I argue here that these are central issues and questions that the film raises: what is the place of *nádleeh* on and off the homeland and what are the interdependencies between *nádleeh* and the hetereosexual characters in the context of settler cultural and political colonization?

An awareness of Navajo recognition of an interdependence is expressed succinctly in the documentary *Two Spirits* (2010), a film that documents the hate-crime murder of Fred Martinez. As Gabriel Estrada points out, the director Lydia Nibley documents the murder and thereby "affirms his/her Navajo sense of being a two-spirit 'effeminate male;' or *nádleeh*" (Estrada 168). The documentary, like *Drunktown's Finest*, includes a version of the Navajo story of the *nadleeh* and the river: "it was the *nadleeh*, it was the more effeminate less masculine men, that brought the sexes together, and that because of the *nadleeh*, our people survived. If it wasn't for the *nadhleehs*, we wouldn't be the people we are today" (qtd in Estrada 173). As Diné writer Carrie House writes, "We are significant balancing factors in the cosmos and world we live in" (qtd. in Driskil 2011, 217).

Drunktown's Finest tells the stories of three Navajo people on and off the reservation, in and around the New Mexican town of Gallup, named Dry Lake in the film. One plot involves the character of Sick Boy (Jeremiah Bitusui), a young Navajo man who is on the verge of joining the U.S. Army in order to support his family, but who, because he cannot keep himself out of jail, is ultimately denied admittance by his recruiter. After hitting a police officer, then later pummeling his mother's boyfriend, he promises his pregnant partner that he will change. A second plot involves Nizhoni (Morningstar Angeline), a soon-to-be eighteen-year-old Navajo woman who was adopted as a child by a white couple following the death of her parents in a car wreck. She is home in Dry Lake for the summer from Michigan where she has been in boarding school and to where she is to return to start college. In the meantime, she is doing community service and actively seeking—without her adoptive parent's knowledge or approval—the family of her birth parents, or "real" parents as she refers to them. A third plot tells the story of Felixia, the *nádleeh* grandchild of Harmon and Ruth John (Toni C. Oliver), living with them on the reservation just outside of Dry Lake.

Felixia is competing in a "Women of the Navajo" calendar competition (as a woman) and is having sex for pay with different men, men responding to the Facebook page, *Sexy Tranny Felixxxia*. In the course of the film, Felixia receives an offer from a man in New York, and the decision to leave the reservation and meet him there is what prompts Harmon John's telling the story of the *nádleeh* and the river, reminding his grandchild that there will always be a welcoming home for her on the Reservation with him and Ruth.

Having established contexts for each of these three characters in the opening sequences, the film follows them on and off the reservation as they move toward what interactions they do have among one another. As will be developed below, Felixia and Nizhoni discover that they are cousins, their mothers having been sisters; and Felixia and Sick Boy come together with each other at a party. These encounters only hint at the interconnections, the interdependences that the film implies, that all of the characters are subject to the same forces and cultural impositions of settler-colonialism. In this context, Andrea Smith's argument that practitioners of queer studies, as they move "past simple identity politics to interrogate the logics of heteronormativity," "have the task to uncover and analyze the logics of settler colonialism as they affect all areas of life" (43, 61). Similarly, Chris Finley argues for the importance of a "critical theory of biopower" because it has the potential to expose "the colonial violence of discourse on Native nonheteronormativity being used to justify Native genocide and the disappearance' of Native people" (Finley 40). By looking at representations of the intersections of Native and non-Native cultures in *Drunktown's Finest*, we can gain a sense of that tendency toward and resistance of that disappearance.

One can argue that the director makes erotics a way to understand the "dynamics of indigeneity." Freeland can be said to "foreground interdependence and vulnerability as positive principles of peoplehood" (Rifkin 35). Viewing the film in the

contexts of gender fluidity and structures of kinship helps clarify the interrelatedness of all three of the (only) apparently disparate plots as it simultaneously helps the viewer to rethink (colonial culture's) rigid gender boundaries. Freeman exposes those rigid, heterosexist boundaries, perhaps most obviously, through the character Sick Boy.

Sick Boy, having internalized many settler-colonial attitudes, is repulsed in stereotypical ways by anything that is not clearly heteronormative. It is thus instructive to look at how this masculine, heterosexual gender norming has been constructed. The internalization of extra-Indigenous norms is rampant throughout Native North America. According to Driskill, for example, "colonized sexuality is one in which we have internalized the sexual values of dominant culture. The invaders continue to enforce the idea that sexuality and non-dichotomous genders are a sin, recreating sexuality as illicit, shocking, shameful, and removed from any positive spiritual context" (2004, 54).

The viewer learns of Sick Boy's disinterest or lack of interest in the biological life of his little sister (over whom he has legal guardianship) when his partner Angela (Elizabeth Frances) tells him that the young girl is to prepare for her puberty ceremony.

Sick Boy: Why is Max wearing jewelry?

Angela: We're going to get a medicine man. He's going to do a puberty ceremony on her.

Sick Boy: What? When did this happen?

Angela: I would have told you if you weren't so busy running around punching cops.

Sick Boy: I'm just saying, can't this just wait until I get out of basic.

Angela: No. No, she just had her first period. It has to happen within four days of that.

Sick Boy: *Whoa. Way too much information*. (minutes 14-15) (my emphasis).

This early exchange clearly demonstrates that Sick Boy, though her guardian, wants nothing to do with any knowledge of the young woman's biological life. He lets his partner take complete responsibility. This brief scene early in the film also prepares the viewer for Sick Boy's response to other issues of sexuality.

At a grocery store Sick Boy meets Felixia, buying supplies for a party at a friend's house. He offers to drive her from the store to the party; once there, Felixia convinces him to stay for one drink, then two. In this sequence, as in others throughout the film, Freeland makes the choice to offer the viewer very stereotypical "male-gaze" shots of Felicia, emphasizing legs, hips, and breast cleavage. The director's shot-reverse-shot choices here offer the viewer a clear sense of how Sick Boy is seeing, Felixia. The filmography in this context exposes the cliché of the heterosexual male gaze at the same time it identifies Sick Boy's objectification of Felixia as female and as a sexual object. As this objectification is going on, Freeland uses dialogue to expose Sick Boy's heterosexism and homophobia. Once Felixia has accepted his offer of a ride and gotten into the car, he asks "Where're we going?"

Felixia: My friend, her name is Tracey?

Sick Boy: I know her. She hangs out with that faggot, Eugene, right? (minute 30)

Felixia seems to grudgingly accept Sick Boy's homophobia and chauvinism; that is, she lets him slide. But filmically the emphasis is on his gender prejudice in that the film exposes how out of place and inappropriate his attitudes are: "ahh . . . yeah," Felixia responds, hesitantly, and adds, with a sarcasm totally lost on Sick Boy, "That's funny." The viewer has been prepared to disapprove of Sick Boy's attitude in that there has been an earlier scene which shows Felixia and Eugene to be very good friends. Eugene prepares a fake ID for her, making the change from Felix to Felixia, opens his home and use of his computer for her, and proffers advice as a way to offer protection from disappointment and/or abuse.

These two moments in the film—Sick Boy's not wanting to hear about or even know about his sister's sexual maturity and his exposing his heterosexism—set the viewer up for his response to Felixia's physical body. The film indicates his initial physical attraction, as mentioned, with several filmic "male-gaze" shots of legs, hips, and cleavage. Felixia leads him into a bedroom, and they start kissing, but when he puts his hand between Felixia's legs, he is shocked. He springs back and runs from the house. In these ways, then, the film meticulously sets up Sick Boy as one who has internalized many of the settler-colonists' attitudes, prejudices, and chauvinistic behaviors. He is in ways a stereotypical, almost clichéd heterosexual man, gay-bashing, hitting on Felixia (whom he initially assumes to be a heterosexual woman) and being repulsed when he discovers she is not the "woman" he expected, all while his pregnant partner waits for him at home. At the same time the film shows him as homophobic and unaccepting of difference, however, it does depict him as compassionate in another context. In one brief scene he is seen sincerely helping his sister Max (Magdalena Begay) learn Navajo words, and again when he attempts to protect his six-year-old (half) brother from the child's abusive father. In short, his character is not black and white; Sick Boy does have some redeeming qualities despite his having internalized the male-heterosexual norms of settler culture. And ultimately, as we will discuss below, the film suggests he might be on the road to healing.

In the book *The Erotics of Sovereignty*, Mark Rifkin explores "the ways histories of settler dispossession, exploitation, and attempted genocide and their ongoing effects and current trajectories are embedded in the dynamics of everyday life" (2). Though Rifkin is concerned with written texts, one can certainly ask the same questions of film. In what ways can *Drunktown's Finest* be seen to "theorize dynamics of Indigenous sociality and spatiality that are not recognized as sovereignty within the administrative grid that shapes the meaning of self-determination under settler rule"

(4)? Rifkin sees erotics as "a way of exploring the contours and dynamics of indigeneity," addressing works that "foreground interdependence and vulnerability as positive principles of peoplehood" (Rifkin 35). And as noted above, Rifkin argues that part of the settler-colonists' enterprise has been and continues to be the erasure of Native cultures and people. We can see this idea of erasure as Freeland presents it in the character of Nizhoni.

Another of the film's three protagonists is Nizhoni, the Navajo woman whose non-Indian, adoptive parents have kept her from her birth-family, even hiding from her the letters and cards the grandparents have written and sent over the years. Nizhoni's adoptive parents justify this deceit by mouthing some platitudes about the right time to tell a child about such things. "There were studies," begins her father, Phillip Smiles (Mark Silversten), "that said that adopted children could be traumatized if they were reintroduced to their biological parents" (minute 73). Here Nizhoni cuts him off. Keeping the correspondence from their daughter and keeping even the very existence of her grandparents from her, they effectively attempt to erase her past and her people. This attempt at erasure is, of course, a centuries-long effort by the settler colonizers.

As noted above, the Nizhoni plot line concerns her searching for the family of her birth parents. She undertakes this search, in part, as a form of survival. With the specifics of a young Navajo woman searching the reservation for her biological family, this plot element provides the viewer a glimpse of the on-going effects of settler colonization of Native America generally. In fulfilling her work of volunteer hours for her college scholarship, Nizhoni enters the reservation with a road-kill pick up crew. Because they come across a motorist who has killed a horse and crashed her car, Nizhoni's mother, Phoebe Smiles (Debrianna Mansini), drives out from town to pick up

her daughter. Phoebe's first words are these: "You shouldn't be way out here on the reservation." As the two of them sit in the hermetically sealed car, Nizhoni confesses to searching for her birth family and says that she thought that if she could find them it would give her some sort of closure. When Nizhoni's mother asks her why she is searching for her biological family, the young woman responds honestly: "Because I actually thought it would help. I've had problems sleeping since before I can remember. And you say that it's all related to the car crash that killed my parents. I simply thought that if I met my real family, it would give me—I don't know—closure" (minute 43).

A potential underlying metaphor here is that a young Native woman is attempting to come to terms with a past that has been riddled with the destructive forces of racism, colonization, and the continuing occupation of Native lands by settlers and settler culture. The mother's response characterizes this colonial attitude:

> Nizhoni, I am simply trying to protect you. I knew your family. I knew the world they came from, and—you know what?—if I lived under the conditions they did I probably would have drank [sic] myself to death too. You have an opportunity that most people here will never have: you're going to college. You have to keep looking ahead" (minute 44).

Phoebe's comments are instructive here. Note the use of the past tense, for instance, as if like her parents, anything to do with Nizhoni's past is just that, past, dead and gone. By this logic, the daughter's obligation to herself and certainly to her adoptive parents is that she look forward, and forward in this context means away from her biological family, away from her ancestral roots, away from Native America. The moment is emphasized filmically with the mother's closing of the car window: as the viewer hears the sound of the power window closing, the camera focuses on Nizhoni with a close up of her face. Filmically, too then, the moment suggests that the young

woman is being locked in and closed off from her biological or ancestral roots. The underlying implication is that there is in fact no past to look back to. The mother's imperative is in itself a form of erasure. The very fact of this film by a Native filmmaker, however, disproves Phoebe's narrative, emphatically denies it, by insisting on the Native presence.

Pausing on this scene is important in that it is suggestive of how the filmmaker in one brief scene, located precisely in the center of the film, is portraying the forms of repression and attempt of erasure imposed by the settler culture, embodied by Phoebe Smiles, the non-Indian, upper-middle class, adoptive mother.

Although this scene is not explicitly about gender politics within the film, a telling moment in the context of colonial imbalance is when Nizhoni uses the cliché of heterosexuality in a lie to her mother to return to the reservation. The very day after the crash and her mother's lecture, Nizhoni returns, still in search of the family of her deceased birth parents. She continues her search knowingly against her adoptive mother's wishes, so when the mother calls, Nizhoni offers a lie that she knows her mother will accept unquestioningly: "I'm fine. I'm just… I'm at the mall. There's this really cute guy at Orange Julius" (minute 57). The implication, of course, is that a young girl meeting a cute guy at the mall is completely within the hetero-normative and thus something the mother will accept unquestioningly. The mother, as the viewer knows by this point, has racist and ignorant attitudes toward the Navajos on the reservation; she assumes they are all somehow dangerous and drunks. Nizhoni herself has imbibed some of that racism, telling the woman at the placement office (for her community service) that it is not safe out there:

> Youth Works Agent: You've done all your work in the city. For some reason, you haven't done anything on the reservation. Why?
>
> Nizhoni: Well, it's dangerous.

Youth Works Agent: Who told you that?

Nizhoni: My mom. (minute 12)

The exchange is worth noting in this context because it is a clear demonstration of the settler's racist and unfounded attitude toward the Navajos, and such attitudes can be seen as indicative of others, especially when such attitudes are held by a wealthy, married, heterosexual, white woman, who is an M.D. by profession. From such a position of social and economic power, she embodies these attitudes and passes them on to her adopted Navajo daughter. This is the mother who will later in the film defend her keeping knowledge of her grandparents from Nizhoni by exclaiming, "Do you think I wanted you to hang out in some shack with some drunk alcoholic relatives out on the reservation?" (minute 74)

At the point in the film when Harmon tells Felixia the story of the *nádleeh* and the river, the viewer has already witnessed the struggle for acceptance and can thus appreciate Felixia's situation and the importance of the grandfather's support. Before turning to the implications of some of those struggles, it might be informative to acknowledge Felixia's own gender identity. Felixia is surrounded by a culture that acknowledges essentially only two sexes and consequently only two genders. As Jennifer Nez Denetdale argues in another context, even in Navajoland there are only the two options: "Navajo leaders, who are primarily men, reproduce Navajo nationalist ideology to reinscribe gender roles based on Western concepts even as they claim that they operate under traditional Navajo philosophy" (2006, 9). Felixia identifies as female. She takes the feminine form of the name—Felixia rather than Felix—on the new (fake) driver's license and competes in a "Women of the Navajo" calendar competition. Her good friend Eugene calls her "girl"; and taped to the bedroom wall there are many photos of women models with whom Felixia seems to identify, photos

that she rips down after the disappointment of her exposure as trans at the calendar competition.

Another indication of Felixia's identifying as female is that on the morning of her departure, she comes into the kitchen where Ruth (the grandmother) is making frybread. Felixia takes some dough into her hands and begins preparing it for the frying pan, expertly enough, evidently, for the process meets with Ruth's approval. The viewer sees and acknowledges this approval via filmic convention: there is a cut to Ruth's face, a closeup showing her smile. The moment is significant, given the Navajo association of gender and gender roles. According to Will Roscoe, "the term *nádleehi* was used to refer to both female and male berdaches… male *nádleehi* specialized in the equally prestigious women's activities of farming, herding sheep, gathering food resources, weaving knitting, baskets… (41). And what the film does not show is a moment when Felixia participates in any of the conventionally masculine roles, such as chopping wood—an exercise, whose associations are clearly male gendered. Indeed, the film stresses this association on multiple occasions. "This wood isn't going to chop itself," Harmon says at one point in Felixia's presence.

Although Felixia identifies as female, she characterizes herself on her website as trans: "Sexy Tranny Felixxxia." And several sequences in the film serve to highlight the difficulties Felixia as *nádleeh* has with her own generation in the struggle for acceptance. Felixia's encounter with Sick Boy as noted above is perhaps the most jarring. But other sequences also depict Felixia's difficulties in seeking acceptance. Two former friends or classmates turn against her, for example, based solely on her sexual identity. In a brief early scene she sees an old friend in a casino, and he essentially snubs her by walking out as soon as she tries to start a conversation with him. In another sequence, as she's preparing for the swimsuit competition as part of her calendar audition, another contestant, an old acquaintance from school, shares her

drink which has been spiked with "Virile Grow" tablets. During the photo shoot, Felixia gets a very visible erection and runs off the stage.

Implicit in this instance is the understanding that Felixia would not be welcome or eligible to compete if the fact of her being *nádleeh* were known by the selection committee—even though Felixia can be seen to qualify based on the criteria that seem to matter: female appearance (even in bathing suit competition), knowledge of Navajo language, and overall physical attractiveness. Once exposed, as it were, however, she leaves the stage under the impression that the members of the selection committee for the "Women of the Navajo" calendar would not include a transgender contestant. Felixia is evidently correct in that no one calls her back as she runs off. Also frustrating for Felixia are her encounters with men. As discussed above, Sick Boy rejects her outright. And the men who pay for sex treat her poorly: after she's had sex with one man, for instance, he tries to short her twenty dollars then tells her to be gone by the time he's out of the shower.

According to Wesley Thomas, "Navajo gays and lesbians identify with the Euro-American notion of sexual identity rather than with the Navajo ideology of multiple genders. Because of Western schooling, extensive exposure to Western culture, and the lapsed transmission of Navajo tradition, the traditional role of both male-bodied nadleeh/feminine males and female-bodied nadleeh/masculine females is not widely known by young Navajos who would fit into these categories." (162). Although Felixia does not actually necessarily fit such categories either, Thomas's argument is applicable here in that it concerns a younger generation of Navajos. In other words, if the characters seen to interact with Felixia on a daily basis, those who knew/know this person as Felix, had a fuller understanding of or appreciation for Navajo culture and history, they would very likely have a more tolerant attitude toward their former friend.

When asked about the generational response to Navajo notions of multiple genders, director Sidney Freeland has this to say:

> I can only speak to my own experiences on this. The grandma and grandpa characters represent the more traditional aspects of Navajo culture. And one of those aspects includes the concept of 3rd and 4th genders. The mindset on the reservation tends to be more conservative, but because this is part of the culture, it made perfect sense that they would be accepting of Felixia. (Wissot np)

Even those who are fully accepting of Felixia warn her about the dangers of auditioning for the "Women of the Navajo" calendar. When her grandmother lets slip that she is auditioning, her grandfather Harmon says "Are they okay with you auditioning?" And Felixia responds, "Just says you gotta be between 16 and 25." Harmon then gives an account of his praying by mistake to an airplane he mistook for Venus, the morning star, concluding aphoristically, "What we look for and what we get aren't always the same thing." (minute 10). Felixia's friend Eugene, who has just set her up with a fake ID, also offers a warning about auditioning, saying, "Girl, can you be a little more realistic?"

Felixia: What's that supposed to mean?

Eugene: I'm sorry if I sound a little bitchy…

But he then changes his mind and say, "You know what? Give 'em hell at the audition" (minute 17). During this exchange Eugene removes his sunglasses, and Felixia and the viewer see his black eye. The implication is that he has been physically abused because of his sexual identity. When Felixia asks what happened, he responds "You do not want to know." And it is at this moment that he says "Give 'em hell." According to a brief response to the film, Navajo scholar Jennifer Nez Denetdale acknowledges that "All three characters' life stories give glimpses of the violence that Navajo women

experience, which largely continues to go unaddressed and unacknowledged. Yet, even less understood or acknowledged is the amount of violence that Navajo lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people experience, both off and on the Navajo Nation" (119). The film does address these issues and makes clear that this sort of homophobic violence applies to Eugene as well.

As instances from the plot demonstrate, Felixia is very definitely ostracized from inside and outside her own community. Sick Boy, the young man she knows in the casino, the calendar contestant, all demonstrate the difficulties Felixia faces by venturing outside the pre- and proscribed sexual norms of her community, even her own Navajo community. This bias can perhaps be seen to extend beyond the film itself. That is, one reviewer infers that the money Felixia makes from sex work must be for a sex-change operation: "we see her engage in prostitution—no doubt to pay for her gender reassignment surgery—but we're left to assume this" (McDavid, np). There is nothing in the text of the film, verbally, visually, or otherwise, to suggest that Felixia has a sex reassignment operation in mind. Does the reviewer's inference itself, given that there is no suggestion in the text of the film, suggest a tendency toward heteronormativity?

Jennifer Nez Denetdale argues that "a narrative like *Drunk Town's Finest* [sic] ignores the realities of Navajo people's experiences in border towns like Gallup, thereby making invisible and sustaining injustices, hatred, and discrimination" (2016, 119). One must grant that despite its title and Sick Boy's drinking, the film pays little attention to the issue of border-town alcohol abuse. Nor does the film pay much attention to violent crime including sexual abuse. Its focus is elsewhere. As Freeland relates in an interview with *High Country News*: "I want to tell a story about the reservation, but I don't want it to be tragic. I don't want to have a tragic ending… I didn't want to tell a story where everybody lived happily ever after, because that would

also be disingenuous and would gloss over a lot of the issues that are going on back home. So it was sort of like finding this middle ground—this middle ground that wasn't quite tragic, but wasn't quite happily ever after" (Ahtone np). Of course it is finally up to the viewer to decide how successful the director has been, but, clearly, the film does make visible some of the realities of Navajo people's experiences.

By the end of the film, both Felixia and Nizhoni are to leave the reservation. Nizhoni is returning to Michigan, but not before she has reconnected with her grandparents, the parents of her birth mother and with her cousin Felixia. Felixia too is leaving the reservation. The immediate reason for the departure is to join a man in New York, who identifies himself as Daddy Warbucks and who has sent a plane ticket, as promised: "Come out one week. I'll pay you well. Could be longer if we have chemistry" (minute 53). She has met her cousin and has, in a sense, reconciled with Sick Boy. Felixia's grandfather has shared with her the account of *nádleeh*, explaining the importance of acceptance and balance, and he has made sure she understands her family's acceptance: "I know you're… you're struggling with acceptance. This world can be cold and hard on our people. But you must always remember wherever you go, whatever you choose to do, you will always have a home here, in this place" (minute 81). Interestingly, when Harmon states that the world can be hard on "our people," he does not distinguish between *nádleeh* and Navajos more generally. This fusion, fusion through the use of the first-person plural pronoun *we*, demonstrates not only total and unquestioning acceptance of *nádleeh* but also a repudiation of any culture or group of people (or individuals?) that is unaccepting.

And where do these departures leave the viewer in the context of the issue of transgender, of *nádleeh* people in the Navajo Nation? The answer might be in the suggested interdependence of the three main characters at the points of departure.

The idea of acceptance is certainly at play when Felixia and Nizhoni meet. Nizhoni comes to the reservation on the morning of her departure, and Ruth introduces the cousins. Felixia asks "you mean like cousin cousins or Navajo cousins?" (minute 86). This meeting is the intersection of their two plots and collides both quests: Nizhoni's search for her biological family and Felixia's for acceptance. In meeting Nizhoni, Felixia finds family and acceptance from outside, from off the reservation, as it were, through her cousin. In a sense, this meeting marks the bridging of an important gap between the unquestioning acceptance of Ruth and Harmon, and that of the larger community, represented by Nizhoni. The film neither glosses over the complexities of different Navajos' responses to the idea and fact of transgender people nor suggests the future will be unquestionably smooth. Nizhoni will return to Michigan and have to figure out the place in her life of her birth family. And Felixia will undoubtedly face obstacles in New York, but will know she always has a welcoming home.

Having brought Nizhoni and Felixia together, the film, in its final sequence, can turn to the apparent reconciliation of Angela and Sick Boy. The shot-reverse-shot camera work shows the two of them looking at each other as Sick Boy begins the *kinaalda* ceremony run with his sister Max. After starting to run, he pauses, looks back to Angela, smiles, and then sets out running. Angela watches. Thus, the film shows Sick Boy perhaps on the road to healing. He is the one, after all, who has been totally unaccepting of Felixia, and who even says when he first hears of his sister's going through puberty: "too much information." Because of his lack of acceptance, the film declares that his is the character that must be addressed; this is the character most in need of learning acceptance. At the beginning of this final sequence, Sick Boy has been surprised to see Felixia again, but his concern is not with the fact that Felixia is *nádleeh*. No, his concern is that, as a married man soon to be a father, he was with Felixia at all. This moment of recognition can be seen as filmic shorthand indicating a

form of acceptance on Sick Boy's part. And Felixia's casual response, "we were both drunk. . . . This stays between you and me" demonstrates their interdependence (minute 74). Sick Boy has matured enough to accept Felixia for the person she is and enough to acknowledge his earlier inappropriate response to her, filmically a mere nod of recognition on Sick Boy's part. Analogously, his participation in the *kinaalda* ceremony demonstrates his acceptance of responsibility toward his little sister. He runs with her.

In addition to Angela and Ruth, the viewer can assume that Nizhoni and Felixia also watch the runners, and in this way they also participate in the ritual. Whatever hints concerning the road ahead for these three characters, the final glimpses of each holds promise. That is to say, in a sense, the film ends where Harmon John's story about *nádleeh* ends, with the realization that "both sides needed each other: the men needed the women and the women in turn needed the men, and they both needed the *nádleeh*. To this day we carry this lesson, this balance. (minutes 79-81).

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"No one will touch your body unless you say so": Normativity and Bodily Autonomy in Australian Indigenous Writing

MADELEINE CLARK

Introduction

In writing by Indigenous trans people from the 1990s to the present, trans existence is frequently affirmed as a part of Indigenous cultures which has persisted from pre-colonial times. Trans and non-binary authored works are critical of the influence of the church and disparaging towards the western understandings of queerness and gender, including the medical model of understanding transgender identity, and emphasise agency, bodily autonomy, and collective negotiations to produce identities and navigate relationships against colonial norms.

This article begins with an exploration of the research done into trans Indigenous people in Australia since the 1990s. I look at the development of a community discourse documented in sistergirl publications in the 1990s and 2000s which rejects what Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck has called a "damage-centred" research framework, instead embracing a "desire-based framework" (416). Drawing from these community texts, I look at three more recent works from Warlpiri, Arrente, and Luritja sistergirl Brie Ngala Curtis and the Mununjali Yugambeh writer Ellen van Neerven. Looking at the works of these two writers, I argue that trans Indigenous writing honours the roles of trans Indigenous people within their communities and problematises western understandings of queer and trans identities.

Terminology

'Sistergirl' and 'brotherboy' are collectively understood and adopted terms for Indigenous gender diverse people (see Kerry 2014). They are culturally specific to Indigenous Australian trans people and have been collectively negotiated and agreed on as terms which can be used widely by Indigenous people from all nations. Where appropriate, I use terms which the authors specifically identify for themselves. I use sistergirl and brotherboy to refer to self-identified individuals who use the terms, and I also use "trans" to refer generally to all First Nations peoples with non-cisgender or non-binary identities. I do this to be inclusive of those trans and non-binary identifying people who do not feel that sistergirl or brotherboy describes them.

While I want to provide some background to those outside our community on the histories of these terms, my language will not be streamlined or standardised, and this might seem inconsistent, imperfect, or confusing at times. It is intended to be. It is vital to understand the terminologies of trans and queer from within the context of colonial history, and to displace and unsettle their use as catchalls. Damien Riggs has linked the development of terminologies of western LGBT identity with the "possessive investments" of whiteness in Australia (2007, 112). The term 'trans' sits uncomfortably with me, because, as Riggs writes,

> such terms fail to acknowledge the cultural contexts that shape the category "sistergirl"…it is important to acknowledge the sovereign relationship to country that sistergirls hold, and how the ontological implications of this relationship differentiate them from other groups who may be located under the umbrella of 'trans and gender diverse.'"(112)

Following on from Riggs' observation, I use the terms queer and trans through this article with some necessary nuance attached. The non-binary Wiradjuri author Sandy O'Sullivan has written that "I know my responsibility is to be multifarious, complex and

inextricable in my identity representation…this is the experience of an Aboriginal lesbian. And it is not" (222). Indigenous queer, non-binary and trans people use a multitude of terms to describe our behaviours, social roles, and identities, with the critical understanding that they are all imperfect and we have to invest in disturbing them. Jawoyn writer Troy-Anthony Baylis comments that this multiplicity and flexibility is a valuable part of Indigenous trans writing which destabilises the reader's desire for a "more digestible" story (17).

I use the term 'settler' to refer to Australian non-Indigenous people and culture. Indigenous Australian people use a range of accepted terms to refer to ourselves, including nation and clan or language group names, as well as collective terms like 'Indigenous', 'First Nations', and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander', as well as 'Blak', the political term coined by Erub Mer artist Destiny Deacon[1] which is referenced by van Neerven in *Throat.*

A Desire-Based Literature Review: Understanding Discourses of Indigenous (Trans) Gender in Australia

Settler researchers frequently reinforce what Tuck calls a damage-centred framework in relation to trans Indigenous people. In her work "Suspending Damage", Tuck identifies damage-centred research as work which operates "even benevolently, from a theory of change that establishes harm or injury in order to achieve reparation" and outlines the need to move from this model to what she calls 'desire-based' research (413). Damage-centred research work aims to

> document pain or loss in an individual, community, or tribe…It looks to historical exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy. Common sense tells us this is a good thing, but the danger in damage-

> centered research is that it is a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community. (413)

Tuck makes note of both the uses of this practice, given the historical "need for research that exposed the uninhabitable, inhumane conditions in which people lived and continue to live,", while making note of the harms of those research frameworks which consequently carry the "possible hidden costs of a research strategy that frames entire communities as depleted" (415; 409). She urges alternative ways of doing research outside of the framework of showing injury as a way of advocating for change. Her proposed model of instead applying "desire" based research is focused on understanding and celebrating "complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (416).

The dichotomy between damage and desire is relevant to the development of research on trans Indigenous people. Research interest on trans Indigenous people has increased since the 1990s, with a strong emphasis on health and social vulnerability. Given the research funding imperatives around sexual health and HIV/AIDS prevention in the 1990s and 2000s, attempts to better understand Indigenous trans lives from within the fields of medical and academic research have typically emerged from local gay and lesbian history projects and from government-funded research into the health and well-being of LGBT communities in the 1990s. This has meant, as Stephen Craig Kerry has documented, specific "attention being paid to the impact of HIV/AIDS" and "the lived experiences of transgender Australians," and more recently, focus on areas like suicide prevention (173–74). That wave of funding, research, and organising around HIV/AIDS and sexual health contributed to enabling the establishment of discussion of sistergirl and brotherboy life on a national level, while also closely tying it to research on the experiences of gay cisgender Indigenous men.

To use Tuck's words, the development of emerging bodies of research on such previously 'invisible' populations can be considered "a mixed signal of progress" (410). On the one hand, that research can be considered useful in leveraging for the community's needs and gains, and this is particularly evident in research related to health and HIV/AIDS prevention strategies and resourcing. On the other, those research interests and imperatives have the potential effect of "usher[ing]" in outsider researchers to our communities with little knowledge of the proper way to write and think about our lives (410). Settler researchers in this field consequently position Indigenous trans people as doubly marginalised, subject to experiences of racism within the Australian society, and subject to transphobia and violence in their own communities.

Much of the earlier research on trans First Nations people centres around identifying the specifics of risk and vulnerability among our LBGTIQ community members. In the literature, sistergirls and brotherboys (if brotherboys are mentioned) are defined by our levels of economic instability, social exclusion, illness, vulnerability, and finally, invisibility. Kerry, for example, summarises how "indigenous transgender Australians face issues pertaining to HIV/AIDS, identity, alcohol and substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and community engagement", and they explain how additional burdens of racism within the wider community contribute to "complex matrices of discrimination" which "intersect cultural traditions, personal and social identity, and colonization" (174). They frequently refer to social invisibility and the need to address the 'dearth of data' on trans Indigenous life.

Research from within the community explicitly problematises the simplicity of this view, revealing a more complex situation. Trans Indigenous writers identify violence and transphobia, but alongside this, they identify strong family and community supports, respected positions of sistergirls within family, recognition of

belonging and social roles within culture both pre-colonisation and since. They problematise the western definitions of transgender and speak to the role of the church and the medical profession in creating marginalisation and violence against trans and First Nations people. The complex understanding held within Tuck's desire-based frameworks are evident in the work of Indigenous trans and sistergirl/brotherboy writers and researchers, and it is from within the same spirit, the same investment in desire, that I proceed.

Community Self-Definition

Despite the pervasiveness of the damage-centred framework, the First Nations trans and sistergirl/brotherboy community has been active in producing its own discourses. The first National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Gay Men and Transgender Sexual Health Conference, Anwernekenhe, took place in 1994 on Arrente country. Following the establishment of its national working party, three further Anwernekenhe events were held across the next 15 years. The government funding for this was auspiced by the Australian Federation of AIDS Organisations (AFAO). The funding and leadership of the AFAO and Anwernekenhe organisations enabled the first national gathering of sistergirls on Magnetic Island in Queensland in 1999, and that event along with its report back and recommendations to the AFAO, shaped by the contributions of those gathered, has been foundational in shaping the way trans, sistergirl and brotherboy First Nations peoples understand ourselves in so-called Australia.

While these events took place under the auspices and frameworks of HIV/AIDS prevention, they took on much greater meaning for the delegates. It is clear from reading the forum's report that the discussion that took place there responded to the application of sexual health and AIDS prevention discourse with one that, as Tuck writes, "seeks to construct a fuller representation" (418). Michael Costello and Rusty

Nannup, authors of the report back, note that "The forum had a focus on sexual health, however it became apparent that this is but one aspect of a much broader predicament" (4). The conference addressed issues of health, violence, racism and exclusion, but alongside this, it was concerned with the development of a community identity and with acknowledging and examining the history and role of sistergirls and people "with transgender qualities" in Indigenous communities (Costello and Nannup6). The Magnetic Island forum of 1999 is where the term sistergirl was formally adopted as a shared community identity, and this was achieved through collective agreement. The report back explains:

> Anwernekenhe II saw a change in terminology from "Indigenous transgender person" to "sistergirl". Sistergirl delegates felt that "transgender" terminology should only be used for bureaucratic reasons, as it was not representative of the diversity within the community…The usage of sistergirl terminology is clearly influenced by the diversity of communities, and will often be defined within a community depending on geographical location. (Costello and Nannup 1999, 6)

The report outlines a careful consideration of how the term sistergirl, which is understood as both culturally specific to particular nations in the central desert, but used widely, was agreed by "all delegates" to signify a range of individuals, including both urban living and rural women. To the idea of transgender as "bureaucratic", sistergirl advocate Kooncha Brown added that,

> The relationships within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have their own unique make-up and are often entwined with other cultural and spiritual structures. The western identity construct of transgenderism does not easily fit within these structures. (2004, 6)

Nannup and Costello's report back from the 1999 gathering notes that "sistergirl" is understood differently across diverse experiences of Indigenous groups but was intentionally embraced as an inclusive word after a long process of negotiation that was "sometimes volatile but ultimately constructive" (6). Further, the term was intended as a placeholder to be revisited at a later time "to determine an appropriate Indigenous name to replace [it]" which would reflect the whole community (Nannup and Costello 2004, 6). The term brotherboy has seen a similar (and more recent) emergence, being adopted as a collectively agreed upon word within community which refers inclusively to trans masculine Indigenous people from across Australia. Nicole Anae notes that there was a significant presentation on brotherboy identity at the 2016 National LGBTI Health Alliance's Mind Out mental health conference which signalled a greater recognition of brotherboy as a distinct term, though it had already been in use for some time:

> This presence marked an historic step in forging a stronger Brotherboy visibility and included speakers such as Dean Gilbert, the Brotherboys support group, and Brotherboy presenters Jay Delany and Kai Clancy (2020, 77).

Representations of belonging, negotiation and agency as part of our experiences differentiate trans Indigenous texts from those written about us and express a desire-based framework that acknowledges complexity and agency. While the work of writers like Costello and Nannup and Kooncha Brown on trans First Nations people acknowledges harm, adversity, and social difficulty, it is important to note that they also acknowledge pleasure, belonging, and agency. The final words of the report back on the Magnetic island conference state that the forum ended with a party:

> The final night, after conference proceedings, provided an opportunity for all conference delegates to come together to celebrate this historic

> forum and its achievements. The theme for the night became Island Night, an opportunity for all to let their hair down or, in some cases, to put it on. With many newfound talents and old alike, show time proved to be possibly the largest showgirl event ever staged. (Costello and Nannup, 5)

This celebration is just as important to the report as the identification of social problems and forms of violence the sistergirls face and highlights the complex dichotomy of trans Indigenous writing which is in direct critique of damage-centred research.

Peer-authored literature on trans First Nations people is critical of the influence of institutional power in shaping the western understanding of trans life. Heightened experiences of violence and ostracism are, as Kooncha Brown importantly points out, heavily influenced by the Christian church's impact, which she notes is "a powerful force in fostering discrimination" (25). She also notes the influence of the medical profession, which has long held a pathologising and diagnostic view of trans embodiment rejected by many First Nations people (Brown, 25). Western identity discourse is taxonomical and categorical and neglects the understanding Indigenous people hold of our relationality. As Brown illustrates: "I am Kooncha. I'm seen as a woman, a daughter, a sister, an aunty, and a mother - a valuable part of the family, a carer and a supporter…However in western culture, I am seen as 'black' and 'transgender'" (25). Kuku Yalanji brotherboy Madi Day, in collaboration with Wiradjuri queer researcher Corrinne Sullivan, also takes great care to write back to a damage-centred framework in their examination of trans masculine Indigenous sex workers. They explicitly acknowledge the common notions of their research participants as "victims" and actively shift their language to recognise them as "people working from a position of autonomy and agency" (Sullivan and Day, 1). The Indigenous trans people

described inSullivan and Day's research "negotiate and construct their identities" and "navigate" their financial and social needs. They have "tactics for managing their sexuality, gender and emotion", and "resist as well as rework" the discriminations the participants face in work and social life (2). This language is deployed intentionally and is seen by the authors as necessary within the broader context of damage-centred research which has come before. In this way, Sullivan and Day's research embodies a trans Indigenous standpoint.

Genre and Gender as Colonial Binarisms

Just as Sullivan and Day made the note that the lives of their trans Indigenous research participants "exceed" the discourses of heteronormativity, cisnormativity, and homonormativity, the work of trans Indigenous writers exceeds colonial discourses of genre as well as gender, making active critiques of both (6). Wiradjuri scholar Jeanine Leane's identification of genre as a form of colonial binarism alongside gender underlines the limits of western discourses when looking at the texts of Indigenous trans people. Brie Ngala Curtis' oral history, *Kungakunga: Staying Close to Family and Country* is recorded in the collection *Colouring the Rainbow* (2015). *Colouring the Rainbow* is a collection of First Nations queer and trans writing which is separated into three distinct sections or 'genres'. These sections divide the contributions in the anthology into "Life Stories," a series of memoir pieces and recorded oral testimonies; "An Emergent Public Face," which includes pieces that document activist organising and interactions with the mainstream LGBT movement in Australia; and the third section, "Essays," which more embody the style of an academic critique. However, essays within the third section frequently display the tone of memoir and life testimony, and works across the collection often engage with the theoretical languages of critical race theory and queer theory. The introduction by Troy-Anthony Baylis notes the

deliberate choice of the editor not to impose a consistent terminology or a neat classification of writers into identity categories consistently across the collection as a means of preserving the nuance of how each contributor relates to the "slipperiness of our identifications" (17). The division of the works into these three styles of narration and areas of concern, however, may habituate the reader into seeing each segment as discreet, when there are themes and modes of address which appear across the collection.

Van Neerven's *Heat and Light* is also divided into three sections, "Heat," "Water," and "Light." The first section, "Heat," is a five-part family saga which shifts temporally between past and present and details the story of the Kresinger family in southeast Queensland. "Light," the third section, brings the reader back to contemporary Australia. It is a collection of ten short stories which travel across Queensland, Western Australia, and Sydney. The protagonists are most often young women at formative stages, exploring sexuality, relationships, identity, and mental illness. The middle section, "Water," is a longer Indigenous Futurist novella.

The disjuncture between these three stylistically distinct, but interrelated, segments of the book unsettles reader expectations. There is a compulsive habit in the settler literary critic world to try to categorise Aboriginal work within conventions of western genre distinctions, and this continues in reader responses to *Heat and Light*. While Helena Kadmos identifies these three sections in western generic terms as "part short story cycle, part long story, part short story collection" (2018, np), she also acknowledges the limits of western genre discourses which might compel readers to seek these definitional terms at all to anchor their understandings, noting,

> The generic boundaries between texts by Aboriginal writers (such as life story and fiction) were often blurred, a sentiment echoed by speculative fiction writer Ambelin Kwaymullina, who claims that 'Indigenous narratives rarely fit neatly into

> Western genre divisions' (26), and scholar and poet Jeanine Leane, who dismisses western generic boundaries as too reductive for some Indigenous texts (Leane and Kwaymullina qtd. in Kadmos 2018, np)

While reviewers and critics puzzle over the appropriate genre labels to attribute to text like van Neerven's, it should be recognised that Aboriginal writers actively intervene with western genre forms with an intention to disrupt. Leane has described this engagement as embodying an "eclecticism," a playful and intentional interference which challenges what is known about writing in the west (2020, np). Kadmos recognises the troubling effect that Aboriginal women's writing in particular has on the genre borders between fiction and non-fiction, acknowledging that "among contemporary Aboriginal women writers, short stories, often drawing on personal and family histories filtered through contemporary narrative practices, feature strongly" (2018, np). The short story cycle, the label often applied to *Heat and Light* due to its multiple, stylistically and narratively discreet but connected threads, has been attributed to the writing of women and 'ethnic minorities', as Kadmos has written. The episodic form of the cycle has been understood this way due to its ability to engage with complex and multilayered realities, representing a "myriad of truths" rather than a single truth (Kadmos 2014, 32).

Throat (2020) is van Neerven's third book. Reviews of the text by Jeanine Leane and Yorta Yorta man Declan Fry both note that the collection challenges western structures of both genre and gender, seeming to collapse one into the other and disorienting both. Fry writes, for example, "*Throat* is a collection that crosses boundaries: of gender, genre, culture, history. Throughout the work you catch yourself, half unconscious, half wondering, dazzled and spent and continually recovering" (2020, np). Leane also identifies the active critique of genre present within the text and links it with the confusion of western gender languages, writing, "There is much in *Throat* in

both form and content that exposes the limits of, defies, critiques and rejects colonial binaries of genre and gender" (2020, np).

Performativity and Normativity in Sistergirl Narrative

Brie Ngala Curtis' oral history *Kungakunga: Staying Close to Family and Country*, as told to Dino Hodge, details her story of growing up in a small community, Ackwerrnarrte, near Alice Springs in the Northern Territory. She documents for the reader her early years growing up with her family, 'coming out' as a sistergirl, and her continuing advocacy work for sistergirls both in the territory and at a national level. Curtis' identical twin sister, Rosalina, is also a sistergirl, and 'comes out' as a teenager, while it takes Curtis a little longer to begin a medical transition and identify openly as sistergirl. Both sisters have connections to Warlpiri, Luritja, and Arrente nations, and Curtis is a founding member of the organisation Sisters and Brothers NT, an advocacy and support agency for trans people in the NT in Alice Springs. In the opening pages, Curtis discloses a story of being discovered by her grandmother, a "strong, cultural woman", while dressing in women's clothes as a child:

> I was a really feminine little boy. I always used to play with the girls and dressing up and all that. My grandmother was the first person to catch me cross-dressing. She growled me only because of the fact that I was wearing her clothing. Oh, she swore, and I got upset and started crying. But she said to me to not worry about what people would say about what I'd wear as long as I'm happy. Yeah, we grew up really Christian as well. My grandmother was very Christian. Even though she was really traditional and cultural, she had a really strong Christian background and belief. (36)

Despite how deeply Christianity is rooted in Curtis' family life (she later describes becoming more committed to the church during a difficult period in her life and reflects positively on how finding God enabled her survival and affirmed her sistergirl identity as she transitioned), the presence of the church in the life of her community does not interrupt the recognised place that sistergirls hold in her community. Her staunchly Christian grandmother, when Curtis has grown into a teenager, reflects with her on the accepted history of trans people in her community:

> One day when I was a bit older, in my teens, I sat down with my grandmother and said to her about why she didn't mind me wearing girls' clothes. She said that there were always sistergirls in Aboriginal culture and there always were trans people long before European settlement in Australia. And people like her tribal group - being the last tribe to be discovered in Australia - I believe her for that because she didn't come into contact with a white person until she was a teenager. (37)

Christianity has a complicated place in the life stories of queer and trans Indigenous people. For Curtis, while the presence of the church and the historical legacy of missionaries presents a potential threat to her being accepted, she narrates how the moral codes of the church have been incorporated and integrated into community life and the value system of Ackwerrnarrte. While Curtis acknowledges that she went through "lot of bullying" which forced her out of school, she comments that the church she went to "didn't exclude Aboriginal culture at all" and that religion could be practiced secondary to the community's culture (38). This flexibility enables her to continue participating in family life and feel a sense of belonging.

As she explores her identity, going through a "sort of evolving" process of trying to be "straight," then living as a gay man "for a few years," before eventually transitioning, Curtis describes complex conversations and negotiations with family

members around her gender expression. At a difficult moment, when confronting puberty and contending with tumultuous emotions, she experiences the pressure of expectation to undertake initiation: "My feelings as a teenager were really intense. I've had family members saying, 'Oh you're reaching puberty now. You're almost ready to go through men's ceremony', and all that" (Curtis, 38). However, Curtis is given control over her self-identification as a sistergirl in a formative conversation with her father:

> my father being a tribal law man himself, he sat down - because obviously he could see I was different - and he said: 'No, it's your decision. You do it, whatever you want. If you want to go through it, you can go through it, but nobody's going to touch your body unless you say so'. Yeah, he's very strong and he gave us that option. I've never been through men's ceremony and I'm not intending to. (38)

Ceremony, as discussed between Curtis and her father, is a way of marking her body culturally and socially as male, and this process is done as part of a collective group. However, in this passage, it is made clear that this social marking is to be done only with her explicit and full agreement. The process of becoming a man in this context is achieved collectively through ceremonial practices which would mark her body irreversibly and induct her into a gendered social role within community.

This is a powerful moment. Many of us, as Indigenous trans people living in a colonial culture in Australia, particularly those of us who are urban living, have had to continuously negotiate the social experiences of being gendered without our consent. Curtis's identity, in this passage, is the subject of an affirming and active negotiation of gendered social relationships in a collective and ongoing discussion. This negotiation is premised on bodily autonomy, consent, and belonging. Markings made on her body are to be determined by her and won't be forced, and thus gendering is, in this passage, negotiated in relation to others, but not coercive or disciplinary by any

means. Curtis's story provides us with both the opportunity to demonstrate some of the ways we make sense of gender as well as providing some complexity in how it reveals the limits of a disciplinary understanding of gender.

Disciplinary normativity is a central concept in the western queer theoretical lens. It is integral to the construction and understanding of queer and trans subjects and is characterised as coercive and inextricably linked to power relations. Foucault's history of sexuality, for example, provides an account of how disciplinary power produces sexual identity. Exploring homonormativity, Eliza Garwood notes that queer theory's central concern and method comes from an understanding of disciplinary biopower and normativity, citing the "routine erasure of marginalised non-normative sexual identities and practices" which normativity engenders, "while enhancing regulatory power relations within and between certain legible identity groups" (6). Queer Indigenous studies scholars, expanding on Foucault's understanding of sexuality as a conduit of power, have conceptualised sexuality as an "especially…dense transfer point for specifically imperial power" and have argued, as trans Murri scholar Oscar Monaghan has done, that "the centrality of sexuality to colonial power relations help explain its importance to settlers" (Monaghan. See, also Morgensen and Smith for further development of this idea).

The primacy of normativity within queer and trans studies has also been problematised by Indigenous scholars and other scholars of colour. Sahiba Allouche, in her exploration of "strategic nomadic marriage" between same sex desiring people in Lebanon, notes that "it is the theory, rather than the queer element itself, that often is hegemonized in queer scholarship (9), and instructs readers that "To write wilfully from and about queerness from a non-western standpoint is to question western academics' insistence on queering stuff'' (11). When looking at sistergirl life stories, the logic of normativity, bound up as it is in processes of coercion, discipline, and biopower, is

challenged. Sistergirl identity is entwined with, as Brown has stated, cultural and spiritual structures, not just disciplinary and institutional structures which act to regulate Indigenous life. When Curtis goes through important moments of 'coming out' and begins to articulate her identity as a sistergirl within her family structure, her belonging within culture and her bodily autonomy, and the broader belonging of sistergirls in the clan groups to which she belongs, are reaffirmed. Curtis is able to negotiate her ability to mark herself culturally in gendered terms or withhold from a social categorisation as male. Sistergirls, Curtis is told by her family, lived among the community as women pre-colonisation:

> the trans women at that time would join the women to do traditional women duties like cooking, collecting bush fruit, growing up the children, and making bush medicine. They go through women's ceremony and they'd be respected as women. They'd have relationships with men and be married. (37)

Queer and trans Indigenous people have also related critically to the idea of performativity and agency in understanding how we navigate the complex and power-laden fields of gendered colonial power. The western idea of performativity in relation to gender has been criticised for the lack of attention it gives to how Indigenous peoples relate to gender. Riggs and Toone have noted, when discussing sistergirls, how critical understandings of gender

> fail to acknowledge the cultural contexts that shape the category "sistergirl"… it is important to acknowledge the sovereign relationship to country that sistergirls hold, and how the ontological implications of this relationship differentiate them from other groups who may be located under the umbrella of "trans and gender diverse." (229)

It is vital to consider how sovereign relationships to country shape how Indigenous people experience and articulate gender. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, for example, notes how Indigenous women's standpoint is constructed and exercised relationally, involving connections to land, ancestors, and the spirit world (see Moreton-Robinson 2014). The Larrakia poet and activist Laniyuk has written in *Colouring the Rainbow* about how she navigated racism and homophobia growing up in Darwin and Adelaide by purposefully "manipulating people's perceptions of me" (Garcon-Mills, 76), has also made an important intervention into performativity discourse by explaining how Indigenous people's gender performativity is inherently tied to our engagements with our ancestral Country (Laniyuk 2018, np). Gender identity, then, for Indigenous peoples, is necessarily bound up with how we experience our cultural and collective belonging. These written life stories critically emphasise both the need to, as Butler and Williams write, "figur[e] out how to live with and against the constructions—or norms—that help to form us" and to, on occasion, "reject those vocabularies, or actively develop new ones" (Butler and Williams 2013, np). They also, vitally, expand on this analysis by showing how Indigenous peoples experience our genders in collaborative and ongoing negotiation with community and country.

Ungendered Ancestors in Ellen van Neerven's Water

In the novella "Water", the dystopian Indigenous Futurist story which sits between two short story phases in *Heat and Light*, trans and non-binary author Ellen van Neerven writes a relationship between a young queer Yugambeh cultural liaison worker and an Yugambeh ancestral being (van Neerven 2014). Their relationship takes place on Yugambeh country, on the islands of Moreton Bay, in the context of a destruction of country in the area under the new 'progressive' regime of President Tanya Sparkle. The fictional future President Sparkle is intent on solving the problem of Indigenous land

rights by islandising the waters of Moreton Bay to create 'Australia2', a new country which dispossessed Indigenous people can live on. Kaden, van Neerven's protagonist, is seduced by Larapinta, a member of the Jangigir or 'plantpeople'. The Jangigir, a mysterious race of creatures, neither human, animal, nor plant, are 'discovered' during the islandising project by the staff of the Science Centre who are in charge of managing the area in preparation for Australia2's construction. Kaden carries on a secret sexual relationship with Larapinta for some time before it is revealed by an Uncle that the Jangigir are her ancestor beings,

> our old people. Spirits. Something happened when the dug brought the sea up. They rose with it…their knowledge goes back, big time, Bub. They've helped us piece back our language. And they're going to help us stop this. (van Neerven 2014, 113)

The sexual relationship with this ancestor being provokes Kaden to reconnect to her country and community and take action against the science centre's project.

Because of the ways that Kaden and Larapinta's relationship is explored in *Water* as a transgressive human/nonhuman queer sexual encounter, this story has been described by some critics as a queer ecofeminist text (see Grassi 2017). However, the story actively resists queer language and presents an unresolved relationship to gender and sexuality. Kaden and Larapinta's genders remain ambiguous. Kaden reflects in conversation with Larapinta, when asked about whether she feels like a woman, that "even though I have short hair…I tell her that hair is the least of it" (van Neerven 2014, 95). The plantpeople express their gender through responsive social adaptation. Among the jangigir, "both the males and females are identical. She has no breasts. I understand they are ungendered; see, their gender is not predetermined and is only communicated" (78). When Larapinta asks Kaden directly how she identifies, Kaden responds, "'Queer, I guess.' I say. 'I know it's an old-fashioned word…some words are

loaded, will always be loaded,'" to which Larapita replies, "'That is fine. I do not know the common usage of words. They are bricks, aren't they?'" (95). This designation of words like queer as 'bricks' recalls the description by Rusty Nannup of transgender as something which can only be described as "bureaucratic"; bricks are blunt, functional, and impersonal. They can also be used as a tool or a weapon.

The Subversion of Damage and the Celebration of Blak non-Binary experience in *Throat*

Van Neerven's 2020 work *Throat* is divided into five segments: *they haunt-walk in*, *whiteness is always approaching*, *I can't wait to meet my future genders*, *speaking outside*, and *take me to the back of my throat.* It is their third collection of writing, following *Comfort Food* (2016). Like "Water," it is a work that refuses easy definition in how it presents gender and sexuality. The early pages of the book, *they haunt-walk in*, address an episode of vicious online harassment of van Neerven by high school students on twitter and Facebook following the inclusion of one of the poems in *Comfort Food* in the HSC exam in 2017. On the opening page, they remember the harassment and their withdrawal:

> memories sometimes come backwards. They haunt-walk in. Haunting, walking, and sugar and chocolates my friends give me after 'the incident'. 'We are in admiration of how you handled yourself. We thought you conducted yourself with such dignity and grace'. I did nothing but lie in my bed (2020, 3)

I can't wait to meet my future genders explores body dysphoria and discomfort, but maintains a sense of clarity and desire. The text critiques white queer culture. The limits of western queer language bend and break when confronted by the experiences of the Blak non-binary body:

sometimes I want to create a dictionary together
because this body is rejecting the common names
and the common ways (2020, 76)

The limits of queer language are again highlighted when sharing conversation with queers from South East Asia while travelling. Together, they touch on other possibilities to experience gender and sexuality outside of that same colonial dictionary:

We speak about gender before colonisation
we speak about love before colonisation
Remembering-forgetting-knowing-needing (2020, 83)

The poem *Dysphoria* describes a defamiliarised and suffocating experience of the body, the disjuncture between the internal experience of the body and its externality. They write of the desire

to take clothes off
to take them off but also take
off another layer underneath
peel away those expectations
get closer to my truth (2020, 77)

A dissociative experience of dysphoria is there in the writing, but it sits alongside complexity. The poet is "juggling shame, guilt, and alienation with the desire to feel free, connected, and powerful" (van Neerven 2020, 76). Disorientation and pain are a part of the experience of their body and how they connect to others, and they describe seeing someone "in an embrace with another part of me" (76). But with these experiences, there is also clarity, love, and a hopeful desire for another space in which to express the language of the body. The relation of van Neerven's work to pain and trauma is complex and open, allowing for possibilities and power. Just as Eve Tuck

invited all of us as her peers to "consider the long-term repercussions of *thinking of ourselves as broken*",van Neerven openly plays with conceptions of themselves which fixate on trauma (Tuck, 409). Leane, in her review of the work, reflects how the work's "stoicism and strength" subverts the gaze of any reader who define it in terms of trauma. The power to be still—immovable in the face of challenge and adversity—should not be underestimated, nor should it be misread as inertia…the poet refuses to be intimidated by it. Nor will they be reduced by it. When they write - "*So I'm walking-dead-haunting-live and there seems nothing left to write about but my trauma*" - the sentiment is the opposite to the words on the page. It is a case of appearance versus reality and an example of the poet critiquing another pernicious stereotype of Aboriginal people, that we are nothing but the sum total of ongoing colonial trauma. (Leane 2020, np)

Leane takes care to recognise van Neerven's autonomy and strength. She makes note of the strength of their stoicism against both the acts of racism they suffered, as well as the presumption of their passivity in its face. Yorta Yorta man Declan Fry similarly notes the explicitness of desire in the work, which responds directly to the experience of harassment, refusing to let it be the centre of the writing. He asks whether, following *Comfort Food*, "Perhaps the intervening years, and the moronic inferno of their bullying, revealed comfort to be a troubled and uneasy refuge for the poet" and recognises that "Van Neerven remains, however, implacably hungry" (Fry, np).

Conclusion

When examining western texts on performativity and normativity, Indigenous trans writing provides frameworks for complicating settler colonialism's influence on how sexuality and gender are understood. Our texts negate damage, and in establishing

desire-based frameworks across a diversity of forms, they do the work of honouring histories of trans life in our communities and questioning non-normativity and disciplinary power as the condition of queer and trans identity formation. In writing this analysis, I seek to open discussion, through these texts, of how normativity and performativity can be understood in settler colonial contexts and within the lived experiences of Indigenous trans people. Hunger, desire, and complex experiences of affirmation and belonging live in these works, along with active challenges to western queer norms.

Notes

[1] See a brief history of Deacon's use of the word 'Blak' here: https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/2020/05/07/why-blak-not-black-artist-destiny-deacon-and-origins-word-1.

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"You Can't Be an NDN in Today's World:" Tommy Pico's Queer NDN Epic Poems

JUNE SCUDELER

From the Viejas Indian reservation of the Kumeyaay Nation, Tommy Pico, the author of *Nature Poem* (2017) won the 2018 Whiting Award, with the committee calling his book a "contemporary epic." At first glance, calling Pico's poetry epic may seem like an odd choice. Helena González Fernández explains the "classic definition of the epic poem in the West refers to an account of a hero or heroes' past deeds recorded in a setting of both nation and city; in other words of community and public space—both distinctly patriarchal and heterosexual" (15). While the epic in prose form is being rewritten by authors like Madeline Miller, whose novels *Song of Achilles* (2011) and *Circe* (2018) are queer and feminist reinterpretations of the Greek stories, the epic poem is historically masculinist and heteropatriarchal. The literary epic has fallen largely out of fashion for these reasons, but also because tastes (and attention spans) have changed.[1] But how do Pico's queer Kumeyaay poems fit within the epic tradition? Poets.org defines epic as "a long, often book-length, narrative in verse form that retells the heroic journey of a single person or a group of persons. Elements that typically distinguish epics include superhuman deeds, fabulous adventures, highly stylized language, and a blending of lyrical and dramatic traditions." Pico's book-length poems fit these descriptions (they definitely are fabulous adventures), blending internet speak

with the travels of a young, hip queer Kumeyaay man through New York, book tours, relationships, and Kumeyaay history.

Pico's epic poems aren't heterosexual or patriarchal, but queer.[2] Pico's queerness is intersectional not only because he is Kumeyaay but because he works with and supports other Black, Indigenous and people of colour writers, particularly queer folks. In 2008, Pico established Birdsong (a key Kumeyaay concept I will explain shortly) Collective and Micropress in Brooklyn NY to "foster sustained collaboration among artists, musicians and writers" through its own zine. The Collective's mandate was to "share commitments to social movements of feminism, anti-racism, queer positivity, class-consciousness, and DIY cultural production" ("Who We Are"). He is also a member of the queer quartet who produce the podcast *Food for Thot*, hilariously described as stemming from a "discussion about how literary and intellectual spaces rarely allowed for conversations about things typically considered—well, not so intellectual. We loved talking about queer theory, identity politics, and Ta-Nehisi Coates, but also . . .our absolutely filthiest hook-up stories" ("About"), an exhilarating mixture of pop culture and theory reflected in his poetry.

Pico's poems seem to fit more into the queer American poetic tradition, moving from the queer epics of Walt Whitman's (1819–1892) *Leaves of Grass* or Allen Ginsberg's (1926–1977) *Howl*. Though Benjamin Meiners explains the "identification of the intertwining of the sexual and the political in Whitman's work has (rightly) become commonplace" (246), Pico rejects placing himself in this tradition even as he is grudgingly influenced by it: "I didn't read *Leaves of Grass* nor have I read *Howl* for that matter nor have I really read Frank O'Hara. Although, there are people who like to compare me to them all the time." Instead, he makes his own epic tradition rooted in Kumeyaay song traditions and urban Indigeneity and "less Whitman" (Fajardo-Anstine).

Pico also rejects slotting himself too easily into the epic tradition because epics are integral to the founding or originary literary land claims of countries to justify empire. For example, Virgil's *The Aeneid* tells the story of the founding of Rome whereas the "American epic differs from those of the European tradition by being about prospective nation-building, rather than retrospective celebration of the founding of an Empire" (Davies 60). Settler scholar Margery Fee asks how has "the formation of a Canadian literature been complicit in the colonial process of occupying and claiming land" (60), a question equally important for American literature. Although "the literature needed to unify a people and form a national character did not have to be overtly patriotic, but it did have to capture the essence or spirit of the nation" (Davies 4), for Pico the national essence of America is the genocidal erasure of Indigenous peoples.

However, American epics are not always white and heteronormative. In "Songs of Ourselves: Searching for America's Epic Poem," Ed Simon includes Claudia Rankine's 2014 *Citizen: An American Lyric* "as a postmodern epic [that] explores the precise ways that this nation has never treated it citizens equally. . .racism not simply as a problem of policy, but also as a national spiritual malady." Although Pico's tone is lighter that Rankine's, he also deconstructs the founding myths of American exceptionalism, progress, and equality. Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser and Roy Pé rez situate Pico's first book *IRL* (2016) as "an epic that refuses to posture as high art. . .Length allows *IRL* to activate a queer, Indigenous interpretation of empire by exhaustively sequencing sex, history, gossip, and critique into epic monumentalization" (238). Pico refuses American discourses of empire, instead creating his own queer Indigenous epics:

> America wants its NDNs[3] weary, slumped
> over the broken horse, spear sliding into the dry grass But I'm

> givin U NDN joy NDN laughter NDN freedom My body was built
> for singing (*Junk* 52)

Pico's epics are Indigenous and queer, meaning his poems don't conveniently fit into the western epic tradition; he may make nods to the genre, but he insists that they are queer Kumeyaay epics. Warren Cariou (Métis) stresses the importance of Indigenous poetry as a way to stay rooted in Indigenous existence in a colonized world, giving us another way to understand Pico:

> While poetry is undoubtedly a marginalized genre in mainstream Western society today, I believe it retains the capacity to shake up the divisive mindset that is endemic in our class-inflected and still-colonized world. It can destabilize those edges that keep Aboriginal peoples marginalized in contemporary North American culture, and it can do this by holding different realities side by side: by juxtaposing the received mainstream perception of colonial reality with a perception that is rooted in Aboriginal experience (33)

That is precisely what Pico's poetry is doing, walking the edges between not only settler colonialism and Kumeyaay ways of knowing—encompassing epistemologies, histories, stories, languages, spirituality, legal systems, and artistic practices—but shaking up the epic genre. When asked how he would describe the main theme of his poetry, he stated emphatically "genocide!" ("Tin House").

On the surface, Pico's life story makes him an unusual candidate for writing epics. From the Kumeyaay nation east of San Diego, California, Pico lived in Brooklyn, and is currently based in Los Angeles and New York City. He co-curated the reading series Poets with Attitude, co-hosts the podcasts *Food 4 Thot* and *Scream, Queen*, and is a contributing editor at *Literary Hub* ("About'). He attended Sarah Lawrence College,

intent on returning to his reservation after writing his pre-med thesis on diabetes. However, he felt overwhelmed because he believed that one doctor couldn't make a difference, so he majored in creative writing. He moved to New York City after he graduated, making zines to publish his poetry in before turning to book form. Pico was always creating stories,[4] so it makes sense that he turned to poetry, although epic poetry doesn't seem to be a natural choice. In *IRL*, Pico references epic poetry by wryly appreciating the queerness in Greek poetry: "Srsly / who didn't love the Greek / shit as a kid? / So witchy and swishy" (28). Pico references Thamyris from Homer's *Iliad*, "singing prodigy, glory / of the cithara, lover of / Hyacinth. Can't / you just see him sashay?" (*IRL* 28).[5] Greek poetry has been important for queer men because of its homoeroticism, including Pico.

Pico's poetry quartet–*IRL, Nature Poem* (2017), *Junk* (2018), and *Feed* (2019– redefines whose stories are worthy of such an "exalted" poetic form. The four books make up their own sequence because the reader can finish *Feed* and go "right back into the beginning of *IRL* so that they can be experienced as a cycle" ("83"). He explains "I write book-length poems, and it changes with each book. *IRL* I wanted to compose as if it were the world's longest text message. With *Nature Poem* I thought of each page like a transparency stacked atop each other, to create a sort of topography. *Junk* was organized into ten couplets on a page, each couplet 4.5 inches long to resemble a junk drawer: something made of very distinct objects that creates one, indistinct mass. The idea was you could pick moments out of it, like in a junk drawer, but as you turn the pages if you're not careful you'll lose it. *Feed* is organized at times like a news feed, but also approximates the manicured microclimates of the High Line park in New York where all these differently textured plants are sown to live alongside each other" (Cortez). His books are based on seasons and stages of a relationship: *IRL*

is summer / crush, *Nature Poem* is fall / relationship, *Junk* is winter / breakup, and *Feed* is summer / reconciliation (Brunton).[6]

The poems are written in a deceptively simple, breezy, and humorous style that belies the rigorous thought inspiring them, leaving the reader / listener unprepared for the truths about genocide, Indigenous erasure, and homophobia. His poetry oscillates between the urban (New York, book tour stops) and his memories of the Viejas reservation, carving a space in contemporary American society for a queer NDN.[7] Pico's epics shifts expectations about Indigenous poetry by "creating unsettling juxtapositions, which can have a comic or a dramatic effect—or, most often, some combination of the two." He uses his poetry to destabilize his readers, "lulling them into a false sense of security with jokey lines about Grindr and take-out food, getting them to laugh in recognition until suddenly he's talking about diabetes or the killing of Native Americans and his audience is finding out who can stop laughing the fastest. 'I call it Trojan horsing'" (Moskovitz). The Trojan horse appears in Homer's *Odyssey* and *Virgil's Aeneid* and is an apt metaphor to explain Pico's unsettling poetry.

Kumeyaay people[8] were forcibly moved from their original homelands to make way for Lake Cuyamaca, "taking most of the San Diego river water used by the Kumeyaay. This left them with only a small share from the city's flume" ("How Viejas"). Pico loves to confront his non-Indigenous readers and audiences with the implacable facts of genocide and forced displacement, pronouncing "Absence, as if Kumeyaay just didn't show up, as if slept in, as if there / weren't a government intent on extermination" (*NP* 62). Pico repeatedly returns to this theme; that the genocide of Indigenous peoples is conveniently believed to be some accident, rather than the genocidal policies of boarding schools (residential schools in Canada), allotment, and the imposition of Christianity. He asserts his presence as a queer NDN, daring the

reader / audience / literary establishment to deny that the stories of a queer NDN are of great national importance.

Pico embraces a different kind of epic rooted in Kumeyaay ways of knowing that Pico grew up with.[9] Apache / Chickasaw / Cherokee scholar and writer Erika Wurth underscores that the *Popol Vuh*, the story of the creation of the Maya people, is an epic that is equally important and complex as *The Iliad*. Pico similarly calls his poetry contemporary Kumeyaay epics: "My precedent for writing book-length poems are these Indigenous song cycles called 'bird songs.' Some of my first memories are listening to my father and other people singing them. They're just like epic poems that talk about how people made it into the valley, like travel logs. I feel that structured my thinking... My Kumeyaay name translates to 'bird songs.'" ("On Not"). His epics centre the adventures and musings of a queer Kumeyaay man that both honours his ancestors and his Kumeyaay relatives and his experiences as a queer NDN in urban spaces.

IRL: Musing About Being a Queer NDN

IRL chronicles Pico grappling with being between two worlds, a seemingly well-worn path for Indigenous writers. Struggling to find meaning in settler-colonial United States is part of his journey: "Kill / the Indian, Save the Man–/ Sow a shame so deep it arrives / when I do, it waits for me" (73). Pico's poetry is not only the outward journey of a queer Kumeyaay man, but the inward journey to self-acceptance, one that Pico knows will never really end. Listening to a podcast by astrophysicist Neil DeGrasse Tyson inspires the understanding "that trauma could be passed down / like molecular scar tissue like DNA cavorting with wars / and displacements and your bad dad's bad dad and what / is being indigenous but understanding a plurality of time" ("I See"). Pico's poetry not only reflects his restless mind, but also non-linear shifts in time between his ancestors and living in New York as a queer NDN. He carries his

community on his body; he has the word Kumeyaay tattooed in ornate letters on his hand and Kumeyaay basketry designs on his arms.

Pico makes the epic queer and NDN, but like the Greek epics, Pico also uses a Muse in *IRL*. Calliope is the Muse of Greek epic poetry, but in *IRL* Pico invites his own Muse, a man on whom he has a crush: "Crushing / on Muse. . .Muse crashes into the edges of my nights / isn't crushing / doesn't love me" (1). Pico queers the Muse, who is usually seen as feminine, by making them a queer man. Muse doesn't love Pico because he's "the side piece / Art is Muse's / main squeeze" (29). How can Pico compete with Art and the cultural capital that comes with it, but by stealing all the cultural capital for himself? He berates himself for being sentimental: "Don't fall in love / with Muse, duh! Muse is / embodiment of abstract / concept: Art, dance / astronomy, drama, heroic poetry, security, good/god, edible / underwear, pepperoni pizza, Jim / Beam" (29). Pico demolishes the edifices of Art by beginning his list with art, dance, heroic poetry, or what seems to be secure and acceptable of what Art is, moving to an account of the urban attractions of Jim Beam, pepperoni pizza, and edible underwear. He writes his own heroic poetry, eliminating the conflation between good and god, revelling in both the abstraction of Art and the corporeality of pizza.

Pico is well aware of ancient Greece's homoeroticism, which he updates as a twenty-first century queer urban NDN. He flirts with Muse:

> I'm giving Muse
> the look like *I'm only pre-*
> *tending I don't want*
> *you to kiss me.* I'm
> withholding, in general
> Surely Muse will want
> To kiss me bc I appear

Disinterested in kissing.

This is my technique

lol, so far, so alone (36)

Pico expresses his yearning for Muse with "Surely Muse will want" even as he is "withholding, in general." He wants Muse but is also unable to show the "emotional transparency" (36) needed to engage with Muse. Pico hides behind irony and pretence because "What kind of artless / simpleton says what they / truly feel?" (36). Of course, we know that Pico cares deeply about what Muse thinks; after all, he is crushing on Muse, even as he plays hard to get. Pico is enthralled by Muse: "If Muse ever texted me / I would :-) :-) :-) If / Muse ever texted 'I / want to be with you' / I would have a / minor coronary incident" (10). Muse is a capricious taskmaster who can't be controlled, but instead owns you and leaves you "in a shawl by the fire- / place, rocking alone / again" (30). But Muse is hard to escape even as Pico berates him: "Don't patron- / ize me, tradition / is a cage Conflict constant," a container Pico wants to escape (31).

In its place, Pico creates his own poetic persona, Teebs, a persona he uses to protect himself from settler colonial society and white queer culture. Teebs is "a fuckin' scrappy bitch" ("Epic Poet"): "I feel like Teebs was the original me, and then Tommy was the shy one whom I created in order to survive, to shield myself from anti-gayness. I was shamed into becoming a lesser version of myself. So getting older and getting louder and getting more performative is, I think, my reconnecting with a person before shame touched him" ("Not Waiting"). Teebs enables Pico to be queerer and more performative, a more amped-up version of himself. Pico firmly calls out homophobia for forcing him to hide and shrink into a lesser version of himself. He remembers "I mean I've always been a fairy, you know what I mean? I feel like starting to get bullied or whatever or hatred from people in high school ... I mean that's internalized homophobia and racism and all that kind of stuff" (Naimon). Now he sees the

boundaries between Teebs and himself dissolving, even as he cautions, "Writers / should never be the hero / of their own work / Be a hero IRL or whatever? / But don't *write* to be a hero- / That shit's disgusting" (38). But Teebs demands to be the hero of his own story as he moves through the poem: "Muse is *finally* giving me / what I want" even as his "hard won / sense of self surrenders thru / the sieve of yr attention every time" (64).

Pico is keenly aware of the nature of negotiating between Indigeneity and queerness, using what Dian Million (Tanana Athabaskan) calls felt theory, a "new language for communities to address the real multilayered facets of their histories and concerns by insisting on the inclusion of our lived experience, rich with emotional knowledges, of what pain and grief and hope meant or mean now in our pasts and future" (57). Teebs helps Pico be a queer urban NDN, but Pico also feels the presence of his ancestors "who have your hands with the contours of words bursting from your ends" (*Feed* 65). His ancestors inspire Pico's words with the kinetic force of Kumeyaay traditions. A lot of his poetry chronicles the trials of being Indigenous in the so-called United States, where Indigeneity is often rendered invisible through the vanishing Indian trope because of the vanishing Indian trope. Pico references photographer Edward Curtis' (1868-1952) who staged photos of Indigenous peoples, in which "Indians" are relegated to the past because they must be photographed before they vanish.[10] Pico warns that "Tradition is a cage / like an Edward Curtis pic / of high copper cheekbones – / totemic, fabricated" (*IRL* 25). Pico is rightly suspicious of these images and how they freeze Indigenous peoples in the past. He is a thoroughly modern NDN that is being supported by his ancestors, so there isn't a dichotomy between the two states of being. Pico's "family was queer in structure because a tribal structure is different than a hetero, nuclear family. My mom had three different kids

from three different men. It wasn't that common for somebody to be married to the person that they were having children with at the moment" (Ormundson).

Teebs struggles to find himself while reading a

cross-indigenous
anthropological survey
that claims extra-gendered
identities for a smattering of
tribes including mine, n I
wonder about two-spirit
traditional roles How
it would have sounded coming
from my grandma instead
of white anthropologist
. . .
Whatever Kumeyaay word
for 'they' Catholicism erased
Assimilationist homophobia
(*IRL* 93)

He is keenly aware of how conceptions of gender have been lost, highlighting how homophobia exists in his community because of Spanish colonization that imposed Catholicism. Pico dedicates *IRL* to "the memory of my grandmother, and all the ancestors who persevered through cultural/literal genocide, land & resource theft, myriad oppressions aggressions etc. so I could be some queer poet in Brooklyn who smells his own belly button way too much" (n.p.) His dedication encapsulates his mixture of tragedy and humour, but asserts the presence of Kumeyaay people in contemporary society.

The ending of *IRL* functions in the same way. Pico calls his poetry "a new ceremony" (97), quickly segueing to a karaoke bar, where Teebs is thrilled that James is following him back on Instagram and sends him a "somewhat *risqué* selfie:"

> He responds w/
> a pic of his computer
> screen His phone #
> on it so we
> text n he's like
> *come over* n I'm like
> *do u have A/C* he says
> *Yes* n I just straight up
> drop the mic
> n Leave. (98)

The last line harkens back to his admonishment "It's summer, some- / times, and / Leave. Me. Alone. Muse" (64). Even though he's "In-between / Kumeyaay and Brooklyn– / that it has a word, / even if the word is lost" (106), Teebs know that air conditioning and the promise of sex in a sweltering New York city summer is the most important thing for a queer NDN. Pico's first epic ends a characteristically irreverent note (who can blame Teebs for hooking up with a guy with a/c?), he still brings the end of the poem back to the difficulties of forgetting[11] the Kumeyaay language because of colonization.

***Nature Poem*: Indigenizing the Romantic Epic**

The canonical Romantic poets used the Kantian idea that the sublime "is not in the objects themselves but in our consciousness, which encompasses and transcends objects" (Cantor 399). Rather than *The Iliad* or *The Aeneid*'s celebration of warfare, the

sublime "was not lost on the Romantic poets, who, in effect, used the Kantian sublime to establish themselves as their own heroes, as the locus of greatness in the world" (Cantor 399). The Romantic poets who wrote epics, in this case Lord Byron, "begin[] as part of nature, but now nature becomes part of him; nature is assimilated into human consciousness" (Cantor 398). Although Lord Byron and Pico seem like strange bedfellows (or maybe not), Pico also satirizes the epic as an exalted form as Byron does in *Don Juan* (1819). Part of Pico's critique of the epic poem is echoed by Cantor's use of the word *assimilated* which situates the Romantic subjugation of nature as extractive and colonial. It reminds me of Pico exclamation of "genocide!" as a consistent theme; Pico's "mistrust of the [epic] is double—first because of its political and literary history as a tool of American settler colonialism and second because the lack of relevance to his own lived life is pronounced" (Ali), inspiring him to write his own epics.

Pico attempts to disentangle himself from nature but realizes that binaries between nature / urban are false because they're based in colonizing logics. He envisions a queer Kumeyaay sublime within cities because "he only fucks with the city" (4). He "accepts" nature by the end of the poem, but very much on his terms, mixed with Instagram, popular culture, and the refusal to whitewash genocide. He imagines himself as an ancestor fleeing Spanish and American colonization:

> I scout from the peak
> of our sacred mountain
> I'm dragged from the center
> of town in chains
> I'm old women scattered
> Along the creek
> My little hands squeeze
> My little mouth shut (45)

For Indigenous people, colonization is not an abstract concept, but something felt in the body in Pico's poetry, which is full of food, sex, and the insistence that his body will survive in the face of genocide.

In *Nature Poem*, Pico uses the epic form "as an attempt to understand, confront, and reconcile stereotypical ways in which American Indian people have been described in popular culture" (Tosone), especially as the vanishing Indian. He illuminates how Indigenous peoples are "depicted as being 'noble savages,' [being at] one with nature and all that shit. . .I wanted to write against these stereotypes in part to imbue nuance and humor and humanity back into people from whom it has been stolen from, historically" (Tosone). Except, of course, as the poem progresses, we learn that Pico is connected to nature, even if stereotypes are "dangerous to me because then we become features of the landscape, not human beings, things to be cleared and removed" (Tosone), victims of Manifest Destiny.

Teebs also slyly asks non-Indigenous readers and audiences what kind of nature poem they're expecting. He begins by evoking the Pacific coast: "The stars are dying / like, always, and far away, like what you see looking up is a death knell / from light, right? Light / years. But also close, like the sea stars on the Pacific coast" (1). Pico paints a picture of the stars' reflection on the Pacific Ocean, which seems innocuous, but the opening line surprises the reader who may be expecting a conventional nature poem, certainly not the death knell of stars. Teebs becomes more annoyed:

> When I try to sleep I
>
> I think about orange cliffs, bare of orange stars. Knotted, glut. Waves are clear. Anemones n shit. Sand crabs n shit. Fleas. There are seagulls overhead. Ugh I swore to myself I would never write a nature poem (1)

Pico moves from dying stars to the viscerally down and dirty "Anemones n shit," which can mean shit as in more stuff or actual shit on the beach. Teebs becomes more

exasperated at the supposedly bucolic scene, exemplified by "Ugh I swore to myself I would never write a nature poem." He confesses, "I can't not spill" (1), the double negative of wanting to tell his story while protesting he doesn't. Pico, as Ali suggests, "identifies with what a nature poem *isn't*," particularly terra nullius, landscapes devoid of Indigenous peoples. Teebs asserts his ancestors' presence and his own presence in contemporary American society. Pico confronts the reader with the purpose of his book: "I can't write a nature poem / bc it's fodder for the noble savage / narrative. I wd slap a tree across the face, / I say to my audience" (*NP* 2). Pico is extremely aware of where he places words on the page. Are nature poems fodder for the noble savage narrative or are nature poems also internalized by Indigenous peoples? Besides being feed for animals, fodder also means "inferior or readily available material used to supply a heavy demand" ("Fodder"); the dominant society is still rife with stereotypes about Indigenous peoples that leads to the forced displacement and genocide of Pico's ancestors.

Like *IRL*, *Nature Poem* is his queer NDN bird song, asking us what it means for a queer urban NDN, to reflect on nature in its myriad forms. Unfortunately, urban Indigenous peoples are still seen as inauthentic, negating that "the beauty of culturally inherent resurgence is that it challenges settler colonial dissections of our territories and our bodies into reserve/city or rural/urban dichotomies. . .cities have become sites of tremendous activism and resistance and of artistic, cultural, and linguistic revival and regeneration" (Simpson 173). Pico underscores his "draw to the city is simply that I crave the kind of excitement and motion and possibility that city life offers. Plus I'm pretty freaking gay and I was drawn to a place where a queer relationship was safer and more possible. It's weird 'cos my 15 years in the city, 'nature' has become something obscured and dangerous to me. You won't catch me camping, you can

believe that" (Haparimwi). Despite his protestations, there isn't a dichotomy between living in New York and being Kumeyaay.

But being in the city has its own, humorous challenges. Teebs is at a pizza parlour, bemused at a married man with "a cracked skin summer smile" trying to pick him up, a man who is "talking like I want to hear him / Like he's so comfortable / Like everybody owes him attention." Teebs describes himself as a "weirdo NDN faggot" when the man

> puts his hands on the ribs of my chair asks do I want to go into the
> bathroom with him
> Let's say it doesn't turn me on at all
> Let's say I hate all men bc literally all men are animals—
> This is a kind of nature I would write a poem about (2)

Pico not only deconstructs nature as in the so-called natural world, but the nature of masculinity. "A kind of" confirms that Pico is not thinking of just the natural world, but human nature, especially around sexuality. He calls out the sheer confidence of the man who tries to pick him up, who is secure in his self-delusion that Pico would of course want to have sex with him. Teebs then goes into a tirade about how he doesn't "like boys, men, or guys. . .the musk the swoony wake, the misc / bulges, stupid weight training *Spot me bro*– / I was like *pfffft* I says *yr kind of hard to miss?*" He rails about mainstream articulations of masculinity—"choosing trucks over pink?"—knowing that he doesn't want to / can't fit in because he's a weirdo queer NDN. There are men he does approve of: "Men dancing is fine tho. / Or like maybe men in socks? I dunno" (3). While Teebs knows what he finds objectionable about mainstream masculinity, he is still unsure of what kind of men he does like: the tragicomedy of dating.

Teebs is continually confronted with the presence of being a vanishing Indian in America. A "curious" white guy asks him if "I feel more connected to nature / bc I'm

NDN / asks did I live *like in a regular house*," obliviously asking if Teebs has any "rain / ceremonies" (15). The white guy's questions evoke a whole cavalcade of stereotypes about Indigenous peoples so it's easy for Indigenous readers to share his frustration. Pico is very precise about how he places words on the page, so it's significant that ceremonies has its own line, signifying the sacredness of Kumeyaay traditions. The "conversation" with the white guy carries in a way familiar to BIPOC people: "When I express, frustration, he says *what?* He says *I'm just asking* as if / being earnest absolves him from being fucked up." Teebs bluntly states:

> It does not.
> He says *I can't win with you*
> because he already did
> because he always will
> because he could write a nature
> poem, or anything he wants, he doesn't understand
>
> why I can't write a fucking nature
> poem.

Teebs' interior monologue shows that he knows all too well that the white guy can say whatever he wants about Indigenous people and be seen as correct, that he always will win because he can write about anything he wants. He could write a terrible nature poem and still not be faced with the complications Pico faces when trying to write a nature poem.

Of course, the white guy doesn't know that he will be fodder for Teebs' own nature poem:

> Later when he is fucking
> me I bite him on the cheek draw

blood I reify savage lust (15)

Is "reifying savage lust" something Teebs "simply does, or he chooses to, or is forced by white expectation to perform the role assigned him? That last stanza, by the way, is the single instance where the two men are on an equal plane—a non-verbal, sexual one. As if sex were the one space where equality might figure, where bodies are merely doing what they do—by nature" (Phillips). Sex, of course, is not free of power relationships, but we get the feeling that Teebs is both playing at being a savage Indian and very much in charge of the situation.

Pico states "Because I'm a Native person, there's this stereotype that we're reverent of nature or whatever. I wanted to mess with that, and be like camping is dumb and fuck lakes and grass sucks" ("I Said"). But he wonders

> What if I really do feel connected to the land?
> What if the mountains around the valley where I was born
> What if I see them like faces when I close my eyes
> What if I said hi to them in the mornings and now all their calls go to voicemail
> . . .
> I get so disappointed by stupid NDNs writing their dumb nature poems like grow up faggots
>
> I look this thought full in the face and want to throw myself into traffic (72)

Does Teebs really feel connected to the land or is he performing? He doesn't answer nature's call, but lets it go to his voicemail, a seemingly incongruous statement. Again, the placement of words is key. Teebs is very disappointed by NDNs writing their "stupid nature / poems." Are NDNs writing their own human natures? Is nature stupid? Teebs' plaintive "like grow up (not grown up) faggots" is full of child-like frustration,

undercut by Teebs melodramatically wanting to throw himself into traffic for writing a nature poem.

Then, on the facing page, Teebs challenges us: "Admit it. This is the poem you wanted all along" (73). Pico omits nature from the line to show that Teebs has accepted his fraught relationship with Indigeneity and nature, even though it's "hard to be anything / but a pessimist / when you feel the Earth rotting away on so many home pages" (74). However, Teebs puts aside his grand musings to spend time on his friend Roy's porch, "petting kitties" where there is "lavender in the air." Of course, Pico pulls the rug out from underneath with his last line:

> The air is clear and all across Instagram—peeps are posting pics of
> the sunset

The stars are no longer dying but are captured in stasis. For Pico, nature is mediated, whether by history, technology, particularly by being queer and Kumeyaay.

Another Man's *Junk. . .*

Described on the inner sleeve as a "breakup poem in couplets," *Junk* is inspired by A.R. Ammons' (1929-2001) *Garbage* (1993). Cited as an inspiration numerous times by Pico, Dan Chiasson calls Ammons "the great American poet of daily chores," an analogue precursor to Pico's digital hyperactivity. In 1963, Ammons inserted a roll of adding machine tape into his Underwood typewriter, a laborious process that became *Tape for the Turn of the Year.* His adding-tape epic's "formal properties are ways of managing the rate at which tape-time elapses: when Ammons's lines are long, spanning the width of the tape, he preserves the length and buys more time; when he prints a narrow strip of words, more of the tape. . .is gobbled up. Ammons cannot go too fast, or the poem will end before it has served its purpose" (Chiasson). Pico uses similar strictures to hold his overflowing thoughts and emotions. Ammons' use of

enjambment or the "running-over of a sentence or phrase from one poetic line to the next" ("Enjambment") is echoed by Pico, giving *Junk* a hectic, stream of consciousness tone of "Thoughts // becoming jagged and panicked" (35). Pico notes "Convention says a book shd be // *this* long but I'm only interested in writing as long as you want / to read in one sitting" even as he admits we're "Sitting for longer and / longer but paying less and less attention" (5). Pico's poems are an impossibility, epics in a time of short attention spans and internet brain. Although digitally constrained by envisioning his poem as a Tumblr post, a microblogging site, and by his decision that the couplets could only be 4.5 inches wide, Pico's feeling and thoughts are not so easily contained. He explains that "the book length format became a container of sorts, it became a conduit through which I could express the too muchness and the obsession" (Naimon), creating an unsettling balancing act between excess and control.

Like Ammons, Pico is fascinated in the stuff not considered important. Junk is material that seemingly no longer serves its purpose depending on who is deciding its usefulness. Pico remembers hanging out with his mom at the thrift store on the Kumeyaay Nation where she worked, leading to an appreciation of the discarded, the unloved, the useless. Teebs spends "whole ass afternoons among / the busted watches and raggedy Barbies" eating candy because it "is a simple way 2 make kids behave when you have three jobs" (46). He would also "parade in faded dress and sweaty // plastic pumps" while his "Aunty calmly blinks // 'That's just your way'" (46). Pico, a queer NDN, is seen as disposable in American history and culture: "Junk not immediately useful but I'm still someone I can't stop // lookin at ppl's Junk generally so u can imagine how hard it is / at the gym" (2). Junk is also slang for male genitalia, a very important interest of Teebs'. Jacquelyn Ardam underscores that "Junk also becomes, powerfully, a metaphor for the Native Americans abused and discarded at the hands of white people past and present... The beating heart of *Junk* lies in the

intersection of this junk experience: as food, as sex, as being Other-ed in America" (Ardam). But Pico (and Teebs) is determined to be make space for his own unique story because "Writing is witness—in ink the revelation stays" (2) because Junk is "a way of being at the centre of yr own universe" (31) to tell your own story.

Pico lives in a liminal space, one he makes his own by writing his own stories. Of course, Pico must find writing poems important because he confesses "But the poem is much more hos- / pitable Embrace the pivot & plow" even if "I'll stop writing abt my body's danger / when one of those goes away" (34), which could be quite a while for a queer NDN. His poems are both hospitable and "pitiable," an in-between space that unsettles the non-Indigenous reader. But it also unsettles Pico:

> Whenever I'm back in CA my whole rez asks *Soooooo*
> *what r you doing?* Which means, *what's more important than*
>
> *being here w/ yr family and yr ppl in the valley we've lived in for*
> *thousands of years* Which, heavy I have ppl here too Make
>
> *here* feel like *home* Sucks being a sometimes person Sometimes
> here sometimes there (50–1)

Although Pico feels uncomfortable with his rez's questions, he pushes back because he also has a community in cities, especially with BIPOC and/or queer writers. But he still feels conflicted as a sometimes person, a Junk space of being neither here nor there.

Throughout *Junk*, unwanted objects are "lovingly humanized – 'don't blame the junk for being discarded' – raising an important question. Namely, what happens when the forgotten items are people or entire populations? Dumped by a bored beau, or left

high and dry by American genocide? Or both, as in the case of our queer, freshly single, NDN... protagonist?" (Kenny). Teebs is also junk because he was dumped by his boyfriend:

The operative phrase is "dumped" but the opera-
tive feeling isn't "garbage" bc garbage suggests refusal and I

can be reused I swear (40)

He pleads that he can be reused though it is unclear by whom. The enjambment turns operative into opera, a musical performance of exaggerated emotions like Teebs' own emotional states. Ardam notes "Just as the couple — Teebs and his boyfriend — fails, so do these couplets," even if Pico's couplets don't follow rhyming conventions. Teebs struggles to find meaning in the junk space of romantic rejection, plaintively wondering "I thought the point of seeing each other / was to see each other How is being seen by me a bad thing?" (10).

However, these heightened emotions can keep Teebs safe; he rejoices at having a boyfriend even as he knows the dangers:

Not havin
a bf in so long I forgot how something as mundane as holding
hands makes a target of us You reach yr arm out to rest on my

shoulders and I pulled away I'm not afraid of intimacy
I'm scared of assault I want 2 love in spite of the violence (22)

For Pico, living in occupied America means self-surveillance because he is too NDN (or sometimes not NDN enough) and queer. Pico is telling his story in spite of colonization and homophobia, a Junk space of fear but also beauty. The everyday acts of love

between Teebs and his boyfriend are terrifying for Teebs, who simply wants to love his boyfriend without violence. But Pico is also keenly aware that his queer NDN body isn't wanted in white gay culture: "I hate gay guys so much There's this / idea that only some bodies are worthy of desire and the others // don't even exist" (11).

Teebs is not only discarded by his boyfriend, but also by America, an epic process that he connects with global forces of colonization. Although Pico writes to be the centre of his own universe, his universe includes solidarity and kinship with Black, brown and / or women, trans, and queer folks:

> First things first: get out of bed Another black man shot by
>
> police Another missing woman in Indian country Another trans
> person discovered by the roadside Another mass shooting They
>
> pile like stones and overtake the poem Resist wanting to burn it
> all down (34)

Teebs finds it impossible to function in the face of overwhelming violence that threatens to sink his poem. The repetition of "Another" signals the continuing violence of marginalized peoples is America, the bodies piling up, threatening to stop the poem. Teebs pivots to find comfort and inspiration in plants, a series he will continue in his next book: "Native basket grasses paperwhites mint and irises // elderberry and honeysuckle" (34). However, the list reminds me of a grounding exercise, a way of distracting yourself from distressing feelings, especially for people with anxiety or PTSD, part of being Indigenous in settler colonial societies.[12] When Teebs walks down

the street with his boyfriend, he sees "14th Street but I see a massacre Lenape land" (54).

In *Junk,* Pico lists the stereotypes that Indigenous peoples face like "The Berdache[13] / The Shaman / The Noble Savage / The Indian Problem / The Squaw // The Indian Princess / The Spirit Animal / The Drunk Indian / The Teary-eyed Environmentalist" (48), an epic of colonization that he debunks. He knows that these stereotypes are defined as "Considering something as a gen- // eral quality or characteristic apart from concrete realities, / specific objects, or actual instances" (48) junk ideas of who Indigenous peoples are. Splitting the word general onto two lines breaks apart how false these stereotypes are even as these leftover ideas are still part of the dominant culture or "What goes into the display case vs What goes in the Junk drawer" (39). Indigenous peoples aren't artefacts to be displayed in a museum or destined to be put in a Junk drawer; Pico imagines an alternate space, where he feels "something dark pulling me down, as sure // as I feel the ancestors yanking me up" (29) in spite of settler colonialism.

Junk ends a note of rebirth, like the Kumeyaay tradition of burning a person's possessions when they pass on, "ascending the possessions to heaven" (52).

If part of

Junk is letting go, partly Junk is letting go of you Junk finds a
new boo I am the standard of my mind Smoke pulls back

into the fire and the fire pulls back into the Junk and the Junk
pulls up to the bumper baby We lie quiet in the buff, not touchin (72)

Pico explains "I look at the narrator in *Junk* and I see a person who definitely can imagine a path toward solace, but who is still spinning out and exhausted. He sees the potential for family and for nourishment and for nutrition but doesn't know how to get there yet" (Osmundson). Befitting a narrator who doesn't yet know his own path, the ending is inconclusive. The smoke is going backwards instead of releasing spirit into the air, while inbetweeness pulls up to Teebs' bumper. He is not touching his new boo, even as he realizes "the most subversive move might be to dodge the grip of history altogether, to refuse what has been refused to you, and in doing so, to write yourself in to a new narrative" (Ardam) as a queer NDN.

"I Am the Recipe I Protect:" Feeding Yourself

Feed is the last book in the tetralogy, serving as a summation and a way forward for Teebs, or more accurately Pico, who becomes more himself by realizing that Teebs is no longer useful. Pico can now feed himself by "forging ways of living by recognizing and building communities" (Clark), a world beyond apps and hookups, a community resilient under the weight of history. Pico writes against scarcities of food, communities, and how Indigenous people are seen in American culture. While these concerns are woven throughout the books, Pico has become more mature and accepting of himself as he "Imagine[s] being fed, and feeding. / Imagine getting what you need. / Imagine the fire inside you" (76). Feeding is not only eating, but also sexual, emotional, and spiritual nourishment. Matt Clark suggests "In *Junk*, junk food, junk stuff, genital junk all offered sites of immediate pleasure in spite of the violence of the surrounding world. But these multiple kinds of junk offered subsistence that did not provide sustenance," nourishment that Teebs was not ready to accept.

Pico was commissioned[14] to write *Feed* by New York City's Friends of the High Line, produced in partnership with Poets House in 2018 when he was living in Brooklyn.

The High Line is "a public park built on a 1.45-mile-long elevated rail structure running from Gansevoort St. to 34th St. on Manhattan's West Side" that "was in operation from 1934 to 1980" ("FAQ"). The rail line was shut down because "the train was killing / people. It wasn't exactly a speed demon / AND there was a man on horseback waving red / ahead" so "they lifted it—up the ladder to the roof[15]—raised the train line High / Line, a hanging monument to the appetite of the sky" (38-39). *Feed* reflects the layout of the Highline with its different garden zones.[16] Pico uses plant names to punctuate the different parts of the poem, leading the reader to imagine themselves walking with Pico and sharing a conversation. He believes "There's a sweetness to [*Feed*], a self-acceptance I think, something that has taken the mess of the world and curated it into a garden that looks wild but is actually meticulously ordered" (Cortez).

Feed not only refers to a social media, but also making food and caring for self and community. Colonization is inextricably linked to Pico's lack of cooking skills as he reveals "I don't have a food history / If the dish is, 'subjugate an indigenous population," here's an ingredient / of the roux: alienate us from our traditional ways of / gathering an cooking food" (11). The Working Group on Indigenous Food Sovereignty states instead of the "highly mechanistic, linear food production, distribution, and consumption model applied in the industrialized food system," Indigenous food is "primarily cultivated. . .based on values of interdependency, respect, reciprocity, and ecological sensibility" ("Indigenous Food"). Pico's ancestors were violently displaced from their traditional food sources: they "are just lost, like traditional ways of cooking food that are just lost. And so I wanted to create. I wanted to have almost like a new ceremony. I wanted to have a new language of food to replace something that had been lost. It wasn't lost, it was stolen" (Pashman). He does remember his mother making a Kumeyaay acorn dish "called [shawii]. We would go harvest acorns in the mountains and I'd crack them and crush them into a powdery

meal. You put water into that and you let it set. And then you would put it in the fridge for a little while to make it congeal or something" (Pashman).

As an NDN from the Kumeyaay Indian Nation, Pico is intimately aware of his people's food history. He "highlights the USDA's Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations (FDPIR), used by the American government as a form of 'redistribution' to Indigenous communities—a gathering of crumbs from the stolen breadbasket of the San Diego river" (Hawa). The Kumeyaay "moved around what wd be called the San Diego county with / the seasons" until

> the missions. The isolated reservations on stone mountains
> where not even a goat could live
> Then the starvation. . .The powdered milk, worm in the oatmeal, corn syrupy
> canned peaches. Food stripped of its nutrients. Then came the sugar
> blood. The sickness. The glucose meter going up and up (11)

Remember that Pico wanted to write his pre-med thesis on diabetes, and in his poetry he continues to fight against the still prevalent stereotype that Indigenous peoples are predisposed to diabetes, something I've been told myself. Like my ancestors, Pico's ancestors were forcibly removed from their food sovereignty through containment on reservations and the slaughter of food sources like the buffalo.

Pico's growing self-acceptance is echoed by the peripatetic pace of the poem, a leisurely but still fraught stroll with his newly married ex, Leo. Walking with Leo brings a flood of memories that moves between past, present, and future even as he is "committed / to being my own damn romantic / comedy" (2). Although *Feed* is a reconciliation poem in which Pico

is "Reconciling 'nature' with 'the city,' the city's past with the park's future. And I just so happened to be reconciling with an ex with whom I'd had many, many dates at the

park itself" (Grant), Pico is wary of the word and "drives a stake through our reconciliation mythologies" (Wawa):

> Reconcile:
> to cause
> a person
> to accept or be resigned to something not desired (28)

Pico is addressing the difficulties of being friends with an ex. Does he want to be with Leo again? Is Leo reluctant to be friends? But he realizes there is another way of understanding the word: "To win over / to friendliness; cause to be amicable" (28). Triggered by Leo's comment that Teebs slept on a box spring on the floor (he now has Off-brand overstock bought in installments), "*I think we've both moved on lol I didn't want to, it's just. . .*" he wants to grow up even though "sometimes it feels like it's everyone else / around me growing up, and I'm just getting older" (28). Pico's poetry is sly, humorous, a running commentary on being a queer NDN, but is also full of tender confessions from Teebs' hectic mind that announces, "To compose or set- / tle I will not" (28). Teebs fights against stasis, even as he feels lonely on book tours. He needs to "set" in place to grapple with his relationship with Leo during spring, the most changeable of seasons. He reconnects with Leo through a Twitter chain "(brace yourself for some annoying / thoroughly modern love-in-the-time-of-apps bullcrap)" (68), but he finally realizes

> I guess this is a dirge
> to the future I thought we could have
> Not all plants were meant to grow together
> in the same microclimate. Some things go apart instead (69)

He accepts that not all relationships last, highlighting Pico's growth. While *Junk* is post-break up stream of consciousness, *Feed* is a meandering walk with an ex who may be a friend, even after heartache.

Pico realizes he is becoming himself through his various communities. His ancestors surround him as he lives in cities, creating new, primarily queer BIPOC communities. He directly addresses us, daring us to acknowledge our part in the poetry-making process:

> Dear reader,
> We are in a pot
>
> One of us is the vegetables and one of us the water. I can't tell
> who is cooking who (5)

This is not only a nod to the relationship Pico has with readers and listeners, but with his various communities. It is impossible to separate ourselves from others, Pico acknowledges, moving from the "me" of the preceding books to the "we" of *Feed*. While Teebs has interactions with people, he is now having conversation with his friends, and most importantly with Leo, a process that Teebs previously may not have had the maturity or courage to undertake.

Feed is also unusual because Pico addresses the reader directly in his Dear Reader sections, signalling that Pico is becoming himself, although, of course, nothing is ever what it seems in Pico's poetry. He obliquely addressed the reader before—the repetition of "I say to my audience" in *Nature Poem*—but *Feed* forces the reader to admit their voyeuristic complicity:

> Dear reader,
>
> . . .
>
> Hey! Let's make a vinaigrette

Did you know molasses emulsifies the olive
oil and keeps the little
fat
molecules from stumbling
into each other, thus allowing the oil and vinegar
to mix? (2)

Instead of asking us to listen to what he is saying, which can sometimes be taken with a grain of salt because of Teebs' tricky mind, Pico invites us to join him at his table. Remember that *Feed* started as a commissioned podcast, so listeners could walk the High Line beside Pico, a key shift in Pico's work. Pico realizes that he may no longer need Teebs even as his social media presence is still @heyteebs.

Food is an integral part of community building, a tradition that Pico saw when he was a kid because his parents cooked for funerals "all across San Diego. . .because there are so many funerals in Indian country I mean my first memory was being at a funeral, they were busy a lot... They were very, very, very community-minded. They were very much like what's best for me is what's best for us, or what's best for us is what's best for me" (Pashman). *Feed* continues his parents' tradition as he learns to cook with and for other people: "I says to them around the table I says, I don't have food stories. With / you, I say, I'm cooking new ones" (11). Pico also reflects that sense of community with the Birdsong Collective, but also through his support of other BIPOC writers. He is now ready to create communities when he understands and accepts that "I am the recipe I protect" (53).

Pico ends his series of epics with one of his favourite singers, Beyoncé, who inspired him to start writing epics on his thirtieth birthday. Beyoncé sings to her audience "*You* give *me* everything. . .The reciprocity" in her song *XO* (57). Pico

laments his loneliness as he is "mewing / into the void and yes / I'm completely //alone" but then, echoing Beyoncé, he pivots to address his readers:

> Yes, there is utility
> in this loneliness. This is how *I* be *with*
> You, dear reader, on the other
> side of my words on the other side
> Of my worship (78)

His use of "I' shows the shift from Teebs to Pico signalled on the previous page in a playful conversation with his friend Wilkes and with Leo:

> Leo: One time when we were dating—
> Tommy: OKAY, this hang out is officially over this is where you pack
> In your snacks and get the fuck off my roof you bullies (77)

He answers as Tommy, not Teebs, making the "me" on the preceding a direct address to the reader from Pico. Will Clark notes in his *Feed* review "That is perhaps what is most radical about *Feed*: how Pico questions the very existence of his alter ego, Teebs, as a means of creating a culture centered on queer and indigenous people." The last lines of *Feed*—"As their eyes / were watching / Beyoncé" (78) —is not only a reference to Zora Neale Hurston's 1937 novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, particularly the line "They seemed to be staring at the dark, but their eyes were watching God" ("Their Eyes"), but harken back to Pico's reciprocity with audience / reader. He explains, "I'm from an Indian reservation in southern California, and I think when I left home I was looking to replace or remake that strong sense of community somehow" (Alexander). He also envisions the reader / audience as community because "a book is a handshake, kind of, or an embrace or something" ("Epic Poet"). He now feeds himself and others with the help of his communities, his books epics of reciprocity.

Conclusion

Pico begins his epic poems lamenting that Muse doesn't love him and concludes by learning to love himself as Tommy. Pico is the hero of his own journey by not only counteracting erasure of Indigenous peoples in America but insisting that his own story is as important as western epics. More importantly, a queer NDN who was bullied in school and still feels unsafe walking down the street holding his boyfriend's hand now demands attention, first through an alter ego, then as himself. Just as Muskogee / Cherokee scholar Craig Womack asserts, Indigenous literature is the tree, not the branch of American literature, that "We *are* the canon" (7), Pico also affirms "basically I'm just like this is the new American rhetoric. This is my form now. I didn't ask for this language. I didn't ask for this canon but now it's mine and watch me wreck the shit out of this house. . .it's mine now" (Naimon). Pico takes one of the most exalted of western genres, fucks with it (in more ways than one), and not only queers the epic but Indigenizes it to reflect contemporary urban Indigenous experiences through creating his new bird songs.

Notes

[1] James Poulos argues that the epic is back in fashion, but in the form of books like the *Harry Potter* series and film and TV series like *Game of Thrones* and, I would add, superhero franchises. These epics are usually in the fantasy genre, with *Game of Thrones* echoing the battles and myth-making properties of Greek epics

[2] Pico refers to himself as queer rather than Two Spirit.

[3] Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree Nation) defines NDN as "internet shorthand used by Indigenous peoples in North America to refer to ourselves. It also sometimes an acronym meaning 'Not Dead Native.'"

[4] Pico remembers "my mother always told me that when she would drive by the bus stop where I was, I was surrounded by my cousins and they were all paying rapt attention to everything that I was saying. And I had a tape recorder when I was little and I would just tell all these stories into it before I could even read or write before I knew what spelling was, before I knew what the dictionary was. I had a little talk show

between my stuffed animals and my barbies and my G.I. Joes, you know what I mean, like I always had that personality and that voice" (Naimon)

[5] Pico mentions Robert Graves (1895-1985), who published *The Greek Myths* in 1955

[6] Brunton is referring to Pico's tweet from his now deleted Twitter. Unfortunately, I didn't take note of the date.

[7] Pico also refers to himself as NDN: https://www.instagram.com/heyteebs/?hl=en

[8] As a Métis person in so-called Canada who usually writes about Cree and Métis authors, artists, and filmmakers, I'm mindful that I'm an outsider to Pico's Kumeyaay ways of knowing. How does an Indigenous Literary Nationalist framework, or using Nation-specific ways of knowing, function when engaging with another Indigenous person's writing? My ancestors moved from Red River Manitoba (now Winnipeg) and Batoche, Saskatchewan, where they supported Métis leader Louis Riel's calls for the Canadian government to respect Métis land from rapidly encroaching settlers. Two of my ancestors, Jérôme Henry and Joseph Vermette, fought alongside renowned Métis war chief Gabriel Dumont; Henry was killed, and Vermette wounded by the Canadian troops trying to quell the Métis resistance in 1885. The Métis fought hard, but were outnumbered by Canadian troops, who used the Gatling gun, a forerunner of the machine gun. While my ancestors are from the Prairies (my Métis mom is from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and my dad from Castelfranco Veneto, Italy), I grew up in the Vancouver suburbs on Tsawwassen territories and have lived in the temperate rainforests on the traditional territories of the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), and səl̓ilw̓ətaʔɬ) (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations colonially known as Vancouver BC for over thirty years.

[9] For examples of Kumeyaay bird songs, see Kumeyaay elder Stan Rodriguez's stories and songs https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BkqoUIUN438 and examples of Kumeyaay bird dancing https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T6Iz4xrXK4A

[10] He would give Indigenous peoples costumes to wear instead of the modern clothes they work so they would look more "Indian." Curtis' photos are still popular, published as expensive coffee table books.

[11] Pico remembers "When I was younger I learned Kumeyaay. . .A woman from one of the Kumeyaay villages stayed with us and watched me while my parents were gone. She didn't speak English, and so I learned Spanish and Kumeyaay. I was super young, I didn't know I was learning the language, of course. But later on I didn't have anybody to practice with. There was a legislative push to cleanse American Indian people of their language and culture. The same policies didn't exist in Mexico, and so the language is very much alive there." See

https://www.thestranger.com/slog/2016/07/26/24393711/tommy-picos-irl-is-better-than-the-internet

[12] Thinking in categories is a common technique. See https://www.healthline.com/health/grounding-techniques

[13] Berdache is a derogatory anthropological term used to describe what is now known as Two Spirit / Indigiqueer people.

[14] Pico's reading of the commission is available online: https://www.thehighline.org/blog/2018/04/19/feed-a-garden-soundscape/

[15] Up the ladder to the roof is a reference to the 1970 Supremes song, which included the lines "Go up the ladder to the roof where we can see heaven much better / Go up the ladder to the roof where we can be oh closer to heaven."

[16] https://www.thehighline.org/gardens/garden-zones/

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War and Violence: Reading David Treuer's *Prudence* as Native North American War Fiction

CASSANDRA KRAUSS

Superficially, David Treuer's 2016 novel *Prudence* seems typical of the canonic euroamerican war novel; detailing both combat in Europe and the complexities of personal relationships in Minnesota during the 1940s and '50s, Treuer tells of the battle- and home-fronts, emphasizing the shifting boundaries of violence. He insists that:

> people think of Minnesota as a quiet place full of nice people and […] of World War 2 as a noble effort that happened far away. [*Prudence* turns] that all around: Minnesota is not as quiet […] and World War 2 [did not] happen far away, it happened right here. (Mumford)

Like Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, or Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, both genre-defining war novels, *Prudence* collapses the distinctions between past and present, between here and over there.[1] This collapse allows for a profound exploration of violence, demonstrating its pervasive reach. Contrary to the portrayal of wars (and other violence) as deviations from the norm, *Prudence* showcases a continuous U.S. American aggression, refusing the narrative of the United States as inherently pacific, extolling the ideals of liberty and equality. Treuer develops this interrogation further, centering the role that Native bodies play in these games of violence. *Prudence* questions the established structures that enable and necessitate war, thereby investigating and challenging the legitimacy of the U.S. American nation state.

Prudence hinges on the events of an afternoon in 1942, exploring their immediate and long-term effects. Treuer tells the stories of Billy and Frankie, reunited for "one last glorious August, one last innocent holiday before Frankie

[joins] the world and the war" (*Prudence* 9). While Frankie, white, middleclass, has just graduated from Yale University, Billy, who is Ojibwe, has been "peeling spruce for five cents a stick" and "gutting and filleting fish" for the past years (41). Despite their different life situations and recurring geographic separation, Billy and Frankie have spent their teenage summers falling in love with each other, developing an emotional and physical relationship that has stretched into early adulthood. However, while Billy seems secure in both his love for Frankie and his own queerness, Frankie tries to hide his same-sex desires, locked in the expectations of mid-twentieth century white masculinity.

On the afternoon of Frankie's arrival in Minnesota, his friends inform him that a pair of German prisoners of war has escaped from a nearby prison camp, and Frankie suggests a search party to capture the escapees. Overzealous and intent on proving his manhood, Frankie mistakes Grace, a young Ojibwe girl hiding from the authorities, for the POWs and fatally shoots her. Grace dies in her sister's arms, the titular Prudence, leaving her traumatized. Billy, realizing Frankie's impotence in the face of responsibility, claims Grace's murder. Frankie deploys soon afterwards, having resolved neither his relationship with Billy nor admitted the truth to Prudence, taking up a post as bombardier in Europe.

As historical fiction, *Prudence* suggests a traditionally rendered war novel. Fundamental to the euroamerican imagination and its literature, violence and war have found their way into fiction since the epic poetry of Homer's *Iliad* (written between 1260 and 1180 BC), continuing through the Elizabethan dramas of William Shakespeare and the Realist novels of Leo Tolstoy and Stendhal, to the anti-war narratives of the twentieth century; its objective, as McLoughlin argues, to give meaning to chaos and manage the violence: "writing about war somehow controls it, imposing at least verbal order on the chaos, [making] it seem more comprehensible and therefore safer" (13). However, the implicit aestheticization

through language, as well as the historization of events necessarily leads to a representation that allows (and even encourages) romanticization of war, while establishing violence as essential to the cultural and societal fabric of Europe and, particularly, that of northern America.

Based on documented events (the presence of German prisoners of war in Minnesota, the sequence and geography of World War 2, the details of training and aerial combat) and historical figures (the teenage, Ojibwe Prudence Bolton), Treuer seems to follow this desire to control the past. A self-proclaimed World War 2 expert, he states that he undertook diligent research, reading histories, perusing soldiers' autobiographies, and "imagining himself into [Frankie's] plane" to capture the true feeling of experiencing war (Grossmann).

And yet, while *Prudence* allows the "re-experience [of] the social and human motives which led men to think, feel, and act just as they did in historical reality", typical of the historical novel, Treuer surpasses this objective, bending history and exposing its biased narratives (Lukács 44).

The novel's catalyst is Prudence herself. "Based on a historical person thrust into a rural Minnesota community", Treuer envisions his main character as the incarnation of Prudence Bolton, a young Native woman, immortalized as the first woman that Ernest Hemingway claims to have had sex with (Grossmann).[2] Bolton is further recorded as having committed suicide with her partner at age 19. This is, as Treuer emphasizes, all that is known about her. While there are "thousands and thousands of pages devoted to the life of Hemingway […] all we know about this Native woman is two sentences"; information that reduces her to her gender and death, robbing her of an extended existence in the world (Grossmann). Bolton's historical near-invisibility highlights how history treats Native North Americans (and Native women in particular), "never really [allowing them their own] complicated, flawed, and tumultuous human experience", leaving them as anecdotes to white lives instead (Grossmann).[3] Treuer declares further that Bolton "stayed with [him]

because [her treatment] betrayed a kind of systemic unfairness", and that he thus envisioned his novel as her story, allowing her "an attempt at self-possession and recovery" (Davies). In an effort to amend history, Treuer thus tries to give her story space, her chapter the only chapter told in first person.

It should however be noted that Treuer here follows both in the complicated footsteps of male authors appropriating female voices and of authors more generally trying to excavate narratives that have been violently suppressed. Despite the already monumental task of locating Native histories and voices in a master narrative that denies, curtails and limits their existence, Treuer here insists that he can reclaim Prudence's story, a woman who has been utterly lost to and by history. There is a certain "impossibility of recovery" when engaging with records "whose very assembly and organization occlude certain historical subjects"; Prudence is a footnote to Hemingway because the grand narrative necessitates both his sustained existence and her absence: the historical narrative is dependent on this duality (Helton et al 1).

Saidiya Hartman argues similarly, stating that recovery of lost histories is indeed impossible as the dead cannot speak (12). In her essay "Venus in Two Acts" (2008), she discusses the barely remarked upon death of two girls at the hands of a slave trader. Hartman states that "the loss of [such] stories sharpens the hunger for them. So it is tempting to fill in the gaps and provide closure where there is none" (8). Like Prudence's story that lacks all details about her life, the two girls seem to demand more information, more history. And yet, Hartman cautions against this, the potential new story also violent in obscuring the structures of power that have silenced it. These stories thus become complicit—to an extent—in further disguising how history manufactures reality. Hartman asks instead to "[strain] against the limits of the archive" and step back from trying to "[recover] the lives" or "[redeem] the dead", thus moving to "paint as full a picture of the lives of the enslaved as

possible" (11). While this is undoubtably Treuer's objective, it bears remembering that "rescuing" Prudence from obscurity and affording her "self-possession" is complex, particularly via a male voice.

Prudence begins her teenage years as a victim of repeated rape, this immediately manifesting the dispensability of female Native bodies in US American settler society and mirroring the experiences of Native women from the beginning of colonization into the twenty-fist century. Treuer however does not give in to victimry completely, so avoiding a dangerous stereotype. Instead, he places the violence against Prudence into a larger context of U.S. aggressions. Prudence almost nonchalantly explains that her rapist "was one of them who had been away to the Great War", linking warfare with rape and destructive masculinity (*Prudence* 237). This further connects the historical and contemporary mistreatment of Native women with the violence of World War 1. Prudence's rapist, a veteran, is presented as a violent man who exerts power over the vulnerable, crucially unsettling the idea of heroism linked to war, instead revealing a system of sustained violence that connects the home- and the battle-front.

Violent men, and their brutality against Native women, were central to westward expansion across the United States; the eventual removal of Native peoples and the establishment of secure white settlements almost conditional on the amount of violence tolled out by the settler-colonizers: more violence ensures more territory, faster. Treuer stresses this connection.

Prudence remains casually linked with sex (both consensual and non) throughout the novel, before having sex with Billy after his return from fighting in World War 2. While their encounter is not physically violent, it is emotionally fraught, Billy's motivations layered in a yearning for Frankie. The section culminates in Billy's brutal declaration that Frankie never loved Prudence, and that his care of her following Grace's murder was entirely motivated by guilt—guilt at having been the shooter and the inability to shoulder the blame (*Prudence* 213). Sex, while

consensual, is again coupled with war-colored masculinity, Billy's unnecessary revelation nourished by his trauma-induced drinking, as well as his need to claim Frankie for himself.

Although Prudence and her sister manage to escape their abusive childhoods (and later boarding school), Prudence is permanently traumatized by her sister's murder. Grace's death, also arguably an indirect consequence of war (and confused masculinity), is never fully resolved. Neither Frankie nor Billy are directly punished for the murder; the implication here being that the lives of Native women are aggressively dismissed and consistently exposed to a white violence inherent in the colonization of the Americas.[4] As Sarah Hunt argues

> colonialism relies on the widespread dehumanization of all Indigenous people—[…] children, two-spirits, men and women—so colonial violence could be understood to impact all of us at the level of our denied humanity. Yet this dehumanization is felt most acutely in the bodies of Indigenous girls, women, two-spirit and transgender people, as physical and sexual violence against [these groups] continues to be accepted as normal. (qtd. in *Reclaiming Power and Place* 230)

Prudence seems to function here as representative for contemporary Native concerns, spotlighting the continued effects of colonialism in northern America. While this is surely relevant, it again raises the specter of Treuer's appropriation of Prudence's story. Utilizing her to depict the struggles of an entire group of people arguably robs her of a personal fate, devaluing her yet again—apparently the opposite of Treuer's goal.

Alongside Prudence, Treuer uses the imprisonment of German soldiers in Minnesota camps as impetus for the novel's unravelling. As detailed by Tracy Mumford, World War 2 created a demand for soldiers, and subsequently, a lack of able-bodied men on the home-front, and thus a labor

shortage; in Minnesota (and other states) this shortage was met by the importation of German POWs:

> They harvested beets outside of Hollandale, Minn. and worked the lumber camps of Itasca and Cass counties. More than 15 camps were established in Minnesota, housing some of the 400,000 POWs brought to the United States. (Mumford)

While introducing "the enemy" into Middle America fueled wide-spread anxiety over escaping and marauding prisoners, only very few managed to actually flee the camps. As Gunnar Norgaard, the assistant executive officer at Algona (Iowa) argued, "the American guards discouraged any notions the Germans may have had about escaping, with stories about a surrounding wilderness inhabited by timber wolves, bears, and dangerous Indians" (qtd. In Lobdell).[5] However, on October 28, 1944, two German prisoners managed to escape. Trying to return to Germany via the Mississippi and New Orleans, they surrendered three days into their escape. Treuer coopts this incident and, dismissing notions of historical accuracy, molds it to his own narrative: in *Prudence*, the prisoners escape two years prior in 1942 (before the widespread establishment of German prison camps in the United States), deliberately challenging the established historical timeline.

Treuer seems to be doing two things here; while gesturing towards historical authenticity—the escaped prisoners—and thus manifesting the legitimacy of his narrative, he also consciously upsets it—by setting the escape in the wrong year and state—thus "[demonstrating] the gap between written text and truth" (de Groot 11). Superficially this again seems characteristic of historical fiction, historical fact expelled by playful narrative manipulation; here however it also exposes a Native North American tendency to disregard the established progression of time. Where euroamerican epistemologies view time as linear, developing from a to b to

c, Native time is variously understood as "a rubber band, stretchable, or as little loops", as time running parallel, neither past nor future but "always [as] all the times, [differing] slightly" (qtd. in Dillon 26). And precisely because the prisoners' escape sets the story in motion, explicitly challenging the set course of history, it suggests a skepticism of time as fixed, preferring a Native concept of mutable time. The incident of the escaped prisoners is a means of illustrating that essentially it does not matter when (or if) the prisoners escape, as the events that lead up to their escape as well as those that follow will happen regardless: Frankie will die, the relationship between Billy and Frankie will crumble, and Prudence will commit suicide.

While such a coupling of inevitability and timelessness also prevails in English Modernism, (notably in works by Virginia Woolf and James Joyce), it here stipulates an even more comprehensive critique of violence and war. Read as such, *Prudence* implies that the strict ordering of time that underlies history suggests a portrayal of violence as contained, as a bounded segment on the progressing thread of history; war and violence thus come to be seen as deviations from the norm, as lapses and not as the continuous force that they actually are. This recalls the bracketing of violence such as slavery, the Vietnam war or the institution of residential schools, instances presented as aberrations that do not represent the "real" American or Canadian national character. North American history, told from a settler-colonizer point of view, absolves itself from violence, instances of the same reduced to exceptions, reactions necessary to protect and promote freedom and democracy.

By insisting on the irrelevance of linear time and historical accuracy, Treuer proposes that violence spreads into every corner of northern American existence, just as the German POWs insist on encroaching on rural Minnesota. Even though the prisoners never directly interact with any of the

main characters, their mere presence shatters the illusion of separation from war and violence, manifesting war in the heartland of the United States.

This manifestation is further cemented through the character of Emma, Frankie's mother, who is confronted daily with the reality of war, wondering "why they [had] to put the camp right there, where you could see it out of the front windows?" (*Prudence* 4). Emma's observation immediately adds yet another layer: the home, conceptualized as the sphere of women, comes into direct (visual) contact with the realities of war, destabilizing both the idea of safety in the home, and the distance of women from war more generally.[6] The proximity of the POWs unsettles the idea of the civilian (here in the form of Emma) and forces her, as proxy for American women and children, directly into the periphery of war.

Such a portrayal of the home-front is again reminiscent of Modernist writings of war. With the advent of global warfare in the early twentieth century, war was no longer physically removed from the home. In the United Kingdom this first became apparent during World War 1; accustomed to wars in the colonies, the fighting in France was suddenly very close. Paul Fussell even argues that "what [made] experience in the Great War unique and [gave] it a special freight of irony [was] the ridiculous proximity of the trenches to home"; those living in Kent could hear the shells and bombs exploding across the Channel (69).[7] In her novels *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) and *To the Lighthouse* (1927), Virginia Woolf focusses on the war's closeness and interruption by manifesting violence in the every-day of 1920s London, stressing both the continued presence of the war and its ability to spill over supposedly fixed spatial and temporal boundaries. A contemporary of Woolf's, Sigmund Freud stresses that World War 1 was the first (western) war to ignore "the distinction between civil and military sections of the population"—which is precisely what Emma experiences in Minnesota (279).

While she is far removed from the battle-front, the war teases her from her front porch and from inside her home, exacerbating the fact that Frankie is also about to actively join the war. The war is thus very much present in the every-day and not removed across the ocean.

It does bear mentioning that the line drawn between civilians and combatants has always been fluid; particularly in northern America, where the colonizing governments made use of settlers to further their military agendas (notably in westward expansion and the removal of Native nations). Contrary to the idea of safe civilians, Native women and children have always been under threat by the United States and Canadian governments and settlers always part of violent colonization, both thus directly exposed to violence.

Moreover, Emma, as a white, property-owning employer, suggests the substantial role that white women played in the process of colonization, reminding the reader that even if Emma sees herself (and has been taught to do so) as removed from violence, she has always been at the center of it. Arguably, protecting the home from outside threat can be realized as a prime motivator for westward expansion as well as continued aggression by settler-colonizers against Natives—the very invention of the savage and untamed land beyond the home of the settler-colonizer implies the necessity of (violent) protection, placing the home, and with it the woman, at the epicenter of violence. Emma thus comes to personify white settlers encroaching on Native land, her very existence underlining the absurdity of a safe home within northern America. White violence against Native North Americans is always already implied in the Americas, completely invalidating the idea of separate zones of safety and danger. Ultimately, the insertion of settler-colonizers creates a geography of violence; the United States cannot

offer a safe home to anyone.

Treuer returns briefly to the idea of Europe spilling across the Atlantic at the novel's conclusion, introducing a Jewish man into rural Minnesota and further blurring the perceived differences between "here" and "over there". Cast as a survivor of the Holocaust, he intrudes on the lives of Mary, a Native woman and local bar co-owner, and her husband Gephardt, a German. Again, the sanctity of the home is upset, this time more literally than it is for Emma; the Jewish man importing violence from Europe into the heartland, shooting at both Mary and Gephardt, actively reminding them of the horrors of World War 2. The violence of his appearance also adds a succinct parallel between the Shoah and Native genocide in North America.[8]

The ethnic cleansing perpetrated by the Third Reich during the 1930s and 40s is a reiteration of the same "racial hierarchy built around [the] shared project of territorial expansion" of colonialism: the same ideas of racism, exploitation and geographical expansion (manifest destiny as an American version of the Nazi ideology of Lebensraum) that fed the very idea of colonialism are at work in continuing Native extermination and the Jewish holocaust of the twentieth century (Mishra). While there is an obvious continuity in the oppression of others here, Treuer also upsets this parallel of suffering by implicating a Jewish man in making a Native woman unsafe. Whether this indicates that experiencing trauma does not entail immunity from perpetrating abuse (also mirrored in Frankie, a gay man, killing Grace, a Native girl), or the more general observation that violence will find a way to persist, *Prudence* vehemently insists on the repetitive brutality of violence.

The Jewish man's appearance also gestures towards the existence of concentration camps in Europe, which in turn, hints at reservations, POW camps, and the Japanese American internment camps of World War 2 which saw citizens removed from their homes, dispossessed and incarcerated in

camps in the Midwest. Treuer's Jewish man links these experiences, drawing the Nazi concentration camps into the United States, while also casting a wider net that includes other colonial enterprises, such as the British camps for Boers during the Boer Wars at the beginning of the twentieth century. As Toland states:

> Hitler's concept of concentration camps, as well as the practicality of genocide owed much, so he claimed, to his studies of English and United States history […] he admired the camps for Boer prisoners in South Africa and for the Indians in the wild west; and often praised to his inner circle the efficiency of America's extermination—by starvation and uneven combat—of the red savages who could not be tamed by captivity. (202)

This not only emphasizes the predominance of violence against others globally, it also calls into question the very character of the United States more generally, its presentation of freedom and democracy revealed as a possible hoax. The U.S. emerges as built on oppression, dispossession and brutality perpetrated by whites. It also undercuts the efforts of the Americans in World War 2, the shock at German racism revealed as hypocritical. Ultimately, Treuer seems to say that violence does not have to be brought onto American soil in the twentieth century, as it already exists, lurking at the heart of United States identity.

In conjunction with the POWs, Treuer also illustrates how war is brought literally into the home by returning US American soldiers. Both Felix, the Ojibwe caretaker of Frankie's parents' property, and Billy return from Europe marked by their respective war experiences, physically carrying their trauma from over-seas into Minnesota, further unsettling the idea of bounded spheres and emphasizing the absurdity of the notion of non-violent

spaces. By allowing both of these returning soldiers to be Native—Frankie does not return—Treuer again inverts the narrative, presenting home-coming not as triumph but as extended catastrophe, the treatment of Native North American veterans—ostensible heroes—a continuation of settler-colonizer abuses.

While mid-twentieth century Native American literature (Silko, Momaday) detailed the traumatic effects of combat on Native soldiers, recent novels and scholarship have moved to highlight Native heroism, focusing on such figures as Francis Pegahmagabow, Tommy Price, and Ira Hayes, as well as immortalizing war experiences in novels and biographies such as Joseph Bruchac's (Abenaki) *Code Talker* (2005) or Bradley James's *Flags of Our Fathers* (2001).[9] As Waubgeshig Rice (Ojibwe) formulates:

> [for] all my life, Francis Pegahmagabow has personified legend. […] Pegahmagabow was, and continues to be, the most prominent figure from our community of Wasauksing First Nation. Growing up in the 1980s, decades after he died, my cousins, friends, peers, and I heard story after story about his triumphs and troubles fighting for Canada in the First World War. (McInnes xi)

While Pegahmagabow, one of the most highly decorated World War 1 soldiers, is correctly remembered and celebrated as showing exceptional competence in the field, his ensuing efforts to ensure political freedom and independence for First Nations peoples are ignored in official eurocanadian tellings. His political career came to an abrupt end in the 1930s when Canadian policy changed; he even lost his position as Chief. His life is reduced to his participation in World War 1, made to fit a narrative that furthers the mythology of integration and heroic war effort, central to how Canada presents itself on a national and international stage.

In *Prudence*, Treuer interrogates this idea of war heroism by returning

Felix and Billy (from World War 1 and World War 2 respectively) to Minnesota. For both the war is a continuation of deprivation and loss, culminating in a staid normalcy, exposing a continuous, normalized violence against Native North Americans of which war is only a heightened form.

Introduced by Emma as the quintessential "stoic Indian", Felix slowly emerges as deeply affected by his involvement in World War 1. He demonstrates both the perpetuity and impossibility of containing violence spatially and temporally, again linking violence perpetuated against Native peoples with the world wars of the twentieth century. Felix goes to war because his options are limited, both in his community and in a wider U.S. American context, exemplifying the dearth of opportunities for Native men at the beginning of the twentieth century and the interconnections between disenfranchisement and joining the military in the U.S. He first hears of the war at a drum dance, where an older man:

> [is speaking] about the war overseas. [The man] walked back and forth and spoke loudly about how he was going on the war path as their grandfathers had done. Felix sat along the edge in the shadows with his wife. He listened and watched. He had no position on the drum. All doors were closed to him. So, after the dance he approached the singer and said he'd go with him. (*Prudence* 34)

This recalls research by Rosier and Holm that suggests that Native men went to war "as their grandfathers had done", thus following a warrior tradition, as well as underlining the dearth of other opportunities. Treuer recounts almost none of Felix's combat experiences, stating only that he had "clubbed three men to death with his rifle, had shot nine and had stabbed five with his bayonet" instead returning him to the United States to find both his wife and child dead by Influenza (*Prudence* 158). The Spanish Flu of 1918 was a

deadly pandemic that spread quickly across war-ravaged Europe and further to northern America and across the globe. Researchers have identified Étaples, a hospital and military base, as being as the center of the disease. While there are other theories that see the virus originating in Kansas or China (and then brought to Europe by American soldiers or Chinese war laborers), it is linked inescapably both to war and Europe, which allows for a comparison with European diseases brought to the Americas during colonization. Diseases such as smallpox, cholera and measles killed an estimated 90% of Native North Americans, effectively working as form of viral genocide. By introducing disease into the story, Treuer connects the theater of European war with the spread of illness: both European warfare and European disease invade and destroy Native lives and communities, thus identifying Felix and his family as victims of euroamerican violence. It also returns to the ultimate unsafety of the home: Felix cannot protect his family (even by potentially finding financial security or improving their social status through serving in the military) as the threat is already always inherent to existence in North America.[10]

Bereft, Felix returns to the drum dance, receiving "heaped blankets […] and pressed tobacco plugs" as acknowledgement for his service (*Prudence* 159). This is further significant because Felix only receives thanks from within his own community, reflecting Holm's findings that Native soldiers went to war not to attain respect from whites but from their own community and underlining that as a Native man it does not matter what he does, the settler-colonizer community will never honor him. While he now sits alongside the "old men who remembered 1862 and 1876 and 1891", accepted into the ranks of nineteenth century soldiers, he is adrift, taking what is awarded to him without comment of joy (159). By explicitly including the years 1862, 1876, and 1891, Treuer emphasizes the perpetual nature of

violence, particularly that of US American violence against Native North Americans. Felix's experience in World War 1 is cued as smoothly following nineteenth century wars, stressing the similarities between colonial violence and global warfare.

As Pankaj Mishra argues, euroamerican history aims to explain "the world wars, together with fascism and communism, simply [as] monstrous aberrations in the universal advance of liberal democracy and freedom" rather than as more pronounced manifestations of a continual violence against others. The dates given correspond to wars between Native tribes (primarily the Lakota Sioux), defending their lands and treaty rights, and the U.S. government, striving for more land and resources, motivated by greed and racism.[11] The link drawn between the elders and Felix's modern experiences carries this first global war into the circle of violence perpetrated by the U.S., stressing both the constancy of war and alluding to the necessity of violence in maintaining the U.S. nation state.

Billy, like Felix, manages to survive his war, returning to Minnesota in 1945. With Billy, Treuer insists on presenting a Native war veteran forgotten by society and left alone with PTSD, further upsetting the narrative of heroism rooted in war. Before returning Billy to Minnesota, Treuer falls into an almost canonic representation of warfare, detailing Billy's deployment as a member of the 2nd Division. Billy "had advanced, one in a division of ants, from Normandy on D+1 across the Aure and into Trévières, up Hill 192 and down into Saint-Lo and from there to Brest" (*Prudence* 195). This description coincides with the division's documented movements. By describing Billy's progress through France in accordance with military records, *Prudence* affords an authenticity to Billy that places him, and other Native soldiers, within history, as solidly located in a global violence. Simultaneously, Treuer

however also again destabilizes historical narrative. By telling Billy's story so close to the recorded facts, he is "consciously [deploying] fictional tropes to attain [a] quality" that is usually the property of historical documentation, thus demonstrating the narrativity of the same (de Groot 111). *Prudence* thus does both: unsettle the authenticity of historical fact and anchor Native soldiers in the history of global warfare.

On his return to Minnesota, Billy's injuries make him unsuitable for manual labor, and he starts working as "a spotter in [a] fire tower" (*Prudence* 185).[12] Billy physically carries the war into the United States through the damages wrought on his body, the body deemed necessary to protect the United States now incapable of returning to its former abilities, ultimately leaving him financially challenged and struggling to provide for his wife and two children.

In addition, Billy constantly "[feels] greasy and low and dragged out, as though at the end of another march through the bocage" (181). A mixed terrain of woodland and pasture, bocage is characteristic of the Normandy landscape where Billy spent most of his war. Bocage played a significant role in World War 2, as it complicated progress against German troops; Billy's memory and comparison of trudging through bocage again manifests France in Minnesota, confusing geographical boundaries that should suggest safety. Billy reflects on his trauma, realizing that "being around […] uniforms, even being around […] other servicemen" puts him "out of sorts"; he thus avoids visiting Veteran Affairs (189). The war has also turned Billy into an avid day-drinker, if not into an outright alcoholic; driving home from town he routinely stops "at a bar in Royalton" as well as various veterans' bars, drinking vodka while he drives (189; 199).[13] While this reads as a familiar narrative of trauma—alcoholism, flashbacks, injury—Treuer here casts it in a specifically Native context, demonstrating the continuity of Billy's treatment by the

whites around him that does not change by his contribution to the "war effort". While he is originally accepted as a playmate for Frankie while they are growing up, both Emma and Jonathan (Frankie's father) remark on the fact that Billy is socially and racially inferior to them and that Frankie needs to realize this reality. Billy is valued in his youth as a hard worker around town, as well as a helper to Felix, but only within limits that do not extend beyond manual labor at a clear remove from the whites. Treuer here seems to suggest that Billy's participation in World War 2 is simply another step in his "being worked" by the settler colonizer while he remains solidly marginalized when deemed not useful.

Thus, Billy, even though he survives, functions as anathema to the returning hero, offering a counternarrative to the newly inscribed heroism of Native soldiers who have, through their service, been elevated and established as successful and valuable parts of US American society—so long as they remain usable within the grand narrative. As Holm states, "for a significant number of Indian veterans the return to the United States was not what they had expected" (*National Survey* 24). The opportunities claimed as rewards for military service almost never materialized, and most veterans "discovered that [service] had only lowered their status within the American mainstream" (24). This contextualization is powerful as it subverts the corollary of heroism and war that continues to dominate much of the literary and historical discourse on Native participation in war and instead opens up a space to acknowledge that the very idea of "noble service" (regardless of who goes to war) serves primarily to reinforce national narratives and ensure the continued existence of the nation state.[14]

Writing war through Native bodies prompts a realization that North America is mired in violence. Emphasizing the continuity of violence against

Native others allows Treuer to connect the beginnings of colonial oppression with westward expansion, to twentieth century global warfare and the treatment of Native people today. It also allows for a broader view of the violence inherent in colonialism and white expansion throughout history and across the globe: the same ideologies of violence that govern the abuse of Native people are at play in international wars and global genocides, the concept of racial superiority and the push for land that motivated colonial rule in the Americas, Asia and Africa is at work in the Jewish holocaust, the exploitation of raw materials in the Congo during the nineteenth century, the annexation of Poland in 1939, and the westward push ordained within manifest destiny. By repeatedly centering the connections and continuities of violence, *Prudence* unsettles the master narrative of the United States as a democratic nation based on the ideas of freedom, equality and opportunity for all, revealing it instead as a perpetrator of racial injustices, oppression and sustained violence against those considered other.

At the same time however, Treuer also creates space for new ways of telling a North American past that while exposing these contradictions also affirms the continuous existence of Native peoples. Prudence, Felix, Billy and Mary all demonstrate an ability to survive, and while they do not thrive, they very much exist within the present of Treuer's story, locating themselves as contemporaneous.

With *Prudence*, Treuer creates a historical novel that moves Native soldiers and lives into focus, while also revealing history as a narrative constructed to tell a particular story. Treuer not only joins Native history with US American history, he also inserts himself—and the stories of Prudence, Billy, Frankie and Felix—into the canon of war fiction: by imagining the life of Prudence Bolton, alluding to McEwan's *Atonement*, and pointing to Hemingway, Treuer situates himself and Native stories at the center of a

global literary tradition.

Notes

[1] Treuer was directly inspired by *Atonement*, "impressed by how Ian McEwan picked apart time and place and wrote a character-driven novel about people caught up in events above themselves" (Grossmann).
[2] Hemingway was quoted as saying that "the first woman [he] ever pleasured was a half-breed Ojibwe woman named Prudence Bolton" (Grossmann).
[3] Hemingway's 1933 short story "Fathers and Sons" also tells of "Trudy" (short for Prudence), the narrator naming the Native North American girl as the beginning of his sexual exploits. The story also features an Indigenous character named Billy who while not explicitly part of Nick and Trudy's intimacies is privy to them. Clearly autobiographical, the short story also relates to violence and war, the father (Nick Adams) driving his son through his hometown after a hunting excursion; Nick Adams is loosely based on Hemingway's own life and a number of short stories follow his life from boy to young man, detailing his work as an ambulance driver during World War 1, as well as his return to the United States after the war. Treuer also includes a character named Ernie who almost catches Billy and Frankie mid-kiss, his name surely a nod to Hemingway, strengthening the connection further. Ernie can be read as an inversion of the Native anecdote character, here Hemingway himself becomes the anecdote to Prudence's story.
[4] It could be argued that Frankie and Billy are punished for their transgression after all – Frankie dying months before the war's end and Billy living a life devoid of happiness.
[5] The correlation of wolves, bears, and "Indians" is telling for the 1940s attitude towards Native people; an attitude that Treuer marks in *Prudence*.
[6] By extension it thus also destabilizes the gendered spheres of war as masculine and the home as feminine, indicating that there is, again, no separation possible here and that the assumed difference is falsely maintained by such dichotomies.
[7] Arguably, for the United States, this closeness is echoed in the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941. As the first true attack by a foreign nation on U.S. American soil, Pearl Harbor made it very clear that the U.S. were implicated in global warfare.
[8] This parallel is not new – it has been gaining traction since the late 1990s, and while it remains controversial – many oppose the comparison, claiming it lessens the Nazi atrocities – it appears in numerous essays, short stories, poetry and novels. See: Sherman Alexie ("The Game Between the Jews and the Indians is Tied Going into the Bottom of the Ninth Inning" (1993), "Fire as Verb and Noun" (1996)), Eric

Gansworth (Haudenosaunee) ("American Heritage" (2006)), Ward Churchill (*A Little Matter of Genocide* (1997)), etc.

[9] Ira Hayes is a particularly interesting case, as he was highly decorated and participated in the much publicized raising of the flag at Iwo Jima. Ironically, Hayes "could not vote when he returned to New Mexico" after service; he died of alcoholism at the age of 32 (Rosier 116). However, the photograph of Hayes and his compatriots is still reproduced and used liberally to "symbolize the success of ethnic integration" in the U.S. (116).

[10] For Native North Americans, the Spanish flu was even more devastating than for whites, the "mortality rate was four times greater than that of white Americans living in large cities" (qtd. in Lyons 31).

[11] 1862 refers to the Dakota War of 1862, an armed conflict between the United States and several bands of the Dakota. After numerous treaty violations and failure to correctly distribute annuity payments by the US government, causing increasing hardship and hunger among the Dakota, the Dakota attacked euroamerican settlers. In the aftermath, 38 Dakota were hung, the largest mass execution in US history. 1876 refers to the Great Sioux War (or Black Hills War), a series of battles between the US and the Lakota Sioux/Northern Cheyenne. Wanting to secure gold, the US wanted to buy the Black Hills. The Cheyenne and Lakota refused. The final Agreement of 1877 officially annexed Sioux land and permanently established reservations. Finally, 1891 refers to the Ghost Dance War, an armed conflict between the Lakota Sioux and the United States which lasted a year, culminating in the massacre at Wounded Knee where the 7th Cavalry murdered approximately 300 unarmed Lakota Sioux, primarily women, children and elders.

[12] In his survey on Vietnam veterans, Holm mentions that almost 50% of Native North American veterans faced unemployment after their service, "despite the fact that many of them achieved relatively high education levels after their military service" (National Survey 21). This marginalization of Native American vets is visible from World War 1 onwards, their systemic discrimination central to Silko's *Ceremony* and Wagamese's *Medicine Walk*. The combination of PTSD and limited work opportunity forced many Native veterans into poverty and substance abuse, their "service" to their country forgotten.

[13] The alcohol that Billy consumes is given to him exclusively by white men; possibly a passing remark on the role that the settler-colonizers played in exposing Native North Americans to alcohol and addiction, and a further nod to the dichotomy of abuse and dependence experienced by settler colonizers and Native populations.

[14] While this essay does not discuss Billy's sexuality, it is relevant: by depicting Billy as traumatized by both war and Frankie's continued refusal to acknowledge their love, Treuer suggests a link between the two rejections. Frankie's inability to acknowledge and denial of their relationship marks the power of a heterosexual

ideology that forms the basis for the values of bravery and heroism that define the masculinity deemed necessary for warfare. Frankie's understanding of his own masculinity as flawed due to his feelings for Billy must be rectified by joining the war effort and establishing a normative masculinity. This version of masculinity is celebrated in war, and Frankie, once he realizes the errors of his behavior, dies, implying that war allows no space for other forms of masculinity. Frankie ultimately cannot survive because there is no space for his version of masculinity in the United States; Billy, however, does survive but settles into a heterosexual relationship that fails to satisfy him.

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Review Essay: Elizabeth Weiss and James W. Springer. *Repatriation and Erasing the Past.* University of Florida Press, 2020. 278 pp. ISBN: 9781683401575.

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In the American settler colonial state, much like any other settler colonial state, Indigenous knowledges and ways of being in the world are under constant assault. Since the very formation of the state that we now call the United States, Indigenous lands, bodies, cultures, and histories have been placed at the whim of settler structures—what can be of use is seized and appropriated, what is not of use is placed at the mercy of settler colonial elimination.

Part of this unfortunate history and contemporaneous disregard of Indigenous ontologies surrounds the fate of Indigenous remains. On the one hand, Indigenous nations have long argued that our deceased relatives and ancestors be treated with respect and dignity, and that they deserve to be left in peace and at rest, rather than be crassly used in the name of Western science, whether it is anthropological science or medical science. The advent of laws such as the Native American Graves and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), along with the development of robust structures of tribal research oversight, presents much promise and hope as to the dignity and ultimate fate of the Indigenous dead. On the other hand, there is a marked reticence among some to respect this viewpoint. Scholars such as Beth Rose Middleton (2019) have written about the ways in which the positive process of Indigenous repatriation has been met with delays and arguments from within academia.

Unfortunately, some of this opposition and reticence has taken on venues of a more prominent stature, such as the recent publication of the book *Repatriation and Erasing the Past* by Elizabeth Weiss and James W. Springer. In this book, the authors take aim at what they describe as the obstruction and unfair constraining of Western anthropology and archaeology by Federal laws and tribal regulations surrounding the treatment of Indigenous remains.

This review essay represents two things to me—a review and an engagement. I consider this a review because I am participating in the longstanding academic tradition of engaging with a new text and its arguments. However, as an Anishinaabe scholar who has engaged heavily with literatures and field-based events surrounding the disturbance and mistreatment of Indigenous remains in the course of my academic

career, the arguments presented in this book also warrant engagement. I feel that to be Indigenous in academia is to be willing to defend our lifeways and our own unique forms of knowledge production in the face of settler colonial logics that dismiss them to the margins of the academy.

This review/reaction will proceed thus: I will briefly outline the narrative arc of the book and the main arguments of the authors. I then will bring their arguments into conversation with a history of settler colonial usage of the Indigenous dead (and living) as well as the gaps in the authors' arguments. While available space precludes a comprehensive engagement with these gaps, I seek to make the argument that the viewpoints that Springer and Weiss present are precisely why there is a continued need for Indigenous repatriation laws and for Indigenous-led protocols surrounding research activities conducted with Indigenous remains and surrounding community safety.

Weiss and Springer begin the book by asserting that Indigenous nations in North America have created a landscape where anthropological study of the Indigenous dead is stymied by moves towards allowing Indigenous nations and their ontologies to take the lead in determining access to Indigenous remains. "This then led to the conclusion that secular and scientific scholarship should be replaced by, or should at least defer to, traditional American Indian animistic religions in terms of who has authority to speak," the authors assert (4), referring to the rise of Native voices in questions of repatriation and research access. The authors continue: "Yet it is our job as scientists to challenge these types of renditions of the past, which include unbelievable talks, such as talking ravens and Native Americans arising from holes in the ground in the Black Hills of North America" (5). The authors then proceed to cover a history of research on "Paleoindians" in the United States, as well as controversies surrounding the repatriation of some of the individuals being studied, such as the "Pelican Rapids Woman," "Browns Valley Man," and perhaps most famously (or infamously), the "Kennewick Man." The authors again argue that the repatriation of these individuals prevented and is preventing further study as well as the potential for new data/information that could come through continued analysis of these remains. The authors refer to preserved Indigenous deceased individuals, or "mummies," as vitally important to study, as they can unlock key facts and insights about the past (39).

One area of research that the authors spend time discussing in detail is DNA-based research, where DNA samples are obtained from Indigenous remains, providing information about ancestry, migration, and the historical geographies of Indigenous peoples. This form of knowledge production is placed in conversation with the concept

of "affiliation" under the terms of NAGPRA, which is concerned with determining to which tribal nation remains and other cultural resources should be repatriated. The authors problematize this aspect of NAGPRA, arguing that in some cases, it may be impossible to determine if there are legitimate connections between ancient Indigenous remains and modern Indigenous nations. The narrative then proceeds to a problematization of Indigenous creation stories, citing the well-travelled (no pun intended) Bering Strait theory of migration, referring back to DNA-based research that suggests that Native Americans are originally from eastern and northern Eurasia.

One chapter of the book is devoted to "correcting fallacies," challenging what the authors refer to as "the repatriationist agenda of Native Americans and precontact Native American lives" (95). Through anthropological and archaeological research, Weiss and Springer argue, aspects of Indigenous history – such as the size of the Indigenous population in the Americas pre-colonization, social structures among Indigenous nations, violence between Indigenous nations, and disease among Indigenous individuals – can be uncovered in what they view as an unbiased way. This runs counter to what they describe as a "political agenda to make precontact America seem like a paradise that was ruined upon the arrival of Europeans" (95).

The latter section of the book is devoted to challenging NAGPRA and tribal oversight of research. In regard to NAGPRA, the authors begin their critique by analyzing the history of the legal relationship between Indigenous nations and the United States, especially surrounding the parameters of Indigenous sovereignty. The authors subtly challenge (via a very convoluted argument) the notion of Native Americans in the United States as a distinct people and make the claim that Federal protections of Indigenous sacred sites and cultural resources represents implicit governmental support and backing of Indigenous religions. This is, they argue, a violation of the First Amendment, specifically the Free Exercise Clause, as it forces non-Indigenous individuals to conform their activities and behavior to suit Indigenous concerns, citing several court cases that ruled in alignment with this view. The authors in multiple places make the argument that the combined unique position of Native American tribes in Federal legal structures, alongside laws such as NAGPRA, create a situation where tribes and their ontologies receive special treatment that goes above and beyond protections afforded to non-Indigenous peoples in the United States.

The authors spend some time discussing other forms of genetic research done with Indigenous nations, such as the infamous study done with the Havasupai nation and the legal actions that took place as a result of Havasupai concerns with the use of their

genetic material. The authors cite this incident as one where important medical/genetic research was lost due to the return of the genetic samples, musing about the impacts that increased tribal control over genetic research has on academic freedom, and describing this movement as "repatriation ideology without reference to the repatriation statues" (161).

The authors spend the last chapters of the book deepening their criticisms of NAGPRA, questioning the validity and objectivity of tribal oral histories and traditions in cases of repatriation and research access, and lamenting what they describe as the "the end of scientific freedom" via repatriation (194). In a section of one of the final chapters, they speak about the increasing rights of tribes to restrict research that is carried out on their territories, as well as the dissemination of products from research that has been done, describing it as "publication censorship" (206-10). They conclude by appealing to the objectivity of science, asserting that the freedom to carry out research takes precedence over sensitivities and religious-based objections. "…[T]he search for objective knowledge without interference from race, religion or politics encourages critical thinking, which is a skill needed to address all problems. Objective knowledge is universal, not 'European', as repatriationists try to argue, and thus it benefits all humans," the authors conclude (219).

I now turn to a quote from Devon Mihesuah (an Indigenous academic who is the subject of much criticism in Weiss and Springer's book) from her edited volume *Natives and Academics* (1998): "…works of American Indian history and culture should not give only one perspective; the analyses must include Indians' versions of events […] Where are the Indian voices? Where are Indian views of history?" (1). This passage, along with the book as a whole, has been deeply important to me as an Indigenous scholar, as it speaks to the ways in which Indigenous histories without Indigenous perspectives is a one-sided narrative that can misrepresent and obscure Indigenous viewpoints.

I want to try to meet Weiss and Springer where I see them coming from, which appears to be the idea that it is important to try to understand all aspects of a given history. I feel that it is worth reiterating, first of all, that there is simply not enough space to outline the various problematic views that they espouse in this book. For example, there is much that could be said about the invoking of the Beringia land bridge theory as a questioning of the geographic origins of Indigenous peoples, a theory that, while a valid avenue of scientific inquiry, is also a common talking point among anti-Indigenous circles to question Indigenous land tenure. Additionally, I feel there is a fundamental misunderstanding about tribal sovereignty and the nation-to-nation

relationship between Native tribes and the United States: Native nations are not racial groups; we are political entities, our sovereignty extending before the formation of the United States, or even the colonization of the Americas, for that matter. The multiple invocations of discovering proof of inter- and intra-tribal violence among Indigenous nations by the authors is also problematic, as it trends close to broader anti-Indigenous apologetics about settler colonial genocide. However, I feel that the historical narrative they provide surrounding tribal support for repatriation and research oversight is perhaps the most problematic of all. Therefore, it is prudent to briefly outline the motivations behind why Indigenous nations may be mistrustful of research and why they may be protective over things such as remains or even our own genetic material.

I will start with a very brief outline of a few key, yet ghastly, moments of settler colonial usage of the Indigenous dead in various contexts. One noted nineteenth-century physician, Samuel Morton, for example, amassed a large collection of skulls, many of which belonged to Indigenous peoples, and used their measurements to make vaguely anthropological and extremely racist judgements about their intellectual capacity, compiling it in his 1839 book *Crania Americana*: "The skull is small, wide between the parietal protuberances, prominent at the vertex, and flat on the occiput. In their mental character, the Americans are averse to cultivation, and slow in acquiring knowledge; restful, revengeful, and fond of war, and wholly destitute of maritime character," one excerpt reads, regarding the measurements an Indigenous North American skull (Morton 6).

In another example of settler usage of the Indigenous dead, the remains of one of the 38 Dakota hanged at the conclusion of the U.S.-Dakota War was taken by William Worrall Mayo and used to teach his sons anatomy—those sons would go on to help Mayo found the modern Mayo Clinic—it would take nearly 140 years for the remains of the Dakota individual to be returned to his community, something that has been covered in several pieces of literature, including one written by myself (2018).

The story of Ishi is yet another story of the Indigenous dead being made to be of use to the settler colonial state and settler colonial structures against Indigenous consent. A story that has been covered in anthropological literature by scholars such as Nancy Rockafellar (n.pag.) and Orin Starn (2004), Ishi was an Indigenous man in California who was "found" by a group of anthropologists at the University of California. They took Ishi in and turned him into a living museum exhibit; after he died, they autopsied his body against his wishes. Similar to the Dakota man and the Mayo Clinic, it wasn't until

the 1990s and the advent of NAGPRA that many of Ishi's organs were repatriated to tribal nations in California to be buried.

This legacy of harm to Indigenous communities is not limited to the Indigenous dead. Anishinaabe scholar David Beaulieu (1984) wrote about the ways in which supposed anthropological knowledge was used by academics to determine the so-called "blood quantum" of White Earth tribal members in Northern Minnesota—their level of "blood quantum" would determine whether or not they were entitled to allotments of land in the wake of the Dawes Act of 1887 and related legislation. In the case of the Havasupai nation, which Weiss and Springer cite as an example of researchers being constrained by a "repatriationist agenda," a wide range of non-Indigenous and Indigenous scholars such as Jenny Reardon and Kim TallBear (2012), Joan LaFrance and Cheryl Crazy Bull (2013), and Deana Around Him, et al. (2019) paint a different picture. They all argue that the blood samples that were taken from the Havasupai nation were being used in ways that the Havasupai did not consent to and were even being shared with individuals outside of the research project and even outside of Arizona State University, the home institution for the project.

What I am trying to convey here is that there is a much broader history of disrespect and harm done to Indigenous individuals and Indigenous communities in the name of academia, and in the name of what Weiss and Springer would consider to be "objective" knowledge production, a history that is barely mentioned in their book. They approach Indigenous remains as objects to be studied and things that have value as long as they are being used for scientific knowledge production. There is no conversation about the deep trauma and harm that can be caused by remains being exhumed, let alone being kept from repatriation, or extracting material and data out of communities without their full consent or knowledge. In the cases where this harm *is* mentioned in the book, such as the Havasupai controversy and lawsuit, it is simply cited as an example of researchers being stymied in their quest for knowledge by unreasonable and difficult Indigenous nations. As someone who works closely with Indigenous nations and has been subject to tribal processes of research oversight, I argue that the aforementioned legacy of disrespect and harm has created a landscape where Indigenous nations must be vigilant about the safety of community members, both living and deceased. They understand quite well that science is not apolitical, and in fact, questions of power and politics can interface with science in ways that can be deeply harmful to them in all parts of the lifecycle. Failing to be vigilant allows for situations where the stories being told about us as Indigenous peoples do not take an accurate assessment of our histories, our cultures, and our viewpoints. It allows these

stories about us, living and dead, to be told by others, in what serves as a top-down and extractive form of research and knowledge production that is corrosive to Indigenous communities and leads to situations where, to paraphrase Nerida Blair (2015), Indigenous communities are being "researched to death," quite literally (463). Research oversight is not censorship; it is being in good relation with the people whom researchers profess to want to ostensibly help and serve.

I think that one major implication of this book may be quite the opposite of what Weiss and Springer likely intend—on the back cover, the book promotes itself as useful for people who wish to understand both sides of the debate surrounding repatriation. However, I feel that without any meaningful attempts to engage in good faith with Indigenous viewpoints related to repatriation, it cannot deliver what it promises. For example, a cursory search of the scholars listed in the acknowledgements failed to turn up any Indigenous voices. Any engagement with Indigenous oral histories or epistemologies in the text is made with barely concealed derision, raising the specter of the trope that Indigenous peoples are unsophisticated and that our viewpoints are incompatible with "modern science." What does that mean about the multitudes of Indigenous geneticists, anthropologists, and archaeologists, some of who I am proud to call my colleagues and friends, who have done successful work in these areas while being respectful of tribal beliefs and tribal ethics? If anything, their stories demonstrate that Indigenous nations are not inherently anti-science, but instead aspire to a form of science and knowledge production that is objective, yet ethical and empathetic to peoples who have been affected by histories of structural inequality. Therefore, I argue Weiss and Springer do succeed after all in a way—they are (although likely unintentionally) providing an opening for us in academia to be able to further discuss why repatriation is necessary and what it means for Indigenous nations to have a voice in the stories that are told about them. A failure to have these conversations in an open and engaged way will mean we truly are "erasing the past."

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Review Essay: Alicia Elliott. *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground*. Anchor Canada, 2020. 223 pp. ISBN: 9780385692403

https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/588523/a-mind-spread-out-on-the-ground-by-alicia-elliott/9780385692403

"Wake'nikonhra'kwenhtará:'on" is the Kanien'kéha (Mohawk language) phrase that roughly translates to "his mind fell to the ground […]. Literally stretched or sprawled out on the ground. It's all over" (9). Wake'nikonhra'kwenhtará:'on is used to capture and express depression, which is one of the many threads that run through Alicia Elliott's memoir, *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground*. The richness of Kanien'kéha is illustrated in another translation of Wake'nikonhrèn:ton. It also means "the mind is suspended" (9), which is in direct contrast of having a clear head and being in a state of good-mindedness or Kan'nikonhrí:io (Maracle). Finally, the English translation of Elliott's memoir calls attention to the importance of the mind. Of critical and cultural importance to the Haudenosaunee is their Thanksgiving Address, which reiterates minds coming together as one in a prayer of gratitude, humility, recognition, and relationality to others, including animals, land, waters, and plant-based kin. The bringing together of clear, unsuspended minds is an act of daily healing and restoration, which is an overall aim of Elliott's honest and illuminating stories.

The memoir as a genre has increasingly gained momentum by Indigenous literary artists but is not new as a form of storytelling. Elliott's *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* profoundly resonated with some of my personal, familial, and professional experiences, even though we are from distinct Indigenous Nations, communities, and generations. Elliott's gifts of literary style and form – combined with her humour, wit, and compassionate, poetic disclosures from her life – make for a refreshing and empowering narrative. Compiled from fourteen critically reflective autobiographical essays, *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* is more than just an intimate sharing of lived experiences. Elliott unflinchingly uncovers why these lived experiences shape so many Indigenous lives in this contemporary Canadian state. While each individual story could be read in isolation, the book's essays are situated semi-chronologically to be read in order.

"A Mind Spread Out on the Ground" is also the title of the first short story which introduces and contextualizes depression: Elliott's, her mother's, and historically among her community. Elliott discloses that she was sixteen when she wrote her first suicide note. By this time in her life, Elliott had witnessed and endured her mother's life-long struggle with depression, which she addresses in the chapter "Crude Collages of My Mother." Elliott's depression and suicidal tendencies were not in isolation. She explains that "[t]hough suicide was quite rare for Onkwehon:we pre-contact, after contact and the subsequent effects of colonialism it has ballooned so much that, as of 2013, suicide and self-inflicted injuries are the leading cause of death for Native people under the age of forty-four" (8). This segues into an apt description of Canada as an abusive father, which foreshadows the final story in the book, "Extraction Mentalities." This first essay closes with an explanation of Wake'nikonhra'kwenhtará:'on and Elliott poetically illustrates how depression is akin to colonialism, as both have robbed her of language, but both can be reversed through ceremony.

The second essay, "Half-Breed: A Racial Biography in Five Parts" is an acute introspective critique on how nature and nurture impacted Elliott's life story. The key points of each of the five parts include: 1) Alcoholism. The scent of alcoholic breath was so redolent of her homelife that she considered it to be genetic (14); 2) Shame for being Indigenous. In grade two, Elliott realized her white skin could be weaponized against Indigeneity and she pretended not to be Native because of her New York classmates' outright disdain for Indigenous peoples; 3) Catholicism vs. Long House teachings. Elliott's parents were ideological and cultural polar opposites, which pitted them against each other when they moved to Six Nations. Her mother defended and minimized the Catholic Church's treatment of Indigenous children, while her father quietly embraced Haudenosaunee life ways; 4) Bullying. In grade eleven, Elliott became the target of lateral violence and bullying, due to her white skin: "That's when it became clear: whiteness meant different things in different contexts. On the rez, Carrie and I could share skin colours and still be perceived entirely different as Native people" (18); 5) Teen pregnancy, internalized racism, and self-hatred. At eighteen, Elliott recalls the day she went into labour. In a shocking but powerful scene, Elliot reflects on how "internalized racism had warped" (20) her to the point of relief that her newborn was pink and "didn't look like my father, my aunts, my uncle, my grandmother" (20). Elliott's father had educated her on the impacts of Indian Act legislation, but as a teen mother, she had not fully embraced what it meant to bear the responsibilities of a Haudenosaunee matriarch until she became a mother. The turmoil

of being both white and Tuscarora manifested into internalized self-hatred. Fortunately, this book is testament to Elliott's ongoing growth and healing: "This is how I can decolonize my mind: by refusing the colonial narratives that try to keep me alienated from my own community. I can raise my kid to love being Haudenosaunee in a way my parents couldn't, in a way my grandparents couldn't. This is my responsibility as a Haudenosaunee woman" (22).

The third essay, "On Seeing and Being Seen" is about Elliott's introduction to Indigenous writers. She reveals the overwhelming love and weight of literary erasure being lifted when she read *Islands of Decolonial Love* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (23). Elliott shares that she had never been encouraged to hone her talents as a promising writer but was instead dismissed as one. She was indeed told she could publish, not because of her writing but because she is Indigenous. Coupled with her experiences with systemic racism and sexism, Elliott had not been admitted into any MFA programs and did not write for years. Elliott's exposure to reading an Indigenous woman author prompts discussion of the lack of Indigenous presence in publishing. She discusses E. Pauline Johnson (27), contextualizes the historic and political landscape Johnson wrote in, and clearly links the trajectory of literary stereotypes of Indigenous women with a strong critique. She returns to love, and the love she felt as she read Simpson's book, asking non-Indigenous authors, "If you can't write about us with a love for who we are as a people, what we've survived, what we've accomplished despite all attempts to keep us from doing so [...,] why are you writing about us at all?" (30)

"Weight" adopts a reflective, second-person voice as Elliott writes to herself. We learn about the weight of parenthood as Elliott experienced it. She reflects on her high school love with Mike and subsequent teen pregnancy, which leads to an account of having to admit her mother's bipolar disorder during an early pregnancy exam. This traumatic experience jolts Elliott as she realizes "genes could be toxic" (37), which unleashes a torrent of memories on the weight of being parented by a stay-at-home mom who battled depression. Elliott's mother made some difficult decisions for two of her seven children: "one of them chose to live with your grandmother after a custody battle, and another was disabled, with very little control over her muscles, so your mother put her in a home where they could provide round the clock care" (40). Elliott reflects on juggling being a university student and mother, and her guilt of having to leave her child with Mike's mother during the week.

The short essay "The Same Space" is about Indigenous diaspora on Turtle Island, in urban centers and on Indigenous homelands. Elliott captures the reality of generations of Indigenous people who, for a multitude of reasons, have had to leave their home communities for places that have deep Indigenous roots which are usually not well-known. Elliott explains the history of Tkaronto and the Dish With One Spoon treaty that

> was supposed to be treated as one collective dish each nation had to share, hunting an equal but sustainable amount of game. All would eat from that dish together, using a beavertail spoon instead of a knife to ensure there was no accidental bloodshed—which might lead to intentional bloodshed. In this way, it was a space of mutual peace and prosperity. (49)

In perhaps the most powerful and thought-provoking essay "Dark Matters," Elliott creates a dialectic between western scientific discourse about cosmological dark matter and the dark matters of Indigenous history and experiences. In juxtaposed prose, Elliott's brief sections about scientific laws on dark matter alternate with lengthy and articulate reflections about Colten Boushie's murder, racism, and the dark injustice against Indigenous Peoples that continues to pervade Canadian courtrooms. The essay opens with a comparison and critique of the "discovery" of dark matter, which is akin to saying Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island were discovered. Elliott then pivots in the next paragraph to talk about the moment she learned about the Stanley acquittal (54), which resonates with many as we braced for the monumental verdict. I would liken this to the moment the world witnessed the collapse of the Twin Towers on 9/11. The verdict is etched in our collective Indigenous memories, and we know exactly where we were and with whom. Elliot and her family lived in British Columbia during her one-year fellowship and were touring the province when the verdict was announced, prompting them to cancel their tourist plans. Alongside many, they participated in the march in support of Colten Boushie's family (65); such marches were immediately organized because of the overwhelming collective grief over the evidence that Indigenous people and lives do not matter. Elliott succinctly sums it up as "some things don't matter when a white man does them" (55). While framed around the murder of Boushie, this essay is also an apt discussion on poverty, racism and its origins, inequities, and legislation that does not protect Indigenous people. Drawing together her two themes, Elliott ends the chapter with the following: "Racism, for many people, seems to occupy space in

very much the same way as dark matter: it forms the skeleton of our world, yet remains ultimately invisible, undetectable. This is convenient. If nothing is racism, then nothing needs to be done to address it" (70).

"Scratch" is about Elliott's ten-year plus relationship with head lice, with whom she related: "As a poor, mixed-race kid, I was treated like a parasite, too" (72). Her white grandmother (her mother's mom) was disgusted by the lice and did not acknowledge her family's circumstances: they did not have running water, were impoverished, and had insignificant supports. With Elliott's mother's illnesses that spanned schizophrenia, postpartum depression, and manic depression, treating head lice was not a high priority in their home. Elliott's mother was frequently hospitalized, leaving her father to solo parent. Elliott left home at eighteen and lived in a place with running water, which is when she finally got rid of her head lice.

In an essay that connects Elliott's early dependency on food for happiness with poverty's constraints, "34 Grams Per Dose" is an honest analysis of decolonizing diets. The chapter's title alludes to Chips Ahoy! Triple Chocolate Chunk cookies, which are "170 calories per 34 grams" (91). To decolonize centuries of colonialism and capitalism is to confront the near genocide of Indigenous and racialized peoples through governmental policies, where if "racialized people aren't considered human, [then] it's okay for them to have unhealthy bodies. It's okay if they have unhealthy minds (98). Elliott recognizes pre-colonial Indigenous diets are the way forward, but this path is not accessible to all, enabling the continuation of obesity, disease, and death. Elliott remembers how, as a child she did not eat lunch for a year and a half because it was not part of the Canadian school lunch program. Her father had to prioritize their budget to feed only the younger children, as he constantly feared that social workers would apprehend his children. This memory launches a discussion on historical Indian Residential Schools, malnutrition, and starvation policies as well as the ongoing fostering of Indigenous children in violent homes, "as if white abuse could ever be better than Indigenous love" (105). The essay ends with a return to acknowledging the medicine and relationality of Indigenous foods: "Corn, beans and squash were once all my people really needed. They were so essential to our everyday lives that we refer to them as our sisters. [...gifting seeds] was an act of absolute, undiminished intergenerational love" (116).

Elliott's "Boundaries like Bruises" is a love letter of sorts, and an ode to her white husband and their decolonial, antiracist partnership. While reflecting on her parent's dysfunctional love, she embraces those experiences as having taught her to recognize her own strength in setting up boundaries by breaking their cycles. Elliott's love and respect for her husband is returned and reminds her of the teachings of the Two Row Wampum: "One row represents the ship the settlers are steering; the other represents the canoe the Haudenosaunee are steering. Each vessel holds those peoples' culture, language, history and values" (120).

In the essay "On Forbidden Rooms and Intentional Forgetting," Elliot uses the style of a fairy tale to talk about sexual assault. As a survivor, she advocates for her own agency and decision making, which is what her rapist took from her.

A devout Catholic, Elliott's mother now lives in an adult care home in Florida and is the focus of "Crude Collages of My Mother." Elliott's descriptive poetics about her mother are insightful, "she radiated outward. In my mind she is forever tinged by orange light dash a sunset, perhaps, or an open flame" (135). Elliott's mother felt isolated on Six Nations, which manifested into mania that smothered their homelife as depression and chaos. Elliott distinguishes her depression from her mom's. While anticipating a happy ending for this chapter, there was none. It is a solemn and honest recollection of "crude collages," and she has not seen her mom in five years.

"Not Your Noble Savage" adopts a humorous tone to address white expectations of Indigeneity in writing by Indigenous authors. Elliott also asserts a sharp critique of Indigenous literary erasure and white ignorance of Indigenous sovereignty by beginning with a story. She admits she has never learned to dance at a powwow, a place to enact one's Indigeneity and where we are palatable to non-Indigenous spectators and onlookers as "genuine artifacts." In 2006, these same gawkers were incensed by Indigenous land protectors in Caledonia, whom "we could entertain […] every summer and pose in photos with their children, sure, but attempting to assert sovereignty over our lands elicited moral outrage on par with drowning kittens" (152). The common thread in this essay is a recognition that there is a lone, fetishized Indigenous image in the collective consciousness that further expects Indigenous literary arts to recycle that very same image and storyline. When "Noble Savage" checkboxes are not met, Elliott says, "colonial ownership over Indigenous people within the literary community" (153) constitutes literary colonialism. While Indigenous

authors have a centuries-long presence, critics and non-Indigenous literary reviewers have outright ignored, forgotten about, and dismissed their contributions. Elliott zooms in on *Surfacing* (1972), a survey by Margaret Atwood of Canadian Literature. Atwood completely disregarded Indigenous writers because, ostensibly, she could not find any, yet she did write "a chapter that examined non-Native writers' fictive portrayals of Indigenous peoples" (154). Atwood's faux pas resulted in a flippant response: "Why did I overlook Pauline Johnson? Perhaps because, being half-white, she somehow didn't rate as the real thing, even among Natives, although she is undergoing a reclamation today" (qtd. in Elliot, 154). Elliot critiques this excuse and counters it with evidence of sexism in literature. She further educates her readers about Indian Act policies and forces us to confront our own biases on the content of Indigenous stories by Indigenous authors. In closing, Elliott returns to the story and imagery of powwows, joking that esteemed author Eden Robinson should stifle her creative energies to feed the colonial imaginary and policing of Indigenous identities and labels. In all seriousness, proclaims Elliott, she and hundreds of Indigenous authors are no one's Noble Savage.

Elliott's concern for and critique of fetishized images continues in the essay "Sontag, in Snapshots: Reflecting on 'In Plato's Cave' in 2018," which addresses still photographic images of Indigenous people since the advent of the camera. Elliott shares her insecurities of being photographed, punctuated by Indigenous photographic experiences as both subjects and as photographers illuminating a decolonial gaze. Her research on early European male photographers explores their complicity in Indigenous erasure by capturing vanishing Indians. Elliott theorizes about selfies (179) and critiques imperial beauty standards (181). Returning to the style of the memoir, Elliott states that "photographs are family-building exercises" (183) and recalls that her parents denied her memories by withholding an image of a baby named Angelica, Elliott's half-sister (184). This painful discovery prompts her to acknowledge the power of photographic images, which simultaneously acknowledges Sontag's assessment of photography as predatory (189). Elliott ends by positing, "Maybe the reason everything exists to end in a photograph is because this world isn't equipped to offer something more meaningful: for everything to end in respect, acceptance, and acknowledgement" (194).

The memoir ends with a final participatory essay, "Extraction Mentalities." Elliott explicitly shares memories that are violent, visceral, and triggering. She follows up by

providing prompts and asks questions for the reader to fill in blank spaces or not, as "even blank spaces speak volumes" (195). We learn, finally, that her father was very abusive to her sister. In a gentle, yet thoroughly introspective and firm tone, Elliott challenges accepted misinformation about abusers. What is clear is that Elliott endured abuse and trauma and she loves her father. This was the most poignant chapter, as I related to her experiences. Elliott has fond memories of her father as loving and as someone who supported her goals and aspirations of writing, which explains the essay's title (201). Going beyond sharing these experiences, Elliott illuminates (but does not excuse) that her father was a survivor of his father, and how their behaviour were tactics to survive colonialism (203). Her ability to return to these moments as a Haudenosaunee woman and mother create a heartbreaking and empowering conclusion to the book. As part of her healing journey, I interpret this chapter as a monologue for readers to begin their own healing journeys. Just as her own memory extracted bad behaviours and events, her prompts and questions encourage readers to recall similar events and behaviours that they can navigate in a space that is at once beautifully candid and anonymously safe. Elliott concludes "Extraction Mentalities" by carefully examining extraction and dehumanization, which are products of colonialism. Indigenous traditional resource extraction, she says, is "a cornerstone of capitalism, colonialism, and settler colonialism" (213). She then poses the question if readers have ever felt dehumanized. Here Elliott strongly connects the justification of colonialism with the dehumanisation of Indigenous peoples and compares this to the demonization of her father as an abusive man who is surviving colonialism (217).

Elliott has offered a sophisticated collection of memories and experiences, traumatic and joyful. Her writing reflects literary caring and pathos that affords personal growth and healing, communal rejuvenation, and generational wisdom. Our minds may be suspended and "spread out on the ground" but, as she demonstrates, minds are resilient. Coming to peace and having a Good Mind are in reach.

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Billy-Ray Belcourt, from the Driftpile Cree Nation, dedicates his first book of nonfiction to "those for whom utopia is a rallying call," noting that the book itself is an ode "to the world-to-come" (3). In the fourteen short essays that make up *A History of My Brief Body*, Belcourt blends personal history, theory, and discussions of craft in a creative nonfiction form that serves as resistance to "the glass walls of Canadian habit that entrap us all in compressed forms of subjectivity" (9). Creativity, poetry, writing itself are tools with which we might enter that world-to-come, and love is what will get us there. By describing and reaching toward the "queer NDN joy" (54) that he claims over and over in spite of the violence and sorrow of daily life, Belcourt takes readers to a place of openness, vulnerability, and intimacy.

The essays in this collection take different forms: letters, lists, and longer expositions. "An NDN Boyhood" shares family history; "Gay: 8 Scenes" traces Belcourt's life from a closeted teen to falling in love for the first time to experiences on and after dating apps; "Fragments from a Half-Existence" offers pieces of novels that Belcourt has tried to write; "Robert" takes readers through a year of moments and messages. Read individually or together, these essays can be taught in any creative writing classroom to encourage experimentation and explore the threads of argumentation.

In "An Alphabet of Longing," Belcourt writes: "My field of study is NDN freedom. My theoretical stance is a desire for NDN freedom. My thesis statement: Joy is an at once minimalist and momentous facet of NDN life that widens the spaces of living thinned by structures of unfreedom" (88). Joy—a "durational performance of emotion" (8), the art of breathing within oppressive and asphyxiating conditions—is that "ecology of feeling" (8) scattered throughout this short book: a hug between a father and son, "[b]uzzing with glee" (89) on a second date, finding "a book that was more than a book" (113), one that speaks to beingness and its inherent beauty. Yet as Belcourt notes, creative writing "traffics in ugly" (41)—and those moments that threaten the possibility of utopia are here too: communicating needs to an unsympathetic doctor after a nonconsensual experience, being followed by a straight white couple after

being spotted holding hands with a boyfriend, the heartbreak of falling in and out of love.

These moments are layered with reflections on what it means to be both queer and NDN, to live in a settler state that "has yet to recoil at its reflection in the rear-view mirror" (38). In the title essay, Belcourt writes that "the past starts into my brief body like a knife" (26). Histories of oppression thrive in the present in the form of police and mass shooters who live as if they were guns, white men who either fetishize NDNs or claim color-blindness, the disposability and unlivability of life. To all those who live in a world they did not want, Belcourt says, "Please keep loving" (111).

Love is both a path forward to utopia and an act to challenge the daily lived oppression of colonialism. "Join me in the ruins of the museum of political depression!" (9) Belcourt invites; amidst these ruins of "the world-at-large" (7), we reach the world-to-come through practices of love, joy, "radical empathy" (105), and poetry. Belcourt's writing is a practice of humanity, a counter to "the world of [the] courtroom" (123), a seeking of beauty in spite of all that is not beautiful. Belcourt writes, "we need to write against the unwritability of utopia" (9). By experiencing and telling these stories of living and loving, he opens possibilities for a future where "Canadian cruelty" (5) is no match for this "metaphysics of joy" (88).

Belcourt's writing is at times conversational, telling stories of meeting men on Grindr or questioning the blurry area between wanting to put words on a page and wanting to fall in love. At other times, Belcourt adds to critical conversations about capitalism, coloniality, and the politics of care. "'I'm an emotional person, so I read theory day in and day out'" (82), he tells an audience of conference attendees. Quoting from Judith Butler, Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes, and others, Belcourt moves fluidly between theory, poetry, and story. Sentences are clear, making it possible to move through this small book quickly, but paragraph breaks, blank spaces on the page, and enumerations urge the reader to pause, to sit with quotes by Maggie Nelson and Ocean Vuong, or to linger with Belcourt's imagery: "a shoreline the water of memory drags its palm across" (21), "a question mark with fur" (41), "a glistening tragedy" (73), "a maw full of smoke" (114).

In the preface to *A History of My Brief Body*, "A Letter to Nôhkom," Belcourt honors his grandmother and her unconditional love for him. Though these were the first pages

of the book I read, they are the ones that stayed with me the longest, this letter to a caretaker who was the core of the family, someone who derived joy from those daily moments of giving love. Belcourt writes, "back then your love incubated a refuge, one I can always return to if need be" (5), and it is his kokum's "philosophy of love, which is also a theory of freedom" (6) that Belcourt inherits and through which he learns and practices joy, through which he can "love at the speed of utopia" (5). This book urges us to love, to always insist upon love.

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Margaret Noodin. *Gijigijigaaneshiinh Gikendaan / What the Chickadee Knows.* Wayne State University Press, 2020. 96 pp. ISBN: 9780814347508.

https://www.wsupress.wayne.edu/books/detail/what-chickadee-knows

As a student in Margaret Noodin's Ojibwe language class a few years ago, my imagination was captured by one word in particular: "aanikoobijigan." Often glossed as "relative" or "ancestor," Professor Noodin explained that aanikoobjigan actually refers to anyone more than two generations removed from the speaker—either a great-great-grandparent or a great-great grandchild. We learned that the stem of the word, "aanikaw-," indicates the act of binding or joining things together. For example, aanikoogwaade refers to something sewn together and aanikoobidoon means to extend through the act of tying. Therefore "aanikoobjiganag," as Prof. Noodin explained, describes those who bind us to the present—the relations who tie us to both our past and our future.

In the title poem of Noodin's latest collection, *What the Chickadee Knows*, such ties are of central concern. She writes, "Aanikoobjiganag, aanikoobidoowaad / wiingashk wiindamawiyangidwa / gashkibijigeg gegashk-akiing" ["The ancestors tied and extended it / the sweetgrass, telling us / make bundles, the world is not yet ripe"] (4-5). By watching Gijigijigaaneshiinh, the Chickadee, we might learn how to make such connections ourselves and ultimately realize that doing so is, in Noodin's words, "manidookeyaang manidoowiyaang" ["it's a ceremony, a way to be alive"] (4-5). This poem, like every other in the collection, was written in Ojibwemowin first, before being translated by Noodin into English. The resulting facing page translations offer a means of glimpsing the complexities and beauty of Ojibwemowin even for those, like me, whose capacity in the language is limited. By including English versions of the poems for non-speakers of Ojibwemowin, Noodin enacts another word that shares the "aanikaw-" stem. As she explains in a recent essay: "The verb 'translate' in Ojibwe is 'aanikanootan' which begins with the same stem as 'aanikoobidoon,' to be connected and 'aanikoobijigan,' the word for ancestor" (2021, 1). Over the course of this short collection, Noodin shows us the way in which such relations—whether it be to loved ones, to the world around us, or to those who will one day call us ancestors—are embedded in the very structure of Ojibwemowin.

What the Chickadee Knows is comprised of two sections, "E-Maaminonendamang" ["What We Notice"] and "Gaa-Ezhiwebag" ["History"], which operate on distinctly

different scales. The short, evocative lyrics of "E-Maaminonendamang" focus on relationships at the most intimate level and how they are sustained through acts of careful observation and reflection. In the poem "Agoozimakakiig Idiwag" ["What the Peepers Say"], for instance, interpersonal connection is imagined as a call-and-response, like the chorus of spring frogs who "crawl into the swamp where / my calling becomes your calling" (9). In the Ojibwemowin original, the intimacy of observation is even more pronounced: "mii noopimidoodeyang maskiigong / biibaagiyan ani biibaagiyaan" (8). The agglutinative verb "noopimidoodeyang" implies not just movement, but the particular "forest-crawling" of the spring Peepers, as they leave their hibernation under fallen trees to spawn in newly thawed marshes. As the poem reminds us, "beshoganawaabmigag aawiyang" ["We are the details"]— that is, our collective existence is made up of innumerable beings whom we might closely watch and who, in turn, watch us (8-9). Throughout the section, Noodin dedicates many of the poems to Anishinaabe writers and artists, such as Jim Northrup, Linda LaGarde Grover, and Daphne Odjig, presenting her own poetry as a part of the larger process of call-and-response—the close observation and patient teaching of generations of aanikoobijiganag, by which Anishinaabe language and culture have been sustained.

In the next section, "Gaa-Ezhiwebag" ["History"], the scope of Noodin's poems radically expands, in both time and space, to encompass relations on a global (even cosmic) scale. Despite taking on such weighty topics as the protests at Standing Rock and the rise of authoritarianism in American politics, the poems retain the language of intimacy. For example, in "Niizhosagoons gemaa Nisosagoons Daso-biboonagadoon" ["Two or Three Thousand Years"], the passage of millennia is treated with the same brief, off-handed familiarity one would use to describe a day at work:

> Ishkwaa gaa-ningaabikide
> mikwaamiikaag ajina mii dash
> daashkikwading, bagonesigwaag
> ziibiins ani ziibi ziibiskaaj
> ziibing ziigwanindagwag
>
> [After the minerals melted
> ice reigned for a while and then
> cracks and holes appeared
> streams became a river casually
> pouring seasons onto the land.] (46)

With the practiced ear of a language teacher, Noodin uses the repetition of sound to help us to see the underlying etymological connections in Ojibwemowin between the particular and the abstract. The line "ziibins ani ziibi ziibiskaaj," for instance, describes the transformation of a stream ("ziibins") into a river ("ziibi") through an adverb that metaphorizes a leisurely activity as the slow flow of a river ("ziibiskaaj"). Similarly, the poems of "Gaa-Ezhiwebag" ask us to see a similar kind of repetition, for better or worse, as the basis of history itself—from the massacre of the Cheyenne at Sand Creek in 1864 to the election of Donald Trump in 2016. It is only by close observation of such repetitions, Noodin's poems seem to suggest, that we might find a way of moving forward. As Noodin writes in the haunting poem "Ishkwaa Biinjwebinige" ["After the Vote"], "Ganabaj gimookawaadamin / ezhi-anjidimaajimowaad / mii miinwaa gaa-mooka'amang / da-bagidenindamang" ["Maybe we cry / as the stories change / and what we uncover / needs a proper burial"] (68-69).

In the interests of transparency, I should note that I was asked by the editors at Wayne State University Press to blurb *What the Chicakdee Knows* in March of 2020. Regarding the collection then, I wrote (somewhat blithely) that the poems were a celebration of "the vast web of relations that sustains us all." Returning to it now, after nearly a year of isolation, fear, and uncertainty brought on by the Covid-19 epidemic, these poems have taken on a poignancy greater than I could have possibly imagined. Every connection we manage to forge, these poems remind us, also creates the potential for loss. Indeed, reading a poem like "Izhise" ("Time Flight"), it can be hard to remember that it *wasn't* written to describe the collective disorientation and grief wrought by the current pandemic:

> Ogii-inendaan wanising giizhig dibikong
> azhigwa waabandang aazhogan aawang
> bi-aazhogeyang, ni-aazhogeyang
> mii agwaashimiyangidwa biidaabang
> megwaa waagoshag aazhikwewaad.
>
> Mii goshkozi nandawaabamaad
> gaa-gikenimaad jibwaa
> aanjised, aanjisenid
> debibidood gaagiigido-biiwaabikoons
> inaakonang waa-ezhiwebag noongom.
>
> Waa-wenda-ishkwaase

ge-gezika-nisidotamang
bangibiisaag, animibiisaag
gaye aabitaa-dibikag
dibishkoo naawakwe-giizhigag.

[She used to think of night as a lost day
now she sees it is a bridge
for us to cross and recross
as we are saving each dawn
by the foxes screaming.

And he wakes up looking for
the one he knew before
one of them changed
grabbing a telephone
to chart the course of the new day.

All of this will end
with sudden insight
the way rain passes and midnight is
like noon.] (38-39)

The way in which Noodin's poetry speaks so perfectly to our present is no mere coincidence. Over the past year, we have all been reminded—often painfully—of the truth spoken on every page of *What the Chickadee Knows.* It is a truth that Margaret Noodin, following a long tradition of Anishinaabe thought, is at pains to show us in every word of both English and Ojibwemowin: we are nothing more than that which ties us together.

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Gii-naanogonagizi Gashkadino-Giizis 2020 mii gii-onaabanjigaadeg gaa-ozhibii'iged Giiwedinoodin (Margaret Noodin zhayaaganaashiiwinikaazod) imaa *New York Times* ji-waabanda'iwemagak. Ogii-onaabandaan Naomi Shihab Nye iw ozhibii'igan "Landing Here," mii wenzikaamagak iw oshki-mazina'igan *What the Chickadee Knows.* Geget miikawaadad, mii ekidod Nye. "Note the movements of snow, cold and wind and the flapping of wings," ikido. Mayaginaagwad dash gegoo, indinendam. Zhaaganaashiimong eta ozhibii'igaade imaa babaamaajimo-mazina'iganing. Nitam dash gii-aano-ozhibii'ige Giiwedinoodin Anishinaabemong. Aandi gaa-izhaamagak iw Anishinaabemowin? Naasaab initaagwadoon niw ikidowinan menwendang Nye: Biboon, boonipoon, booniiwag. Apii noondamang gaa-ozhibii'igaadeg Zhaaganaashiimong eta, gaawiin ginoondanziimin iniw naasaab-ikidowinan (https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/05/magazine/poem-landing-here.html).

Aapiji niminwendam aginjigaadeg o'ow mazina'igan. Aapiji niminwendam apiitendamowaad egindaasojig. Zhaaganaashiimong dash eta aginjigaade, gaawiin gakina maakawaadadinig daa-waabanjigaadesinoon. Mii wenji-ozhibii'amaan o'ow ozhibii'igan niin. Niwii-tazhindaan ezhi-miikawaadak ezhi-apiitendaagwak o'ow mazina'igan *Anishinaabemong*.

Aaniin keyaa ge-dazhindamaan iniw "poetry" ezhinikaadeg Anishinaabemong? Gaawiin ayaamagasinoon i'iw ikidowin. Gii-gikinoo'amawid Giiwedinoodin ji-gagwe-nitaa-Anishinaabemoyaan, ogii-wiindaanan "dibaajimowinensan." Niwii-wiindaanan niin "nagamonensan" omaa. Moozhag onagamonan Giiwedinoodin onow "poems." Mii wenji-izhinikaadamaan onow ozhibii'iganan "nagamonensan."

Ji-ozhibii'ang onow nagamonensan Anishinaabemong, booch ji-michi-giizhitood Giiwedinoodin oshki-ikidowinan. Chi-mewinzha ogii-ozhibii'aan nagamonensan Anishinaabemong a'aw Anishinaabekwe Bemwewegiizhigookwe (Jane Johnston Schoolcraft), gaawiin dash baatayiinosiiwag bakaan Anishinabeg enishinaabewibii'angwaa nagamonensan. Dibishkoo a'aw Chi-Anishinaabekwe gaa-ozhibii'iged Bemwewegiizhigookwe, Giiwedinoodin gidadibaajimotaagonaan Anishinaabewakiing. Nitam gaa-ozhibii'ang mazina'iganing *Weweni* gaye ogii-

tibaadodaan Anishinaabewakiing, anooj dash bakaan akiing gaye ogii-tibaadodaanan. *Gijigijigaaneshiinh Gikendaan* dash geget ojiibikaawan omaa gidakiiminaang. Aapiji odibaadodaanan aki, nibi, miinawaa giizhig, ezhi-miikawaadakin, ezhi-wiidookaagoyang giinawind Anishinaabeg.

Jibwaa-maajitaayaan dibaadodamaan iniw nagamonensan, booch ji-wiindamooneg awenen aawiyaan, ezhi-gikenimag aw Giiwedinoodin. Mekadebinesiikwe indizhinikaaz. Migizi indoodem, Wezhaawashkwiikwegamaag indoonjibaa, Gakaabikaang dash indaa noongom. Baawiting izhinikaade ishkonigan wenjibaawaad indinawemaaganag. Ingii-nakweshkawaa Giiwedinoodin imaa Minowakiing gii-maajii-nandagikendamaan ji-anishinaabemoyaan. Miish nitam gaa-gikinoo'amawid aw gikinoo'amaagewikwe. Apiitendaagwad ji-wiindamooneg o'ow onzaam apane ikidowag Anishinaabeg ezhi-inawendiyang.

Nitami-waawiindamaagewining ikido Giiwedinoodin, "The first section of the book illustrates the way Anishinaabemowin blends philosophy, science, and psychology while the second half traces less commonly known histories or provides a less common view of well-known events" (ix). O'ow nitam gaa-ozhibii'iang geget naasaab izhinaagwad omazina'iganing *Weweni*. Onow nagamonensan dibaajimoomagadoon ezhi-anishinaabewaadiziyang, ezhi-anishinaabeyendamang. Izhibii'ige ow keyaa Giiwedinoodin waabanda'inang ezhi-nametwaajigaadenig gakina onow gegoon omaa gidakiiminaang. Odoozhibii'aan:

> Apii Manidoo-giizisoons basangwaabid
> gaye gaawiin bazhiba'ansiimaan
> ge-bimaadagendamaan dwaa'ibaaning
> mii mikwendamaan Ode'imini-giizis
> miskwiiwid miskwaawaasiged giizhigong.
> (32)

Giizis basangwaabi, inendamowinan bimaadagaamagadoon. Mii ow keyaa ezhi-waabanda'iwed Giiwedinoodin ezhi-aanikoobijigaadegin aki miinawaa inendamowin. Miish gaye aabajitood ezhi-anokiimagak Anishinaabemowin ji-waabanda'inang o'ow: "ge-bimaadagendamaan" ikido, ezhi-aabajitood "bimaadagaa" miinawaa iw ojiibikens "-end" ji-idang "inendamowin."

Baatayiinadoon onow dinowa ikidowinan mazina'iganing. Omichi-giizhitoon imaa nagamonensing "Agoziimakakiig idiwag" ow ikidowin

"nibwaakaamashkawajisiiwaad"—nibwaakaawin miinawaa mashkawajiwin—ji-michi-giizhitood oshki-mazinibii'igan naanaagadawendamowining. Aapiji minwaabadad Anishinaabemowin ji-doodaming o'ow. Gaawiin gigashkitoosiin ji-doodaman o'ow Zhaganaashiimong. Booch ji-aanike-atooyan ikidowinan, ezhi-izhichiged Giiwedinoodin, ekidod "frozen by design" Zhaaganaashiimong apii ekidod "nibwaakaamashkawajisiiwaad" Anishinaabemong.

Moozhag gaye odayaabajitoon Giiwedinoodin "inwewinensan," naasaab inwewinens aabajitoong ji-maajiibii'iged. Nitaa-waabanda'iwemagad o'ow "Bi Boniig." "Boon" maajitaamagad endaso-beshibii'iganing, bakaan dash edaming: "Boonipon apii biboong / Boonitamaang… / Boonigidetaadiwag… / Booniiwag… / Boonam…" ("Bi boniig" gaye ezhinikaadeg gegaa naasaab initaagwad iw ikidowin "biboong"). Aapiji nitaawichige apii naasaab ojiibikensan aawanzinog, dibishkoo igo iw nagamonens "Nizhosagoons gemaa nisosagoons daso-biboonagadoon": "ziibiins ani-ziibi ziibiskaaj / ziigibiig ziigwanindagwag." Gakina onow ziib/ziig- inwewinensan odoojiibikensiman bakaanadoon.

Ishkwaaj waawiindamoonang Giiwedinoodin gaa-bi-izhiwebak mewinzha, mayaginaagozi'inang dash. Iwedi mazina'iganing nitam gaa-ozhibii'ang, *Weweni*, miziwe akiing ogii-tazhindaan. Gii-waabanda'iwe ezhi-aabajichigaadenig Anishinaabemowin ji-dazhinjichigaadenig miziwe aki. O'ow dash mazina'iganing ogichi-waabandaan Anishinaabewaki, mii maajitaamagak chi-mewinzha—jibwaa-ayaawaad gosha Anishinaabeg omaa akiing. "Gaabiboonoke" mii iw apii maajitaamagad ow dibaajimowin (gemaa ge ow aadizookaan?). Mii o'ow gegoo aaningodinong ezhichiged Giiwedinoodin: Zhaaganaashiimod, ikido "glaciers;" Anishinaabemod dash, ikido "Gaabiboonoke," dazhimaad a'aw aadizookaanan. Nagamonensing "Nimanaajitoomin nibi" gaye dazhinjigaazo "Nookomis Nibi-giizis" Anishinaabemong, "her silver brilliance" eta ikidoomagad Zhaaganaashiimong. Mii onow "doorways between eras and worldviews" ezhi-wiindang imaa nitami-waawiindamaageng.

Omaa niizho-ozhibii'iganing, nitaa-waabanjigaade gaa-izhichigewaad Zhaaganaashag, gaawiin dash ekwaanig odibaajimowin Giiwedinoodin. Gaa wiikaa ikidosiin iw ikidowin "colonization," maagizhaa onzaam gaawiin aawanzinoon iw ikidowin Anishinaabemong. Aaningodinong niwaabamaag ingiw chi-ayaa'aag ezhi-dazhindamowaad gaa-bi-izhiwebadinig, gaa-dagoshininid Zhaaganaashan. Gegiinawaa, gaawiin ikidosiiwag iw ikidowin dibaajimowaad. Waabanda'iwe dash Giiwedinoodin ezhi-inakamigadinig. Iw nagamonensing "Wanaanimizimigad" giwaabandaamin gaa-izhiwebiziwaad awesiinyag gaa-meshkwadoonamaageng

noopiming. Maagizhaa omaa maamawi-nitaa-ikido Giiwedinoodin: "biniskwaabiiginamigad / gaa-maajitamigag." Mii o'ow gaa-inakamigak: gaa-biniskwaabiiginamigak gakina gegoo.

Zoongi-dazhinjichigaade gaa-biniskwaabiginamigak imaa nagamonensing "Bingwi-nanaandawi'iwe-nagamowin." Geget nagamowin izhinaagwad, niiwing maajitaamagadoon beshibii'iganan naasaab: "anaambiig, anaamaabik / mikwendamang giizhigoon mikwenimangwa." Zanagad gaa-izhiwebak imaa Gaa-mitaawangaagamaag miinawaa Mitaawangaa-Ziibiins. Gaawiin dash naasaab aawanzinoon. Mii enenjigaadeg: "noondawangwa, nagamotamangwa / … / ganawenindizowaad ezhi-bakaaniziwaad / giiwe-gizhibaabizowaad apane."

Gashkenjigaade iw nagamowinens "Bingwi-nanaandawi'iwe-nagamowin," bakaan dash nagamowinens, "Mazinaazod Oshki-miin-gamigong" geget nishkaazitaagoziimagad. "…aanawi" maajitaamagadoon ishkwaaj-beshibii'iganan, giimoojigidaazoomagak. Ishkwaabii'ige dash "aanawi gonemaa indaawaaj waa-mikaadiyang." Ganabaj, inendang, geyaabi gigashkitoomin ji-maamawi-mino-ayaayang. Aanind nagamonensing waabanjichigaade o'ow, dibishkoo "Maori Manaia," endazhi-maaminonenjigaadeg ezhi-anami'aanid Maori-Anishinaaben. Aapiji dash niminwendaan ezhi-dibaajimotang Giiwedinoodin ow nagamonens-mazinibii'igan "Gete-Mazinaagochigaans." Maagizhaa onaanaagadawendaan iw inendamowin, "Land Back" ezhinikaadeg Zhaaganaashiimong. Ikido:

> Robben Island azhenamawaawaad aaskigwan
> Bedloe's Island azhenamawaawaad esan
> mii waa-minisiinoowiyang azhegiiweyang
> mayagitaagoziyang.
> (72)

Aaniin waa-inakamigak giniigaaniiminaang giishpin azhenamaageng? Gaawiin Anishinaabe odakiim azhenamaageng eta. Aaniin waa-inakamigak ji-aazhenamawaawaad aaskigwan miinawaa esan? Aaniin waa-izhiwebiziyang ji-azhegiiweyang mayagitaagoziyang—gaawiin mayagitaagozi'igoosiwang, mayagitaagoziyang ji-nisidotaadiyang, *onzaam ginandawendaamin nisidotaadiwin.* Mii o'ow aki ezhi-dazhindang Giiwedinoodin omaa nagamonensing *Gijigijigaaneshiinh Gikendaan*. Mii ow Anishinaabe-akiiwang, endazhi-gashkichiged Anishinaabe miziwe bakaan awiyan, bakaan bemaadizijin ji-manaajitood enaadizinid. Mii o'ow dinowa aki nando-abiitamaan.

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Geary Hobson. *The Road Where the People Cried.* Mongrel Empire Press, 2020. 60 pp. ISBN: 9781732393530.

http://mongrelempire.org/catalog/poetry/road-where-people-cried.html

I grew up on land that was promised to my tribal nation. I am a citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma (CNO), whose reservation status was confirmed by the Supreme Court of the United States on July 9, 2020. My hometown of Bushyhead, Oklahoma, was always-already "Indian Country," to put it as a critical theorist, which I claim to be. "Indian Country" is a legal term that reminds all citizens of the United States that we live in a republic. We are not merely one nation, but many nations joined by treaties. With its recent ruling, our republic's most powerful court has demonstrated willingness to uphold these treaties. While this decision brings hope to Native folks, it remains to be seen whether the hundreds of treaties the United States has made with tribal nations will likewise be honored. We should thank Native activists such as Suzan Shown Harjo and many others who have been tirelessly protesting land theft, statues, and racist mascots for decades to regain control over our stories. This historical moment in which we find ourselves regarding Indian Country—where sovereignty is confirmed and racist signifiers are denied—is why Geary Hobson's new book of poetry, *The Road Where the People Cried,* is such a timely reminder of the endurance of the Cherokee people and our sovereignty.

Hobson's book, which features beautiful cover art by the late Janet Lamon Smith, focuses on several figures in Cherokee history, along with fictional characters whose voices ring true. These voices help the reader imagine the hopelessness and despair and also the determination of the Cherokee people before, during, and after The Trail of Tears, one of the most genocidal acts in American history. In his prologue, Hobson uses an arboreal metaphor to emphasize the many nations that branch from one republic. The book revolves around the most traumatic event in modern Cherokee history, beginning during Removal and consisting of twenty-eight poems in four seven-part sections. The second section takes place before the Trail of Tears. The third section returns to the time of Removal, and the final section is set after the Trail of Tears. The book is at once a celebration of where we are today as Cherokee people and a reminder of how we got here.

Hobson's collection opens with harrowing imagery in the first line of the first poem, where the voice of the historical figure Rain Crow tells us to look and listen ("Sgé!

Listen!") (1). Rain Crow describes a scene during the forced march. Five dead Cherokees' bodies "lie in stiffened attitudes" beside "the frozen road / in a stand of leafless hackberries" (1). In the same vein, fictional character Susie Wickham muses in another poem, "You know, a dead child is a sure-hard fact to face," referring to the many children along the Trail of Tears who died among one-quarter of the tribe before reaching what is now called Oklahoma (2). Death and despair appear early in Hobson's collection, but so does determination. In "Going Snake," we are told that, at eighty-two years old, the prominent Cherokee leader and eponymous subject of the poem keeps "looking straight ahead and never back, / straight into the face of death, / straight to the west" (5).

Hobson's poetry is carefully crafted with precise diction in both English and Cherokee, bringing to mind the work of another Cherokee poet, Gogiski (Carroll Arnett). Besides his careful choice of words, Hobson uses the absence of words (indicated by spacing) to create poetic effects through typography. In "This World," which is set in the time before the Removal, the speaker says, "Look closely you will see the world" while explaining Cherokee cosmogony (12). The same technique helps us visualize both the road in "Richard Old Field Speaks" and Richard's belief that other Cherokees "will have it much harder / than us trying to go over ruts" as the collection moves back to the period during the Removal (23).

During the protests of 2020, I watched statues of Andrew Jackson in Mississippi and elsewhere coming down, at least temporarily, from their undeserved pedestals. These statues not-so-passively celebrate Jackson's policies of ethnic cleansing and genocide against my people. They also celebrate his disregard for the laws of our republic in his failure to enforce Chief Justice John Marshall's ruling on Cherokee sovereignty. Hobson warns us that the specter of Jackson can appear in unexpected places with his poem "Meeting Andrew Jackson in an Albuquerque Bar," a poem about a drunk man encountering the man who is arguably our most infamous president. The speaker of this poem tells us, "I almost fell off the barstool when I saw him" (38). The narrator confronts the apparition, recounting Jackson's crimes against humanity. The only response the speaker receives, however, is a reciprocating glare from "crazy Tennessee eyes" (*ibid*). This interaction with Jackson is suspect not only because of the anachronistic setting, but also because of the unreliability of the speaker, who admits to being a "bar-drunk" (*ibid*). Nevertheless, his warning is timely: The specter of Andrew Jackson can appear in any time or place.

Hobson's *The Road Where the People Cried* is an important and timely collection that shows us the significance of remembering the trauma of the Trail of Tears by vividly describing the Removal in all its sensory details. Hobson's book was published in a year when, despite a pandemic, Indian Country exercised its agency through increased activism and voter turnout to send a clear challenge to signifiers of genocide. This challenge requires, first of all, that we remember the 574 nations that compose the republic of the United States. Remembering the laws of all our nations along with our stories will help keep our republic vigilant against the next time the specter of Jackson reappears.

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Tommy Pico. *Feed.* Tin House Books, 2019. 84 pp. ISBN: 1947793578.

https://bookshop.org/books/feed-9781947793576/9781947793576

> Rich and Willie and Chase twalk
> about the Proud Boys
> stalking up Cap Hill 70 strong twice
> the size
> they were last year
> and I can only think how much smaller the year before that or maybe
> not smaller but so much less brazen before the terracotta slob slithered
> their truth (25)

These lines were written by poet Tommy Pico long before January 6, 2021, the day former President Donald Trump incited violence during a so-called "Save America" rally by encouraging his supporters to "take back" their country and join him on a march to the Capitol.

> So we are going to—we are going to walk down Pennsylvania Avenue, I love Pennsylvania Avenue, and we are going to the Capitol […] we're try—going to try and give them the kind of pride and boldness that they need to take back our country. So let's walk down Pennsylvania Avenue. (Jacabo, n.pag.)

Following the then-incumbent president's speech, Proud Boys, QAnon, and other far-right, white nationalist factions violently stormed the United States Capitol Building. They vandalized and eventually fought their way into the building, gaining access to the House chamber.

Feed, the newest book from Pico, not only marks the completion of an important literary cycle, but also through Pico's prophetic insights, sheds much light on the ways the Trump presidency has gradually emboldened American racism. A book-length poem largely about food, culture, and growth, *Feed* also sets its sights on the country's concerningly steady growth of hate. Readers familiar with Pico's previous titles (*IRL* [2016]; *Nature Poem* [2017]; and *Junk* [2018]) will find *Feed* a deeply affecting conclusion to the Teebs Cycle, an epic four-book reflection on the myriad links between Indigenous spirituality, American history, internet culture, and queerness.

Like his other works, Pico's *Feed* is direct ("Dear reader") and written in present tense, rapidly unfolding *in the moment*. "There's no past tense because the English language is a colonial legacy in the way in which it has absorbed the languages of the people that it's conquered," Pico said when discussing *IRL*, his debut book of poetry, in a September 2016 issue of *NYLON* (Tosone, n.pag.) "English itself is like a living history of colonialism, so when we're using these words, we are living with the past as well" (*ibid*). Given the book's sense of urgency, stylistic experimentation, and other Joycean figurations, a reader's experience of *Feed* might feel akin to navigating a Twitter chain, a data stream, or a lengthy text message conversation. As the book unfolds like a social media feed, Pico gives readers opportunities to pause and hover on one of the many distressing (and real) news headlines that flood the book,

> PRO-GUN RUSSIAN BOTS FLOOD TWITTER AFTER MASS SHOOTING (58)

or to reflect on one of his playlist selections:

> Track 12: "Shout" by Tears for Fears. First of all, best band name in America. Second, how cathartic am I right? Really, just let it all out. What else can you do in an intractable situation but shout? (52)

LGBTQ readers will find much to appreciate in Pico's queerings of certain playlist tracks. For instance, when it comes to MGMT's "Electric Feel," Teebs tells the reader to "change the pronoun from 'girl' to 'boy,'" resulting in the following lyric: "I said, ooh, *boy* / Shock me like an electric eel" (42). In Drake's "Hold On, We're Going Home," Teebs, wanting to focus on the difficulty of doing things alone after a relationship ends, asks readers to "ignore the music video entirely" because it's "paternalistic garbage" (37). Throughout *Feed*, Pico is constantly inviting his readers to break norms and create new spaces for the queer self.

Likening poems to "food" or "feed" from the beginning, Pico's *Feed* is complexly refreshing in the way Teebs addresses a variety of hungers—social, spiritual, sexual—in an attempt to fill the absence of any knowledge of his own Indigenous food tradition. In the Teebs Cycle, a recurring challenge for Pico, who grew up on the Viejas Indian reservation of the Kumeyaay nation, is to use poetry to fill in the historical gaps in his own life's story, gaps caused by settler colonialism. For example, in *Nature Poem*, Teebs forces himself to write a new kind of "nature poem," one in which he creates his

own definitions of "nature," combating stereotypes that frequently link Indigenous people to the natural world. Pico also acknowledges his ideological trappings, hinting at the multi-layered *Feed* to come:

> but I don't want to be an identity or a belief or a feedbag. I wanna b
> me. I want to open my arms like winning a foot race and keep my
> stories to myself, I tell my audience. (30)

To "be" a feedbag in *Nature Poem* is to be the bag that both feeds and muzzles a horse, to be the grain that feeds the past, something Pico wants to avoid at all costs. According to an 1835 census of 34 men from the Kumeyaay Indian pueblo in San Pascual, many cultural changes in Kumeyaay society were caused by the Spanish introduction of horses. Settler colonialism's culture of horses resulted in Kumeyaay vaqueros, muleteers, blacksmiths, weavers, millers, and cheesemakers. For many Native Californians, to separate horse culture from colonizers is an impossibility (Lacson, 211): "Every feed owes itself to death. Poetry is feed to the horses within me" (18).

Like trauma absorbed by mind and body, Pico writes a culture of horses—a loss of Kumeyaay food traditions—into Teebs' body, resulting in a poetic language that sprawls, at times, like a news feed, but doesn't always nourish. According to the speaker, if "poetry," which is only sometimes food-like, is "feed" and every feed "owes itself to death," poetry should encourage both mindfulness and dissidence ("Poems light up corridors of the mind, like food" [18]). For example, the numerous Latin phrases that spring up are often attached to figurations of violence. The phrase "terracotta slob slithers" seems to reference the orange-colored Donald Trump, who, during his 2016 presidential campaign, recited the lyrics of a song called "The Snake," by civil-rights activist Oscar Brown, during rallies in Bloomington, Indiana and Estero, Florida. Trump performed the poem in close proximity to his comments on immigration, Syrian refugees, and Islam:

> "I saved you," cried that woman
> "And you've bit me even, why?
> You know your bite is poisonous and now I'm going to die"
> "Oh shut up, silly woman," said the reptile with a grin
> "You knew damn well I was a snake before you took me in." (Pinchin, n.pag.)

Pico also references "insulin" in multifaceted ways, juxtaposing "sugar" with "isle" and "island," prompting one to consider the islands of the West Indies where the slave labor of millions of Africans and Indigenous people shaped the world's sugar market (Tomich 205).

> Undigested sugar molecules rage around the blood, doing all sorts of crimes
>
> Insulin, from the Latin insula: isle
>
> Island—sugar—
>
> Insula: a smattering of convulsions situated at the base of the lateral fissure of the brain (Pico 53)

Interestingly, in a book review in *The New Yorker*, poet Dan Chiasson suggests Pico's speaker is "luxuriating" in the Latin pronunciation of a vast assortment of plants and flowers,

> Indian grass, Sorghastrum nutans; sor-GAS-trum newtons
> switchgrass, Panicum virgatum; panic-UM ver-GATE-um
> autumn moor grass, Sesleria autumnalis; sess-LEER-ee-uh autumn-NAY-lus (Chiasson and Pico 56)

opting for an "anti-pastoral" which, again, feels reminiscent of Pico's project in *Nature Poem*. The presence of Latin in *Feed* is unquestionably a volatile substance. Pico may very well be *luxuriating* in an excessive language of flowers, all while teaching his readers the Latin pronunciation, but this might also be a deliberate move to simultaneously evoke the Latin many Indigenous youths were most likely exposed to during religious rituals in the Indian Boarding Schools of colonial California. Tanya L. Rathburn has compared the strict religious teachings and Catholic rituals at St. Boniface Indian School to Spanish missions where many Christian schools were created to "convert heathen Indians" (Rathburn 156). When contemplating whether "Heartbeats" by Swedish electronic group The Knife is a song about atheism or not, Pico's speaker claims, "Prayer never helped nobody do nothing" (39).

A stunning meditation on everything from pop culture to astronomy, Pico's scope is far ranging as usual. The poet seeks to address questions that can only have complex

answers: Can a person be too real? Is darkness a necessary part of life? Is simply choosing to continue a revolutionary act in its own right? Tommy Pico's *Feed* has all the right ingredients—an inspired continuation of a poet's hunger for companionship and understanding: "I am the recipe I protect" (53).

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Jas M. Morgan. *nîtisânak*. Metonymy Press, 2018. 200 pp. ISBN: 9780994047175.

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The centering of Two-Spirit critiques and narratives is essential to decolonial and anticolonial work. One piece of importance in Two-Spirit critiques is Jas M. Morgan's *nîtisânak*. In their memoir, Morgan tells their childhood narrative and the development of their sense of identity. They address issues of gender, sexuality, whiteness, and adoption. Their narrative begins by talking about who their parents are and how they know the stories about them that they know, as they were adopted by a non-Indigenous family at a young age. Morgan continues their narrative by addressing the complex relationship they have to their tribal community, as well as the impact that settler colonialism has had on their relationship with their tribe and culture. Morgan discusses the ways that they have navigated white queer spaces, that often ask BIPOC folx to leave their racial identities at the door. Their memoir concludes with a message to the youth today and their imagining of a different future.

When writing from an Indigenous perspective, we are taught to think not only about our own identities and our survival but also the survival of future generations. Morgan writes directly towards Two-Spirit youth when they state unequivocally, "Dear 2s youth: I witness you. I witness you. I witness you. I witness you. One time for each direction" (159). At a time when Indigenous youth face high rates of suicide and death, the acknowledgement and witnessing of them and their identities is essential for Two-Spirit youth who do not see themselves represented in mainstream queer movements. Just as our work is not solely for us, but for future generations and their survival, our knowledges are not solely ours but community knowledges and stories. In this way, Morgan has "been a reluctant academic because [they] don't believe in individual claiming of knowledge" (171). While we, as Indigenous scholars, vocalize, write, and analyze our lives and our knowledges, these knowledges are not solely ours but are influenced by the community we are raised in, the people who raised us (and not solely those in our household), and our larger kinship networks. These understandings of knowledge and ownership do not translate into the world of academia, where individuality and self-promotion are essential to making progress in our perspective fields. This is demonstrated in Morgan's feelings towards academics and the critique of the individuality of the academic space.

While mainstream movements concerning queer genders and sexualities are focused around identity labels, Morgan argues that Indigenous gender can never be defined under a colonial lens: "when people ask me why my pronouns (correction, when yt people ask me why my pronouns) aren't the most important to me now, I can explain that my gender—something I associate very closely with my indigeneity, and lineages of diverse gender in my community—could never be affirmed through the use of colonial language, through one word" (39). Morgan furthers this conversation with their appreciation for the use of "they," although it is hard for Morgan to disconnect from the trauma associated with the sexualization of their feminized body at a young age. Their discussion around pronouns also challenges the notion that "trans bodies have always been here," an idea often presented by mainstream movements as an appropriation of the Two-Spirit identity. While Indigenous communities historically did not have binary understandings of gender, they did not necessarily have what we know as trans bodies today. Two-Spirit people thus are confronted with gatekeeping politics around queerness and Indigeneity. It is not uncommon for Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous people to hear, "If you are Indigenous, why must you appeal to these white constructs of gender and sexuality?" from members of their Indigenous communities.

When violence occurs within the queer community, a common response is dismissal due to the fact that people have not healed from their own trauma and that reproducing violence is a coping method. However, trauma should not be used to justify the violence towards others, as many who have faced trauma do not repeat the violence onto others. Morgan argues that "I won't tell you it's okay when your girlfriend gets violent when she's drunk—mainly because I know that intimate partner violence somehow gets normalized within queer communities" (158). Society normalizes ideas of who can and cannot be violent, as well as who can and cannot be victims. In the eyes of mainstream (patriarchal, heteronormative) society, women are not violent, and men are not victims, which makes it difficult in queer relationships for intimate partner violence to be recognized. The queer community is also not absolved from its reproduction of patriarchal norms, particularly when it comes to toxic masculinities. In the section of their book titled "Skyler," Morgan says that they "have been subject to the pitfalls of fem binarization to trans masculinities, [their] whole queer life, and the cycles that can emerge from the reification of masculinities that are misogynist, and therefore toxic, even in queer communities. A toxic trans bro is still a toxic bro" (30). Trans men are still capable of recreating violence and positioning themselves in roles of authority over others.

Another topic of importance that Morgan asks us to think about is who receives love and who deserves love: "Is there really such thing as NDN love, as trauma bb love as love for the unloved?" (1). Inundated by the media we watch, particular bodies are deemed lovable, and others are deemed disposable or even "rapable" (Smith). Both queer and Indigenous communities have been marked as undesirable and unlovable. This categorization creates systems in which we see ourselves and even reproduce these ideals within our communities (i.e. transphobia and queerphobia in Indigenous communities and anti-Indigeneity in queer communities). Morgan adds that "If love seems unattainable, for us prairie NDNs, it's only because we've lost our sacred connection to the land, and to all creation" (1). For Indigenous people and communities, connections to land and revitalization of their land-based practices are imperative to their healing and survival.

Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous people have complex relationships between love and violence. What does love mean when it is not modeled to you? How can you love yourself and allow others to love you when you have faced violence and trauma? Due to our understanding of trauma and how trauma is reproduced, it can be hard to create boundaries. Morgan argues, "the only people who get angry when you set boundaries are those who benefit from you having none to begin with" (159). When behaviors are excused by the violence and trauma someone faces, those who wish to create boundaries are ostracized by those who do not wish to confront the realities and change the learned behaviors that have become acceptable. Throughout their memoir, Morgan explores the complexity of boundaries and trauma through their experiences and stories. They navigate how their life is a set of complex relationships, and ultimately, they find that navigating a mainstream white queer community – one which does not center issues of Indigeneity – reproduces violence towards Two-Spirit and Queer Indigenous members.

Jas M. Morgan's *nîtisânak* presents their personal memoir in conjunction with critiques of the settler-state policies of elimination and violence. Morgan's writing style presents these topics in short, easily consumed, autobiographical pieces that are accessible to those within and outside of academia. Their language choice and references are particularly relatable to Millennial and Gen Z age groups, presented through short pieces that capture moments of their lives and particular issues. Their references to Myspace, Limewire, and dial tones are especially relatable to Millennials who grew up with the beginnings of home internet access, music downloads, and early social media. Their references to #whitefeminism, yt, and tl:dr, among other online slang, are relevant to the youth growing up in an age where social media is a part of daily life.

While their memoir is easily relatable and understandable to non-experts and a younger audience, Morgan's critiques of mainstream queer movements and settler colonialism nevertheless make their story of particular interest for scholars in these academic fields.

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syan jay's (Dził Łigai Si'an N'dee) first poetry collection, *Bury Me in Thunder*, walks a thin line between exploring grief and healing through vulnerable, tender poems while also, at times, shrouding language in secrecy to maintain a sense of safety and privacy. The different stages of a thunderstorm – cumulus, mature, and dissipating – structure the collection into three parts and suggest a narrative arc towards release or resolution. Written after the author moved back home to take care of their mother following a stroke, the collection tackles the intergenerational trauma created by a legacy of colonial violence and the cultural rupture caused by the fact that the speaker's mother was adopted by a family outside the reservation. This legacy has real implications: "My mother can't teach me / our words, her father stripped of voice and face, / leaving her alive but evaporated" (90). These lines gesture towards the cultural loss that affects two generations and pushes the speaker to search for restorative practices.

Several poems describe experiences of gendered violence and explore the speaker's articulations of gender. syan jay, who is agender, declared in an interview with Kimberly Ann Priest, "[m]y priority will always be to my transgender and non-conforming kinships" (n.pag.), and their poetry explores these issues carefully in an attempt to wrestle them from a history of harm, as seen in the opening lines of the first poem, "A Person Born Without Lungs":

> My body is made of absences,
> of meaningless gender, of a colonizer's
> language, of unbearable things wrought
> from servitude and genocide. My body
> is an ocean of graveyards. (15)

The body bears signs of settler colonial violence, is shaped by the coloniser's language, and is marked by its experience of trauma: "My sex is unbearable, both witness / and participant to violent desire" (15). Binary gender identities are a colonial imposition that also reinforce racial categories (Driskill, et al.). Mediated by the "colonizer's language," the speaker's meaningless gender" designates a site of oppression. While *Bury Me in Thunder* brushes a devastating portrait of how body and language are affected by colonisation, poetry also functions as a tool to describe and reclaim experience in order to envision alternatives. The "wish / for safety,

equal parts / human and held" (16) gestures towards the possibility of wholeness and the process of healing, neither of which are ever fully completed. The poem "Feasting on Dysphoria and Sparrows" underscores misgendering and the experience of objectification, as the speaker describes, "[a] man is telling me I am a woman," as well as the violence of having one's "personal made public" (51). The language used to render sexual violence is raw and direct: "I am part of the exhibits / touted on stage for men to fondle," as the speaker turns into a gendered, racialised, "othered" specimen: "The 'Thing' displayed naked before / crowds" (56). Terror and fascination, anger and desire, denial and honor uncomfortably bleed into one another.

Naming is an important ritual that ties a person to the land as well as community. As names are often gendered, they bear particular weight for transgender and nonbinary people. In "Time, Names, and Found Things," the speaker asks, "[w]e don't name our girls with things that can die […] But what happens when I am not girl / and not boy? Do I inhabit the name / of ghosted things, undead things?" (86). In other words, when your community does not know how to name you, do you become something more, or less, or other than a living human? Naming becomes a function of the land, the place where "You Asked for the River to Name You / and she named you fragility / and she named you aching / and she named you bruised kneecaps" (31). These given names demand that the speaker integrates pain and grief as constitutive elements of their identity. The river can also take that name and memories away, as in "A Home Prone to Amnesia": "I waited for the river, / who swam and shifted with threat below, to sweep / away the hometowns and memories with them, and reach up, / pull my name right out of me" (69). In this collection, naming has at least as much to do with being claimed by the land as by family, which has powerful implications for trans* people who often need to rename themselves. It is also described as a fluid process, which the river can impart but also claim back.

Bury Me in Thunder casts memory as a geography but the land goes far beyond metaphor: it is constitutive of the body and makes flesh porous to its environment. Manifestations of trauma are imprinted onto land and bodies, as in "Before the Land Breaks": "I breathe in, there is coppered earth on my tongue. / The land thickens under my shoes, as my body de-forests / itself among the lava and rock" (50). Here, the speaker tastes soil and minerals even as their body "de-forests itself" in an uneasy but constant exchange between land and body. Natural landscapes are also a stage for violence, as in "Rawhide for the Archer's Knot," where the speaker and their aunt become deer in a field, a hunter's prey, and "uncles skin our legs to give us camouflage," as though raw wounds would enable them to blend into the environment, the wounds opening them up to their surrounding like "salmon carcasses"

(81). The natural world is simultaneously shelter and threat. In "What the Hills Look Like at Night," land erupts out of the speaker's injury: "As we sat to watch / fire take the mountains, the blood / on my bandaged hand blossomed into three peaks" (48). The body becomes the landscape. In jay's poetry, there are no closed categories, no weatherproof lines. At all times, material reality is liable to rupture and blend into another dimension that is still grounded in the textures of flesh and earth.

These poems embed the speaker within a web of land, histories, and people. Metaphors of eating, devouring, birthing, being swallowed, or breaking into/out of another body run through the collection, further challenging the notion of a discrete individuality. Teeth are a recurrent motif in many poems, as in "Root Soup," where they are cooked to feed a family (73). Like bones, teeth can yield information about someone's childhood landscape. In the same interview with Kimberly Ann Priest, jay remarks:

> Our teeth provide evidence of where we are from. The land and what we have access to during childhood will influence how our bones grow. Scientists use isotope chemistry to look at tooth enamel and bone in order to measure geochemical signatures that carry evidence of where a person lived as a child. We can tell how someone lived, what they ate, and their access or barriers to nutritional food and clean water. The body carries so much and yet, we do not think of what we can find beyond what we say. What can the body say? (n.pag.)

Bury Me in Thunder, then, examines what the body says in its communication with place and community, the family systems disrupted by colonial violence. Storytelling constitutes another type of food that can be offered to appease the ghosts of the past, by both "seasoning the earth for seeds to feed our families" and forgetting "hunger from the stories we eat from our shared palms" (83). Despite the pain of remembering and the frailty of catering for possible futures, the speaker is "making / a map for my family to find home" (22).

That family peoples many of the pages, and the collection itself is dedicated to the author's mother. There is an abusive stepmother (20), a grandfather (85), a brother (37), sisters (55), uncles (40) and trickster aunties (65), and a lover (53). This sense of kinship extends to ancestors when the speaker states that "death has made powerful / ghosts for you to talk to" (49). In fact, the opening poem asserts, "I am built from ghosts" (15). In another, the speaker says, "the ghost of my grandfather will feed me / acorn dumplings, tulapai" (87), showing that ancestors can provide nurturance as well as strength. Longing to connect with her past, the mother "needle[s]

thread into stories, / aching to unbury her family" (90). Here writing, as a form of storytelling, connects with the ancestors once more, framing the poem as healing ritual, capable of (re-)enacting ceremony. The epigraph also refers to writing as creating worlds through magic, a skill attributed to the speaker's mother. Song (59), sage smoke, and dance (63) hold space for a new kind of desire and connection to place and the ancestors. Even though "the people / here don't know how to sing / the songs that close wounds" (88), there is space for pain to open up towards multiple signifiers: "a wound // can hold meaning / can hold tenderness // that pain is not monogamous // &holds many lovers" (62). The last poem, "Silver O," describes loss and grief while also offering a kind of resolution in which the speaker is "returning to a different home" (93). This is the dissipating stage of the thunderstorm, signaling both resolution and separation. *Bury Me in Thunder* does not promote easy notions of recovery but rather suggests ways of embracing ambivalence and contradiction.

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Kelli Jo Ford. *Crooked Hallelujah*. Grove Press, 2020. 288 pp. ISBN: 9780802149121.

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When we seek to understand trauma, we must remember above all else, the body always keeps the score. In Kelli Jo Ford's *Crooked Hallelujah*, she explores the limits that a body can withstand before it succumbs to the harsh violence tallied from its traumatic encounters. Above all else, *Crooked Hallelujah* is a story of trauma. Ford's powerful novel details the harrowing story of Justine Barnes and her search for freedom: a freedom from trauma, broken dreams, and the plight of the internal child she leaves behind in motherhood. The Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, one of the main settings in the novel, is painted as a land where trauma entrenches itself into the bodies of all who live there. Such deep-seated pain and sorrow have their origins in the geopolitical fallout from the Trail of Tears and the ontological terror this historical act of violence imposes upon Native bodies. Ford's text is a literary engagement with trauma's elusive duality: the twisted darkness Justine's family harbours is what both binds them together and keeps them hopelessly imprisoned.

Structurally, the text flows with a heightened urgency, despite certain chapters of narration – namely the chapter narrated by Pitch's father – failing to meet the higher standard set by others. Ford is deft in revealing the many layers to the female souls in her novel but does not achieve this same effect with male characters like Pitch and his father. While the matriarchs of Justine's family are robust and powerfully human, the male characters in *Crooked Hallelujah* fail to replicate that same human intensity. Wes, Kenny, Russell Gibson, and the other masculine characters all exude a violent streak exasperated by poorly hidden agendas and flat developmental arcs. The narrative shifts in the novel to Pitch's father and Mose Lee lack the same hardened vulnerability present with Justine and her daughter, Reney. These shifts seem unnecessary and tangential to the core of the novel, particularly because Ford could have used those sections to flesh out the ending climax. Because the male characters are wooden, the relationships they have with the female characters are less enjoyable to read. Despite these small faults, the Cherokee world Ford creates is captivating. The words on the page read with such cinematic potential as Walter Dean Myers' YA novel *Monster* (1999) and expose a harsh reality some people refuse to accept.

Ford's text asks readers to consider the implications arising from history's cyclical nature and the trauma created from the clash between the external and the internal. In the early parts of Ford's novel, we are introduced to a young Justine entrenched in conflict; while navigating the oppressive nature of her community's religion, she must reconcile being the victim of sexual violence and the shame following this trauma. Between the oppression she faces from her religious community to her eventual downfall, Justine's story prompts vital questions of how haunting travels from body to body, leaving ruin in its wake. Justine's shame and regret remain palpable forces influencing every facet of her life, from the terrible men she surrounds herself with to the desperate hope she clings onto that Reney will have a better life than herself. The mothers in Ford's novel all occupy the murky intersection between trauma and destiny as evidenced when Justine pleads to Reney to break the family's traumatic cycle:

> When I started pulling away that summer—doing what kids do—she'd [Justine] lived exactly half her life doing all she could to make sure my life was better than hers. After taking stock of all the ways we matched and saying, "Good night my Tiny Teeny Reney," she'd hold me close and whisper, "Don't be like me. Don't ever be like me." (97)

Ford is clever and effective in demonstrating how Reney is Justine's way of reconciling the sexual violence done to her: Reney's characterization is a phenomenological exploration into how something so beautiful can come from a place so dark. By having Reney, Justine had to give up on the child within herself she could never save and tries to find this child in Reney. The mother-daughter relationships in the novel are constant negotiations centered around freedom, religion, and the power one wields amidst economically disenfranchised environments. In reading Ford's text, I found myself thinking about the connections between her writing and that of Margaret Atwood and John Rollin Ridge, particularly with how Ford explores societal colonization of bodies. *Crooked Hallelujah* and Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquin Murieta: The Celebrated California Bandit* (1854) both lie at the intersection of race and agency and work to expose the immediacy of Native literature. In their respective texts, both Ridge and Ford explore the traumatic struggles of people stuck between two very different worlds: for Ford's Justine, she is caught between religion and freedom, while Ridge's Murieta is caught between revenge and closure. The oppression of women in *Crooked Hallelujah* invokes similar questions on religion and power as Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, but I hope a reader's discomfort with the oppression of Justine and Reney provides a powerful perspective on the plight of Native women.

Despite some minimal character considerations, *Crooked Hallelujah* is an important text depicting a modern Native experience. Justine's and Reney's sufferings are Cherokee in nature, but human in impact. Ford's writing serves as an essential retort to the Native erasure embedded within the American racial consciousness. Her message is prophetic and a humbling reminder to those who feel destined to repeat the history from which they are so desperately trying to run away. *Crooked Hallelujah* is a testament to Native bodies everywhere suffering under the weight of survival in a society that refuses to see them. In the critical vein of Judith Butler and Avery Gordon, Ford posits her characters as victims of a history they inadvertently repeat despite their best efforts to break free from the chains that suppress the freedom they deserve. In her writing, Ford seeks to expose the flawed and broken human condition that transcends environment, sex, and race. With each page, I found myself more and more drawn to Justine and Reney, desperately pleading to the two women to pursue something more than the life they have accepted. Therein lies the palpable power of Ford's writing: each broken female character demonstrated a deep emotional complexity, forcing me to consider the fixed judgment we so often bestow upon others and the internal responsibility we exercise in healing.

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In his 1995 essay "A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again," David Foster Wallace notes how his imagination has long been haunted by the scene in *Moby-Dick* "where the cabin boy Pip falls overboard and is driven mad by the empty immensity of what he finds himself floating in" (Wallace 262). Wallace adds that when he teaches another famous story of a shipwreck, Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat," he hopes to evoke in his students what he has "always felt" himself, a "marrow-level dread of the oceanic [, …] the intuition of the sea as primordial *nada*, bottomless, depths inhabited by cackling tooth-studded things rising toward you at the rate a feather falls" (*ibid*). Curiously, this *nada* is conceived as at once a void or pure absence, and also as potentially populous, full of horrible "things" (*ibid*). Either way, Wallace's fear – often echoed in his representation of terrestrial milieus – is that a nonhuman environment is fundamentally hostile and intractable to sense-making, a perpetual threat to the vulnerable human pipsqueak.

One of the virtues of Gerald Vizenor's *Native Provenance: The Betrayal of Cultural Creativity* (2019) is its compelling reminders of a counter tradition. The collection's dozen essays reaffirm the author's faith in the possibilities of "a spirited and visionary sense of natural motion" (37) that, though often "betrayed" by both wilful and adventitious misconceptions, has always been a crucial element of (though it is certainly not exclusive to) "native creation stories, visionary dream songs, and literature" (37). Making his own assessment of *Moby-Dick* in "Native Transmotion: Totemic Motion and Traces of Survivance,"[1] Vizenor dwells on the novel's evocation of a nonhuman environment that ultimately "provides a sublime transcendence of sorrow, separation, cultural closure, and victimry" (47). By these lights, Melville's white whale swims free of any narrow human-focused allegory, becoming "a spectacular portrayal of literary transmotion, a spirited and mysterious image of natural motion in the ocean, in the book, and in the imagination of the reader" (48). If, for Vizenor, there is a *nada* here in Melville's work, it is affirmative and generative (evoking the word's classical Latin root *nāta*, "born") – a liberating unfixity amidst identities that allows for endless creative flux.[2] Wallace, I suggest, stands at the rather dismal endpoint of a Euro-American literary tradition that once held a partially kindred sense of natural liberty, but now, for the most part, has lost confidence in the nonhuman environment as a vivifying

tutor. Vizenor's essays point to the dynamic vitality of an alternative sensibility still thriving in contemporary Indigenous art: "Natives are forever in natural motion with ironic creation stories, and the new literary artists are answerable to the traces of transmotion, that mighty cosmototemic curve of the unnamable in cultural survivance stories" (51).

Extending a dialectical consideration of Wallace and Vizenor – who, intriguingly, share dominant thematic interests in the status of irony, the contours of a "decentered" selfhood, and the potential means of personal and collective healing – seems helpful in illuminating what is, at least for this reader, most profound in the latter's work. How these authors imagine the conditions of a therapeutic social order, oriented toward Euro- and Native America respectively, seems particularly revealing. Wallace's representations of Alcoholics Anonymous meetings in *Infinite Jest* (1995), or (more bizarrely) the bureaucracy of the Internal Revenue Service in *The Pale King* (2011), posit such organisations as frail but potentially salvific bulwarks against an all-encompassing void – means of surviving, that is, the *nada* that drove Pip mad. Within such places, an atomic self is largely left on its own to connect with whatever traces of a merely personal divinity it can discover. Vizenor's own fictional works, as well as the essays published in this collection, proffer a divergent vision suggestive of what I call *eunomia* ("good law/pasture"), a blending of the human and natural/divine orders in which the self is understood as capable of communing with a vibrant nexus of interrelated being. In Vizenor's estimation, Melville's Ishmael ultimately reflects a version of such eunomic autonomy, for he is said to have "created a sense of presence and situations of transmotion with tropes, diction, character expressions, irony, and comparative scenes" (51). Such a character can, that is, hear and endorse the divine in the nonhuman world around him – and the relationship is reciprocal. A modern castaway with, as Vizenor notes, "an ironic biblical name" (46), Ishmael is understood to express, in his eunomic sensibility, an unironic faith in that name's literal Hebrew meaning: "God listens."

For Vizenor, positive, liberatory, reciprocal relationships with the natural/divine ought to, and might still, inform and reform political institutions. Hence, in "Survivance and Liberty: Turns and Stays of Native Sovereignty,"[3] the new Constitution of the White Earth Nation is conceived as having honored "totemic associations with nature" (33), for the "moral imagination, heartfelt ideas of native liberty, natural motion and change, ethos of governance, and the sentiments of survivance and sovereignty were embraced in [its] egalitarian articles" (35). The expression of such possibilities has, Vizenor emphasizes, often been obscured or "betrayed," but we may find it even in historical documents such as federal treaties, which, under attentive study, reveal an insistent

"native presence, the oral and scriptural stories of transmotion, and traces of inherent native rights, or an ancestral visionary sovereignty" (88). Wallace, like many of his Euro-American contemporaries, positions himself as skeptically treading water above a sunken tradition, alone together with other shipwrecked souls. Vizenor suggests that, no matter its past and ongoing betrayals, a longstanding communal enterprise, binding the human and nonhuman, still floats.

Vision is one of the guiding metaphors in these essays, and Vizenor is, as ever, interested in surveying "natural motion" with a sinuous alternation of retrospection and prospection. The contemporary artists he celebrates are temporally distant but imaginatively proximate heirs to an archaic tradition: "Native and indigenous cosmototemic artists created the first memorable scenes of presence, natural totemic motion, and survivance on the slant of stone and in the great shadows of monumental caves more than thirty thousand years ago on every continent" (43). The betrayal of that legacy includes, for Vizenor, the authors of "commercial literary victimry" (40), as well as theorists such as Michael Dorris, who have "resisted the concept of a singular native literary aesthetics" (126), and David Treuer (Leech Lake Ojibwe), who "rarely observes in his commentaries the marvelous visionary traces of native transmotion and aesthetics" (127). Legitimate engagement with Native provenance and providence, Vizenor affirms, can be found in the eunomic sensibilities of contemporary visual artists, "who have created scenes of transmotion with conceptual contours, temper of colors, and original abstract forms, patterns, and customs" (102), and contemporary Native novelists, who have "created the totem tease and consciousness of animals in dialogue and descriptive narratives and overturned the monotheistic separation of humans and animals" (127). What is always anxiously ironized in Wallace's thought – a belief in the soundness and ongoing viability of a tradition's key conceptual legacies – survives, as survivance, in Vizenor's.

In fact, the vital expression of "natural motion" by Native American authors can, for Vizenor, be traced and honored in a de facto canon. Impishly but no doubt sincerely, he offers the following genealogy which suggests the historical constancy of some his own central conceptual framings: "Samson Occom, Joseph Brant, William Apess, George Copway, Black Elk, Charles Eastman, Chief Joseph, Sitting Bull, Luther Standing Bear, White Cloud, William Warren, and many other native diplomats, published authors, and restive storiers worried about the course of racial separatism and might have written that it was the cause of native rights, visionary sovereignty, continental liberty, and peace that made them resistance authors" (79-80). All such authorship deploys a form of the purposeful ironic play discoverable in "an

Anishinaabe dream song," offering "a gratifying tease of nature and a creative totemic sense of presence" (38). *This* irony – again unlike Wallace's, which typically underscores a sense of isolation and is often most dynamic in exploring versions of paralysis – is resolutely communal and productive, suggestive of a vigorous belief in the possibilities of totemic pacts (Algonquian *totem*: "dwelling together"). Vizenor's cosmopolitan interests, and his eclectic intellectual borrowings from non-Indigenous sources, are sometimes invoked as evidence of his marginal status among Native American authors. As his own oeuvre and self-estimation suggest, however, he models T.S. Eliot's point in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," that significant novelty finally only springs from a faithful engagement with, and transformation of, a living heritage.

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Notes

[1] As Vizenor notes: "[This essay] was expanded from a conference lecture at Kings College, London, in May 2014. An earlier version of the essay, "The Unmissable: Transmotion in Native American Stories and Literature," was published as the inaugural essay in *Transmotion* […] and included more examples of visionary motion in native literature and in *Moby-Dick* by Herman Melville" (Vizenor 181-82).

[2] *Nāta* can itself be traced back to the Proto-Indo-European root **gene-* ("give birth, beget"), whose "derivatives [refer] to procreation and familial and tribal groups" ("**gene-*" etymonline.com). One might find here, too, a correspondence with one of those derivatives, Hinduism's *nada*: "Inchoate or elemental sound considered as the source of all sounds and as a source of creation, and thus as present within every created being" (*OED* "nada" n.2).

[3] This work "was published as an essay in a shorter version in a special issue of *Revue Française d'Études Américaines*, 'Les nations de l'intérieur: The Nations Within,' Paris, France, 2015" (181).

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

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

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

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

Can you summarize a color?

Can you objectify motion?

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

Blue is the color of motion.

This book is a blue inheritance, not a History.

(One moment, I need to open Eric Satie's *Gymnopedies.*
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FS6o3qFimsc&t=2743s&ab_channel=%E2%99%ABHQClassicalMusic%E2%99%AB)

OK.

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

I am an heir of the fur trade.

The Native heirs have teased me.

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

Totems like Nazi puppets teased on French waterways.

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

Bright blue bruises on a stark reality.

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

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

Blue shadows > shadows.

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

Moby Dick motion and Herr Ahab.

Anyheir's Native.

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

Endless dong zingers.

Open ethos.

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

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

Drift on *liberté*.

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

Blue stories shadowed.

Say their luminous names.

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

Native provenance, provenance, provenance.

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

History is fiction.

history is Fiction.

history is fiction.

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

Headintheclouds reading?

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

Native provenance is *liberté*.

Drift on the *Gymnopedies*.

Become totemic blue.

Idaho State University

Works Cited

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Contributors

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CASSANDRA KRAUSS is a German-American, born in Berlin. After completing my BA at the University of Bremen in English-Speaking Cultures and History, I moved to the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität where I received my MA in British, American and Postcolonial Studies in 2016. I am currently a PhD student at the University of Kent in Canterbury (UK); my focus lies on Native American literature and the production of history. Other interests include post-apocalyptic and horror fiction, as well as Virginia Woolf and her negotiations of war.

JAMES MACKAY James Mackay is a lecturer in comparative literatures at the European University Cyprus, specialising in Native American and First Nations literatures. He was the lead author of the most recent ENAR Shadow Report into Racism in Cyprus (pdf), is the editor of the Salt Companion to Diane Glancy, and has published numerous articles.

KAI MINOSH PYLE (Mekadebinesikwe) is a Two-Spirit writer, Indigenous language learner and advocate, and researcher. Born and raised in Green Bay, Wisconsin, they have ancestral ties to the Red River Métis, Sault Ste. Marie Ojibwe, and the northeast Wisconsin Polish-American community. Having recently completed their doctoral studies in American Studies at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities on the occupied Dakota homelands of Bde Ota Othunwe (Minneapolis, Minnesota),

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LISA TATONETTI is professor in the Department of English at Kansas State University. She is author of *The Queerness of Native American Literature* (Minnesota, 2014) and coeditor of *Sovereign Erotics: A Collection of Contemporary Two-Spirit Literature*.

ARIANNA TAYLOR (White Mountain Apache) is a drag performer and community performer in Los Angeles County. She used to be an active member of the Red Circle Project before the program transitioned into closure.