

TRAIL MIX

by

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ABSTRACT

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Trail Mix is a book of poems comprised of two sequences: “Trail Mix,” which considers the fact and aftermath of the Trail of Tears and “Red Dead Redemptions,” which utilizes the lyric narrative to consider contemporary mixedblood life. The two sequences comprising *Trail Mix* harmonize in dissonance: “Trail Mix” is serious, “Red Dead Redemptions” slightly playful; “Trail Mix” is historically entrenched, “Red Dead Redemptions” documents the unspooling present moment. Both interrogate what it might mean to be Cherokee. Aesthetically, the poems in the “Trail Mix” section have more movement and white space, which aligns with a major theme in the section: walking. The poems in “Red Dead Redemptions” are tighter, with less white space, reflecting the immediacy of the present moment in which they take place. Together, the sections strive to comprise a complex vision of Cherokee postindian life and thought.

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Fragment, Polyvocality, Dissonance, and the Lyric: A Critical Introduction to *Trail Mix*

My creative dissertation *Trail Mix* is composed of two long sequences, “Trail Mix” and “Red Dead Redemptions,” both of which examine indigenous history, attitudes, and the integration of non-Native or Eurowestern (to borrow a word from Chadwick Allen) lifestyles into Native-American communities. More specifically, the collection is interested in Cherokee history, cosmology, and present living, and draws especially upon the critical and historical work of Cherokee scholars such as Daniel Heath Justice and John Ehle. The two sequences—“Trail Mix” and “Red Dead Redemptions”—work in varying aesthetic, tonal, and rhetorical modes according to their emphases: “Trail Mix” is a polyvocal examination of the impacts of the Trail of Tears and its aftermath, whereas “Red Dead Redemptions” is a series of lyric narrative poems based entirely in the present day. Together, the poems seek to query the legacy of the Cherokee and what it might mean to be, as the author is, a white-passing mixedblood Cherokee in 2019. Drawing upon the legacy of Native poets such as Simon J. Ortiz and Adrian C. Louis, the influence of contemporary Native poets like Tommy Pico and Laura Da’, and the New York School of poets, particularly Frank O’Hara, *Trail Mix* employs fragment, polyvocality, dissonance, and the lyric to present a complex and lively portrait of the Cherokee experience.

“Trail Mix” moves in fragments and breaths, echoing the poet’s ancestors’ journey. (Here, it is important to point out that while *Trail Mix* refers to the dissertation in its entirety, “Trail Mix” references the first sequence of poems.) “Trail Mix” follows a loose anti-timeline that includes the signing of the Treaty of New Echota in 1835, the majority of Cherokees’ resistance to the relocation required by the Treaty, the walk on the Trail itself, the landgrab that followed, and present-day impacts. The “human vultures”—as John Ehle

(a 6th generation North Carolinian Cherokee descendent) describes the soldiers in his important work, *Trail of Tears: The Rise and Fall of the Cherokee Nation*—are therein depicted as a metonymy of settler colonialism (Ehle 330). However, to reflect my own biracial identity—which is more fully explored in the second half of the dissertation—occasionally the Cherokee themselves are presented as feet and hands; the members of the Army responsible for the push are typically depicted as shoes or arms. The use of metonymy is a mild nod to Simon J. Ortiz's *from Sand Creek*, a book-length poem that considers the massacre and driving out of “about 600 Cheyenne and Arapaho people” and that returns to the tongue across the book as an image for Native expression (Ortiz 8). While this dissertation diverges from Ortiz's focused examination of that particular mass removal—or other book-length considerations of Native life and/or government imbued terrors such as N. Scott Momaday's *The Way to Rainy Mountain* and Valerie Martinez's *Each and Her*—the “Trail Mix” sequence seeks to maintain the velocity of poems in sequence established by those texts.

At the conclusion of the essay “Dreams in the Fourth Dimension” in his book *The Everlasting Sky*, Gerald Vizenor notes:

the expression of *oshki anishinabe* visual experiences is presented in many different literary forms—the anecdotal and archetypal stories from the collective unconscious of the tribal past, the sermon of conscious and identity, the stories of folly, short narrations of humorous and tragic incidents, the epistle, poetry, the novel and the short story (79).

While Vizenor is speaking from an Ojibwe perspective, it is important to utilize the

transindigenous methodology employed by Chadwick Allen in his book *Transindigineous: Methodologies for Global Native Literary Studies*, in which he argues for “making... productive tensions” across Nations in order to understand vital connections for the monolithic and oft-misunderstood concept of indigeneity (Allen xxi, xxii). For instance, one frequently comes across instances in pop culture in which a generic Native American mythology permeates an object or space, as opposed to speaking specifically with regards to a particular Nation’s mythology, ceremonies, or sacred spaces. Hence, I feel comfortable utilizing Vizenor’s Ojibwe understanding of presentation for the dissertation’s Cherokee history, as it permeates our own history and my indigenous poetics. “Trail Mix” presents “the collective anecdotal from the tribal past” alongside the poet’s own experience of the present to form a collective picture of the strange pain brought about by the Trail of Tears (Vizenor 79).

“Trail Mix” also features two persona poems—one sonnet, and one longer piece—that seek to interrogate two major, polarizing figures in the Cherokee Nation: Sequoyah (a.k.a. George Guess) and Elias Boudinot. These poems provide further depth of voice and tone to an already vocally and tonally variegated sequence. Sequoyah’s poem—“Sequoyah”—is a sonnet in keeping with his perceived capitulation to settler colonial ideals *vis a vis* the finalizing and recording of a written Cherokee syllabary. In her illuminating text *Signs of Cherokee Culture: Sequoyah’s Syllabary in Eastern Cherokee Life*, Margaret Bender argues that “Sequoyah was not an assimilationist; the sketchy data available about him suggests that he disliked the changes whites and some Cherokees were trying to bring about in Cherokee society and felt that his system could be used to make the Cherokees more independent of whites” (35).

In “Sequoyah,” then, I strive to play with language, drawing upon Sequoyah’s construction of the Cherokee language, and portray a human who is more protective of his community than is often depicted, though Grant Foreman’s early 1940’s biography certainly paints a picture of a man working to preserve his culture in spite of ostensible capitulation. The short poem pokes at the inexact perceptions of Sequoyah as overly compliant with settler colonists and seeks to acknowledge the beauty of Sequoyah’s syllabary and, more largely, his overall vitality to the construction and preservation of the Cherokee language.

“Extra Extra,” a longer poem in the voice of Elias Boudinot, is more complicated, as is the subject of the poem himself. On one hand, he was part of the illicit (though quorum-meeting) group of Cherokee who absconded north to sign the Treaty of New Echota, effectively putting into practice the horrific machinations of the Trail of Tears two years later. On the other hand, he also worked as an advocate for the Cherokee amongst settler colonials and established the *Cherokee Phoenix*, which remains the longest-running indigenous newspaper in the United States. In this poem, Boudinot acknowledges his complicity while also upholding his superlative work for preserving Cherokee history. The poem also considers his murder by fellow Cherokee on Saturday, June 22, 1839, as he was building his new home just north of Talequah, and his legacy (Luebke 137). In a nod to the long history of collage in United Statesian socially conscious political poetry, from Charles Reznikoff and Muriel Rukeyser to contemporary poets such as Douglas Kearney and Mark Novak, the poem also samples Boudinot’s well-known speech “An Address to the Whites.” Ultimately, this poem is not seeking to herald Boudinot so much as to attempt to

understand the mindset of a complicated individual who made vital choices on behalf of our Nation and crucially shaped its future.

Another vital aspect of “Trail Mix,” in addition to polyvocality, is that of fragment and disjunctive grammar. Many of the poems contain long pauses, spaces, or gaps, wherein the reader may feel confused or conflicted about a straightforward, intended meaning. This occurs for a variety of reasons—I would argue, for instance, that polyvocality within a single poem lends itself to fragment as the transitions from one voice to another are often jagged and unpredictable—but I would be remiss not to mention the influence of contemporary Chamorro poet Craig Santos Perez, his long multi-volume poem *from Unincorporated Territory*, and his indelible use of fragment.

from UNINCORPORATED TERRITORY, as it stands, is an ongoing poem of protest, four books released thus far, that will continue as long as Guåhan (the Chamorro word for Guam) continues its bizarre existence as a United States territory whose inhabitants do not have many of the basic rights or economic benefits of U.S. citizens living in fully incorporated states. As Tiara R. Na’puti puts it in her article “Speaking the Language of Peace: Chamoru Resistance and Rhetoric in Guåhan’s Self-Determination Movement”:

Guåhan is afforded a political status that can be characterized as both/neither. Guåhan is represented as “both” a political landmass with citizenship status afforded to the inhabitants and a government with local elections and a delegate in the U.S. House of Representatives. Yet it is also characterized as “neither,” because the U.S. citizenship rights granted to Guåhan’s inhabitants are not full citizenship rights in practice... (302).

This “both/neither” status might explain some of Perez’s obsession with “from” or “ginen” in Chamorro. Within each book, and across the longer project, Perez has placed multiple series of poems, which he has broken up and interwoven throughout each book. The various poem series each have their own title, and many of these titles begin with “ginen”—“from,” in English—such as “ginen tidelands” or “ginen ta(la)ya.” So there is ostensibly a “tidelands” poem that is (or will be) complete, somewhere, and the books only present fragments from the work in its ongoing totality. This division, interweaving, and focus on fromness accomplishes multiple objectives: it conjures an impossible place in which all of these poems are collected, as if all of the fragments we receive are transmissions. But it also insists upon a home, a definite starting point, a place of origin. It blatantly flaunts the “both/neither” status and simply is. “Trail Mix,” relatedly, considers notions of fromness via atemporality and multiangularity, and considers the ways in which relocation has produced its own “both/neither” status for many Cherokee, myself included, over several generations. Ultimately, “Trail Mix” seeks, through polyvocality and fragment, to discover and wrestle with the permutations and ramifications of the Trail of Tears, in aesthetic and rhetorical modes indebted to the ways in which Perez considers the impact of settler colonialism on the Chamorro.

“Trail Mix” does not portend to be an historical record or to speak on behalf of anyone—despite its delving into persona poems and the voices of ancestors, which are imagined—but rather to be a part of the continued exploration of relocation’s impact. In this, it reflects important novels about the Trail of Tears such as, but not limited to, *Pushing the Bear* by Diane Glancy, *Mountain Windsong* by Robert J. Conley, and more recently, *Riding the Trail of Tears* by Blake M. Hausman. In this regard, “Trail Mix” maintains the

ongoing creative and critical conversation regarding the effects of forced relocation amongst the Cherokee.

The second half of the dissertation, “Red Dead Redemptions,” is comprised of a series of lyric narrative poems written in the wake of and influenced by vital indigenous poets such as Joy Harjo, Carter Rivard, Adrian C. Louis, and Leslie Marmon Silko. These poems interrogate the author’s own privilege and the peculiar diaspora of the “postindian” (to borrow another term from Vizenor). In *Manifest Manners*, Vizenor writes that the postindian “resumes the ontic significance of native modernity. Postindians are the *new* stories of conversions and survivance; the tricky observance of native stories in the associated context of postmodernity” (Vizenor viii). “Red Dead Redemptions” seeks to represent, complicate, and provide a lyrical voice to the postindian experience.

In her essay “The Possibilities of a Native Poetics,” published in the anthology *Nothing But The Truth*, Kimberly Blaeser discusses the ways in which the poems contained therein are “engaged in framing a response to the perceived expectations of Native American Literature” (414). She goes on to consider the “continuities” of Native poetry and the ways in which “the poems carry history, and therefore perspective, into their encounters with language and life. They also carry the will to survive. Perhaps the most significant facet of a Native Poetics involves the impetus to rise off the page, to teach, to incite continuance” (414-5). This adheres to both my view of Native Poetics—to borrow her phrase—and also to the work “Red Dead Redemptions” is performing. By utilizing contemporary, accessible vernacular, these poems are accessible to a non-Native audience

while simultaneously operating for—albeit, carefully, not on behalf of—a Native, and more specifically, a mixedblood Cherokee readership.

The poems in “Red Dead Redemption” function within a Cherokee literary lineage identified by both non-Native scholars and the contemporary Cherokee literary critic Daniel Heath Justice, whose work has been key to the construction of this dissertation. In their interesting but problematic 1965 collection, *Walk in your Soul: Love Incantations of the Oklahoma Cherokee*, Jack Frederick Kilpatrick and Anna Gritts Kilpatrick serve as settler colonial voyeurs for Cherokee love poems and Cherokee poetry by and large. Their translations are mostly uninteresting, but the introduction provides a few helpful phraseologies for reading the “Red Dead Redemption” section, most notably that there are “certain phraseological ritualisms that are liberally strewn throughout all Cherokee Magic. Every action transpires ‘quickly’ or ‘very quickly’” (7). “Red Dead Redemptions” is especially attentive to those “phraseological ritualisms” that might permeate United Statesian colloquialisms, thus maintaining, or codifying, a postindian mode of Native poetry that acknowledges the creative debt the poet has to United Statesian culture.

The poems in “Red Dead Redemptions” are also interested specifically in the lyric narrative tradition and in cultivating a dialogic methodology between reader and writer, or possibly between the reader and the book itself, which will be discussed later. Drawing on New York School poet Frank O’Hara’s poetics and specifically his tongue-in-cheek essay “Personism,” in which he discusses his realization that, while writing a poem for a person he was in love with, he could have “use[d] the telephone instead of writing the poem, and so Personism was born... [Personism] puts the poem between the poet and person, Lucky Pierre style, and the poem is gratified. The poem is at last between two persons instead of

between two pages” (O’Hara 442). The immediacy and graspability of thought and experience, and the transfer thereof via verse, is vital to the “Red Dead Redemptions” sequence, as it works in a steadfast, talky rhetoric to communicate intimate thoughts and experiences, drawing specifically on O’Hara’s style—and the New York School style in general—and Personism. The poems also emulate O’Hara’s subtle irony and genuine, though extremely complicated, love of the United States and its popular culture.

One O’Hara poem to which I often return, and from which I’ve drawn, is “Having a Coke with You.” Published towards the end of his life, the poem works in anaphora, repeating “perhaps” four times to begin four lines towards the beginning of the poem, and using “and” repeatedly to conjure the breathlessness of love. The title, which refers to a popular advertisement for Coca-Cola, reflects O’Hara’s—and the New York School’s—mobilization of the insidious earworm of popular culture reframed within a context of poetry, which is too frequently perceived in the mainstream as a gilded artform. Seemingly paradoxically, sitting alongside pop culture references and immediately graspable language are these lines, which conclude the first stanza:

it is hard to believe when I’m with you that there can be anything as still
as solemn as unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it
in the warm New York 4 o’clock light we are drifting back and forth
between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles (O’Hara 262).

This is a potent and moving shift into the high lyric, and when juxtaposed with both the vernacular and then-contemporary immediacy of the rest of the verse, heightens and troubles the poem’s rhetorical consideration of love, and tramples any question of irony. I prize the sincerity of this poem and the ways in which O’Hara turns a love poem into a

cultural collage of sorts, while still remaining subtly aware of the ways in which his affection for the addressee of the poem is subject to being warped by United Statesian popular culture. The poems in “Red Dead Redemptions” query that relationship by unironically making reference to our current American moment—the name is a pun upon the popular Western video game series starring cowboys and featuring a handful of occasional token Indians—while attempting to both complicate those references and employ them to situate the poet as a product of this moment.

However, as I am an indigenous poet, the question of my poetry’s complicity in a pernicious settler-state culture must be considered. Though it is an extremely difficult question that will take a lifetime (and an oeuvre!) to explore in enough depth to answer, it’s vital to consider how, specifically, indigenous folks can move comfortably in urban settings. Set on the south side of Chicago, Theodore Van Alst’s gritty collection of short stories *Sacred Smokes* provides a compelling portrait of the anger and sadness permeating the urban Indian experience. For Van Alst, and for many of the poems in “Red Dead Redemptions”—most notably “Myth,” which was shaped in part by Van Alst’s tales of youthful, hedonistic indiscretions—this disaporic feeling manifests (no pun intended) itself in acts of rebellion that mostly add up to petty crimes, but can dangerously snowball into dodgy, seriously criminal acts. In light of this, then, for the purposes of this introduction, perhaps the question we should be asking is how can indigenous poets decolonize—a messy and complicated word—contemporary United Statesian poetry, while still acknowledging there are some phenomenal and influential non-Native poets from whom we have much to learn? How do we work to indigenize—perhaps a more exact word than

decolonize—the rhetorical style of the New York School, or the messy and playful disruption provided by the L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poets?

Perhaps one model to whom we can turn is that of Lynn Riggs, who is discussed at length in Daniel Heath Justice's *Our Fire Survives the Storm: A Cherokee Literary History*. Justice writes:

As an outland Cherokee far from the land base of the Nation, a gay man in the first half of the twentieth century, and an Oklahoman self-exiled to the artistic centers of the United States...Riggs experienced multiple levels of dispossession: from his homeland in Indian Territory/Oklahoma; from the Cherokee Community and its traditions and, ultimately, from himself (94).

Riggs provides an interesting early model for Cherokee like me, operating as an Oklahoma Indian far removed from Oklahoma, and still suffering under various Eurowestern societal realms that “sanction what an Indian can say” (Justice 94-95). Justice goes on to describe Riggs' play, *The Cherokee Night*, as having an “overwhelming tone... of moderated despair” (103). And while *The Cherokee Night* deals predominately in anti-allotment arguments—the idea being that allotments would destroy kinship and encourage assimilation—“Red Dead Redemptions” deals with many of the other themes present in the play, such as that of a mixedblood questioning his place within his Nation—a consistent theme in contemporary Native American literature and criticism—and that of skin color and its importance to how the artist is racially perceived. Justice concludes his section on Riggs by noting “the allotment dispossession of the Cherokees of Indian Territory clearly shaped the course of Lynn Riggs's life, just as it continues to impact many Cherokees today and our relationships to our communities, tribal connections, and cultural responsibilities”

(108). One overarching question “Red Dead Redemptions” poses is “what do we do now that we have wound up spread across the United States, many of us (myself included) learning the old myths and legends from books—often recorded by non-Native anthropologists?” “Red Dead Redemptions” examines the odd physical and existential diaspora of the contemporary mixedblood and could only exist due to work by influential writers such as Lynn Riggs.

Another manner by which “Red Dead Redemptions” practices survivance is via its use of humor, specifically what Vine Deloria, Jr. termed “Indian Humor” in his book *Custer Died For Your Sins*. Indian humor, which Robert J. Conley notes is “a disguise for the profound,” establishes a still-here mentality and a reminder that United States history actively and perniciously works to erase the Native experience (Conley 109). It also seeks to remind Natives that we still possess varying forms of power, specifically those centering around orality: “the liberty to cruelly degrade,” Mikhail Bahktin writes, is a potent one (qtd. in Owens, 226). Deloria notes that, within United Statesian popular culture, the figure of the Indian is played as stoic, silent, and serious, an observation echoed by Dean Rader and Daniel Heath Justice. Of course, Deloria observes, “the Indian people are exactly opposite of [that] popular stereotype.” (146). I concur with Deloria’s statement and believe that one vital manner of breaking down that stereotype is through a resigned playfulness that strikes me as uniquely indigenous.

In this, then, it follows that “Red Dead Redemptions” owes a great rhetorical debt to the late Adrian C. Louis, whose dry and sardonic poems, especially those in *Vortex of Indian Fevers*, many consisting of the poet performing ostensibly uninteresting activities such as going to the grocery store or watching football, were and remain formative for me. His

poem “The Fine Print on a Label of a Bottle of Non-Alcohol Beer,” which is my favorite poem of all time, particularly influenced the arc of many poems in “Red Dead Redemptions,” especially through the ways in which Louis masterfully runs an emotional gamut from humor that contains both Indian and universal tenants which are at turns emotive, wistful, and/or empowering in a mere 20 lines.

Louis’ poem begins “The Chiefs are winning / and I’m on the couch waiting / for the second half of their grunt tussle against the Redskins to begin” (Louis 33). Using accessible language, Louis acknowledges the ways in which Native avatars infiltrate even the most banal aspects of United Statesian culture, while also hinting at the history of intertribal warfare by having the Chiefs fight the Redskins—two teams who, in theory, should be on the same side. The poem continues by examining his struggles with sobriety, concluding with a lengthy direct address consisting of an indigenization of the titular label’s copy:

my brother,

you are pouring this illusion

down your throat

because you are an alcoholic child of alcoholic parents

and they were the alcoholic children of your alcoholic grandparents (Louis

33).

In addition to addressing the larger and more troublesome frequency of Native alcoholism—a point to which “Red Dead Redemptions” speaks as well—Louis here is imagining a world in which branding is, if not decolonized, then at least made more Native, which draws, in my mind, a direct line to O’Hara’s “Having a Coke with You,” with O’Hara’s Coca-Cola replaced by a non-alcoholic beer. The poem continues to speak in the voice of the

hallucinatory indigenous label and concludes by acknowledging the large and upsetting history of Native struggles with addiction: “...days before your people / learned how to hotwire the Great Spirit with chemical prayers” (Louis 34). There is certainly Indian humor present here via the protective irony within the paradox of “chemical prayers,” but sitting between those lines’ difficult playfulness is a painful truth about the dangers of settler colonialism, here represented through the jeopardies of intoxicants but easily extended into the larger menaces of inculcation to United Statesian modes of living and thinking.

Another poem from which I’ve drawn deeply is Laura Da’s “Passive Voice” from her 2015 collection *Tributaries*. The poem begins with pedagogy, the poet speaking of how she’s used “a trick to teach students / how to avoid passive voice” (14). This trick is to add the phrase “by zombies” after each verb—if the phrase fits, then the sentence is in the passive. It’s a clever teacherly trick, but nowhere near as brilliant as the leap Da’ takes thereafter, in which she pontificates upon what her students—whose racial makeup is never made clear—may think as their summer vacation family trips inevitably move them past “historical marker[s] [that] beckon them to the / site of an Indian village” (ibid.). She concludes the poem with a chilling sextet imagining their imagination of the Indian village:

Riveted bramble of passive verbs
etched in wood—
stripped hands
breaking up from the dry ground
to pinch the meat
of their young red tongues (ibid).

Da's poem begins playfully with a fun anecdote about how to teach a specific aspect of syntax and ends by winding that aspect of syntax into the larger history of the eradication of Natives and our voices. Whenever I read it, I like to imagine hearing it aloud: the laughs of the crowd at the initial three stanzas squashed by the scale and earnestness of the poem's powerful and painful ending; I cannot think of the strange and potent connection between relocation and the passive voice without feeling a deep tug in my guts.

Louis' and Da's poems in general, and these two in particular, coincide with the facet of my poetics that believes the strongest poems are the ones that manage to hit a variety of emotional notes on the heart's scale, and I have attempted to utilize that belief more specifically in "Red Dead Redemptions," which is quite a bit more lighthearted than "Trail Mix." I could point to, and write at length about, many Native writers and poems who succeed in thoroughly navigating the emotional spectrum—Joy Harjo's "She Had Some Horses," Gerald Vizenor's *Bearheart: The Heirship Chronicles*, Santee Frazier's *Dark Thirty*, Deb Miranda's *Bad Indians*, "The Legend of Juan Malo" sequence that runs across *[guma]* and *[lukao]* in Craig Santos Perez's *from Unincorporated Territory*—but the writer to whom I most return, and am most tonally indebted, is Adrian C. Louis.

These observations regarding tone apply to entire books as well. There should be even more modulation across a collection. And while not every poem can have moments of both levity and sadness, there can still be minor, albeit key, tonal shifts that allow the poem to be more expansive and, thereby, to operate with greater power.

Of course, the poems in "Red Dead Redemption," with a handful of exceptions, operate fairly straightforwardly in the lyric narrative, as opposed to the more fragmented or gap-filled poems that "Trail Mix" features. The lyric narrative is the chosen poetic mode

for this section not only because O'Hara and Louis and Da' do it so well and I've internalized their styles, but also because there is an immediacy and vibrancy to the lyric that successfully humanizes the poet, and given that non-Native readers can be given to extremely stereotypical (and inexact) preconceived notions about what Native poetry might look and sound like and what subjects, themes, and issues it might express, the lyric might also break down those notions and widen readers' perceptions of what "Native American poetry" might consist of. Heid E. Erdrich observes in the introduction to *New Poets of Native Nations*, which she also edited:

unless our poetry conforms to some stereotypical notion of Native American history and culture in the past or unless it depicts spiritual relationship to the natural world of animals and plants and landscape, it goes unrecognized. We do and we do not write of treaties, battles, and drums. We do and we do not write about eagles, spirits, and canyons. Native poetry may be those things, but it is not only those things. It is also about grass and apologies, bones and joy, marching bands and genocide, skin and social work, and much more. But who would know? (xiv)

Erdrich's point is an important one for 21st Century poetics to bear in mind, and the poems in "Red Dead Redemptions," in the ways in which they depict a Native speaker performing the same tasks and having the same life experiences as non-Native folks, not only reifies the fact that Native folks are still around—and not just in museums!—but that we attend weddings and eat frozen pizzas, too. To paint a portrait of the contemporary urban Indian is to point at a certain assimilation that has its benefits and drawbacks. The subject of audience is always a tricky one; I find myself drawn to the idea that "Trail Mix" is

written more specifically for a Cherokee audience, or folks that are versed in Cherokee history, while “Red Dead Redemptions” seeks a wider audience who can recognize different facets of themselves in the poems.

This observation begets the larger question of how “Trail Mix” and “Red Dead Redemptions” specifically fit together as two long sequences in the same manuscript. I’ve covered the former’s emphasis on the ramifications of the past and the latter’s emphasis on the present day (while still not ignoring those ramifications). The two sequences speak to each other and provide a larger and more complex portrait of postindian Cherokee survivance than if either section were lengthened into its own book-length manuscript in which the conceits would be pushed to a breaking point. While my dissertation is bound by Microsoft Word to present the two sections in a linear fashion, my vision for the published version of the manuscript is quite different. “Trail Mix” and “Red Dead Redemptions” will begin at separate ends of the book and meet in the middle. The reader will have to flip the book 180 degrees towards themselves to read the second sequence; the poems “Creation,” which ends “Trail Mix,” and “Goodbye,” which ends “Red Dead Redemptions,” will be side-by-side, but moving down the page in opposite directions. Each of the two sequences will feature different covers drawn by different artists, and blurbs will be placed on the inside front cover in a subtle homage to Deb Miranda’s playful blood quantum-based art on the inside of her memoir *Bad Indians*.

My rationale for this construction draws largely upon several analyses undertaken in Dean Rader’s highly influential critical work *Engaged Resistance: American Art, Literature, and Film from Alcatraz to the NMAI*. While discussing Edgar Heap of Birds’ *Ocmulgee Sign Project*, in which Heap of Birds audaciously and comically indigenizes the

bureaucratic aesthetic and language of governmental street signage—e.g. a highway sign that might look like it will tell a driver how far from New York she is instead lists purchased, stolen, and reclaimed as mile markers—Rader notes that Heap of Birds’ projects “establish a dialogue between the lexical and the visual, the connotative and the denotative” (201-202). The construction of *Trail Mix*, holistically, aims to take the book—typically considered conceptually lexical and denotative—and bring in the visual and connotative aspects, via the necessitated interaction between reader and book through its designed circularity.

Upon my invitation as a fellow to the National Museum of the American Indian in the spring of 2018 to study for a weekend under Brenda J. Childs, I was struck by the design of NMAI: how it spiraled up, how its space was so open and inviting. Rader gives voice to this, citing its “architecture of compositional resistance” (212). Rader continually refers to the circularity—his word—of both the external and internal design of the building, and the ways in which that befits a curatorial invitation that adheres to that of many Nations—a transindigenous aesthetic—while opening itself up to non-Native visitors as well. This adheres to the project of *Trail Mix*’s design: to do something intriguing, iconoclastic, and indigenous with a reified concept, be it the museum in the NMAI’s case, or the book in mine.

Alongside the sequences’ eventual published format, many poems within complement each other in their use of the sonnet. It’s no secret the sonnet is virtually genetic amongst Eurowestern writers, but I’m more interested in playing with the received form, turning it upside down and seeing what comes out of its pockets. In this, I’m beholden to Robert Lowell, whose *Notebook*, while still predominantly adhering to meter and rhyme, aggressively shakes up content and often features strange juxtapositions or nonlinearities

atypical of the form, and to Terrance Hayes, whose *American Sonnets for my Past and Future Assassin* not only plays with non-rhymed and unmetered poems, but also works in titular anaphora in its repetition of titles, as *Trail Mix* does. I've chosen the sonnet as a form to return to and to subtly bury (there are several sonnets in the manuscript), as I'm devoted to making a mess of reified Eurowestern forms. In this, I consider Linda Hogan's prose piece "Sonnet," first published in 1980 in *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, to be foundational: as a story of a young woman striving to break away from patriarchal traditions, there is no mention of writing, poetry, or sonnets. "Sonnet" consists of 39 paragraphs spread across 10 sections; there is no 14 to be found, and certainly no meter or rhyme. It is in prose! The piece brilliantly begs the question: is it a sonnet because Hogan has labeled it as such? Or at all? Is the title ironic? Is the story of the protagonist, Meg, and her struggles between love and exhaustion from and for men a replication of Hogan's own trials with received Eurowestern forms, in a commentary upon how form can both free and constrain at once? The story offers no answers for its title and is truly puzzling; the prose itself is enigmatic and powerful, typical of Hogan's compelling writing, but the title remains a huge and beautiful question that draws me in again and again for an answer both present and not, like a word on the tip of your tongue that you can't quite derive. My rationale for using sonnets is not so grandiose, but rather to invite a reader to reconsider—if they even notice in the first place, as only one is labeled—what we think about when we think about the sonnet, and what it might mean for a Native poet to enter into the hifalutin world of formal poetry.

Ultimately, the two sequences of *Trail Mix* harmonize in dissonance: "Trail Mix" is serious, "Red Dead Redemptions" slightly playful; "Trail Mix" is historically entrenched,

“Red Dead Redemptions” documents the unspooling present moment. Both interrogate what it might mean to be Cherokee. Aesthetically, the poems in the “Trail Mix” section have more movement and white space, which aligns with a major theme in the section: walking. The poems in “Red Dead Redemptions” are tighter, with less white space, reflecting the immediacy of the present moment in which they take place. Together, the sections strive to comprise a complex vision of Cherokee postindian life and thought.

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TRAIL MIX

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TRAIL MIX

Wado, Prez Jackson, old fool! Did you know westward was the direction taken by the spirits of the dead?

-Brandon Hobson, "How Tsala Entered the Spirit World and Became a Hawk"

MYTH

The sky is made of crystal
and the land is suspended by four strings.

WALK

Santee says
never say trail of tears

driving the car to the mounds Santee
says not to do lots
we are driving on the paved roads
that weren't there going west it wasn't that cold
we went to the out of control mounds

they were so unkempt
we didn't know where Mink was
we looked so deeply for her

Kim rubbed tobacco
on Turtle and wrapped
a song in Anishinaabemowin around the wind

we remember you, remember us

WALK

bible black sky and fine horns sparkle out
from the radio
“Give Me Love (Give Me Peace On Earth)”

the rich man meant it
inasmuch as he meant his kind of peace

step by step the radio dragging
us up next

Redbone playfully thumps

we dance back dancing
whirling our strong legs
across time

WALK

wind

thick

legs feet

air

our skin against the weather

pushed

the time it was very late and we couldn't

the rocks angry against
our feet, the men
laughing in their shoes

POEM FROM THE IMAGINED PERSPECTIVE OF OUR TRUMP VOTING COUSIN

Let's burrow down
into the stolen

what you don't
agree they

took a lot
they gave us lots

let's make it
more back about

small business
let's walk

back
to the times

before
the government

controlled
everything

WALK
vocabulary lesson

☞PZ

like this?

how to?

how do we?

then? now?

is it okay to?

☞WA

POEM WRITTEN WHILE WATCHING *SAW III*

the lights
like teeth

so

the always, dying
there's never

a fun one where survivors party

nope

does your alibi hold

to ache
to keep going

WALK

My hair is walking out of my head. I've been walking around the neighborhood thinking about myself mostly entirely. My immediacy I mean. I walk up and down Locust and Burleigh and sometimes I take the bus and walk around Kinnickinnick and when we went to the mounds we parked on something like Mound View drive and we could see the nice houses behind what we thought was Thunderbird. When I am on the phone I walk around the apartment. The heat walks from the heater to keep the apartment unlike the cold outside. The step, the rhythm. I used to love to dance at dance parties, beer and chaos. The television's noise walks into the space of the room which walks into me, my genetic memory of walking.

WALK

Don't get me
wrong—I'm implicated

here too, I am
reaping the benefits

from this stolen
land. We drive

on the paved streets
where there was grass.

MYTH

We are suspended from four strings.
The temporary suspension of
the Treaty of New Echota.

WALK

no no no

out

red

blood

dark

please

oh the no

knifed faces

nothing

left sighs

heads down

nothing

right

all torn

eventually

WALK

south then west
then northwest then

south
the trod bored

men forcing
sex upon

the women the pregnant
the yelps crawl

is this my story to tell
how can this not

but

neither MORE DRUMS nor REALIZATIONS

it's long and the strongest tiresome. there're fights. we're still talking but it's getting less and less out loud. we stomp and slide. already it's dark and then light again and then already it's dark again. the trees don't understand; we realize this due to continuous peering at the sky through branch after branch, twisting. our ankles get tired. we carry each other when we need to, though sometimes we're prodded and forced to let each other down. we speak jokes still. it's slow but so long and then longer. maybe forever to the home we mostly didn't choose.

EXTRA EXTRA: AN ADDRESS TO US

poem in the voice of Elias Boudinot

I was literally stabbed in the back
by y'all. I get it,

I do, but, come on, really,
the back? Was my signing of the Treaty of New Echota

so stab-worthy? I can see in my still-presence
the *Phoenix* endures, though

only in English now, I see. For those who don't know
that's the newspaper I established, bilingual,

Tsalagi and English in ink side by side
like the veins of us mixedbloods.

I'm not mad. *I am not as my fathers were*,
I said in Philadelphia in 1826 to a kind group of colonizers

who allowed me to state my case. This is prelocation,
which is a portmanteau of pre- and relocation.

I'm clever with language like that. I get it. I know how to talk
to people, how to navigate what so condescendingly is called

"civilization." You know, at least they stabbed Caesar in the front.
I want you to understand I have done all I did—signing, speaking, printing—

to further our great Nation (as opposed to their nation).
I have no regrets. My heart and my tongue both keep a deep rhythm.

SEQUOYAH

I'm George Guess, I guess
I'm George Guess, I guess, I guess

ah to make a whole movement
of breath

to say what we used
to say

but now written down
eventually i(t)'ll get put

into English like this I'm George
now into the English sound

we sent the syllabary to Boston
to be pressed for the press (wado Elias!)

they couldn't figure out the arc of \mathcal{B}
so \mathcal{B} temporarily became B

to B or not to \mathcal{B}
that is the question

GROCERY STORY

today i went to the grocery store
and bought several organic fruits

and vegetables so as to keep my health
tip top i carried the little blue

cherokee card in my wallet
there was a good deal on seltzer

a song played
that reminded me of my ex-wife i paused and cried

by the frozen pizzas then put a frozen pizza
into my cart i walked around the store listening to the music

looking at the cans and stacks the weird
infinite finite nature of the grocery store it was sunny a woman softly

crying by the bread
i am never more alive

than when i am filling up my cart i walked more
and more through ever

-y aisle it came time to put
my things on the conveyer belt and have them

recorded with a satisfying beep then
pull out the small piece of plastic

with all my money on it and give it
to the nice lady who smiled

took my money i didn't need to give
it to her i should have just walked out and not paid for anything

she gave me my card
back reminded me it needed

to slide into
the computer

which asked a few questions
a man put my things into a bag for me

i got into my car on the stolen land and
on the radio they were discussing

the Treaty
of New Echota

WALK

so going, move
downstairs to say hello to Precious

and her baby PJ,
teething

so going, move
out sunlight

hotter than usual
Santee says

never say trail of tears
leave it buried

in the garden
that Arthur Sze told him about

COMFORT

not yet not yet
(t)here

cold yet we're all
together

for a moment we are happy (t)here
fire keeps

flame flicks a fleeting warmth that keeps
getting darker

ours it is ours
we will be there

we will be here
ours it is ours

DO THE RIGHT THING

there's no way it doesn't end

in violence

MUSEUM PLACARD FOR AN EASTERN BAND CHEROKEE BALL STICK FROM THE 19TH CENTURY

Was this ball stick (di-la-sga-li-di) held anxiously in some young man's hands as he struggled to hide their juddering from confident, capable opponents? Or perhaps the other way around—held by a tough and gifted player staring down some weaklings, certain he would handily defeat them and therefore display the strength of his clan. Or, less dramatically, a thoroughly average player, relatively unremarkable, some flashes of athleticism and some sad whiffs, used this item. Is it true a man is only as good as his stick, or what he does with it? While other dilasgaldi feature carvings that might represent the player's clan or aspects of his personality, the one you're looking at is clean and smooth, almost generic, which allows the viewer to transplant whatever kind of Cherokee we want onto it—it becomes a palimpsest. Did the player here own slaves or murder for land or betray his fellow Cherokee or members of another group? Did he have relatives pushed west whom he will never see again, or never met in the first place, murdered or raped or tortured on the walk? Some combination? None of the above? The dilasgaldi —used for recreation but also to prove one's worth and masculinity—becomes a mode of a different kind of play for the viewer, one who is forced to reconcile its sleek beauty with the pure violence of the game itself, and in this way, the stick, which loops and doubles back on itself, becomes a metaphor for the complicated legacy of the Cherokee.

MYTH

Crystal, and Dayunisi
swimming down to unearth
us here, the trickster
finding us
whether we wanted to be found
or not, and us
inventing our own
quote-unquote discovery.

CREATION

after Jenean Hornbuckle's painting "Creation," oil on canvas, NMAI 26.2876

A bit packed

up here,

isn't it? Let's make the earth.

The beetle's body shows the world

in ways words can't.

The water ripples

in ways water can't.

In the animal's body
we find ourselves.

In the land, well,
that's to be decided, ah eh?

There's a terror in the spread of Dayunisi's limbs,
in his strange face.

If I didn't know any better, I'd think those contortions
were a symbol of fear, or confusion.

He's moving north, and surrounded

(t)here, at the National Museum of the American Indian. We stop
to stare at our own making.

It gets lighter as you look up,

the blue moving north, too, from dark to light.

RED DEAD REDEMPTIONS

let's get on with it

but what about the past

-John Ashbery, "The Tomb of Stuart Merrill"

Finding others that are just as alone as you are makes navigating the longitudes and latitudes of postcolonial America that much easier to bear.

-Sky Hopinka, "A Dislocated Wild"

THE NATIONAL ANTHEM

Regularly shit gets blown prettily up
when whoever's singing sings the word *glare*, which is the rocket's,
to punctuate the violence, or

defamiliarize it, I'm not
sure. Sometimes I go to the grocery store
and just walk around when I'm feeling lonely. The rockets

and bombs *gave proof*, the song says:
violence was our best option, and despite and/or because of the kabooms,
the flag remained. I expect people to be there

for me all the time but I am terrible
at reciprocating, at
listening. Outside of Matt and Aly's Chicago garden apartment

the city erected
a massive flag that warbles pathetically; it's too colossal
for the soft breezes

of the Windy City. Matt hypothesizes it's
so you can see the flag from your car,
going east on I-90. If I had any empathy for this broken country, I would hurtle it

at this flag, the inadvertent piteousness of itself wrapped around itself, nowhere
to go but further inward. On still days, you can't
even really tell what it is other than a *mélange*

of red
approximating blood and blue
approximating sky.

A SEARCHING AND FEARLESS MORAL INVENTORY

*Have you ever looked in the mirror
and decided that you want to look different?
How would you like to look different?
-“The Bird with Big Feet,” as told by Kathi Littlejohn*

My face is inherently leftly slanted
which I only notice after looking

in the mirror for too long
which I haven't done in a long

time but I got a haircut
and as it's only human nature

I looked in the mirror. I
hate myself, which means there must be

some part of me who
does not want to be at war

and so simply sits having never
understood hate and so simply sits

being the small part of the self
without hate.

IT HAS TO GO SOMEWHERE

epithalamium for l&d

my computer is dying, my friends are getting sucked
into a vortex, the cats are perpendicular, the heat
is on. lindsay and daniel got married tonight

and everyone was talking about love, it was like
we were smoking cigarettes made of love and exhaling
love into the air. chris twirled me

to remind me what it's like to publicly
love. so much of life is just waiting through
the commercials. the royals are winning tonight

because the mariners played poorly. the cats often
eat their food so quick they throw it
back up which is a form of love too:

sometimes you take in too much and it has to go somewhere
so it goes on the floor which covers the earth to keep our feet clean!

ECHOLOCATIONS

after Gerald Vizenor, with a line from Shakira

As I nametag through life on took land
I send out echolocations of confusion
and gratitude to anything

that can receive it
the big ladder
the little ditch

constellations
made from shifting satellites
named after the children of the wealthy

for birthday presents
chairs made for sitting unsat in
clouds move if you look

or not
there will be a point
at which boxes will hold every

thing you own some frog hops into a pond
and if you're some combination of good lucky dead
you've got one hell of a poem *underneath your*

clothes there's an endless story the little ladder
the big ditch
whichever you think is better is better

BALLGAME

Where did the time go? The Royals game's already in the seventh inning, what happened? What happened in the fourth? Who led off? Why'd we mark error on the scorecard? How are we still alive? What's really bringing us all together here? Is it bad I want you to tell me? Why is the bathroom so fun? Who died during this game, and how? Who cared and who cares? Why did I spend so much of my life asking so what, and so what? Why am I still here? We won the big one four years ago; why are we so bad now? What's happening? How many keys to how many doors? How many records get bought then never get played? Why do we get tired in the middle of our day? Should we just go to sleep? It's already the seventh? Why the cheekboned faces on the illustration of displaced Cherokee on the National Park Service's Trail of Tears Association Trail of Tears National Historic Trail website? Why'd I download the .jpeg? Why can't I stop staring at them, their just-red-enough-skin sadness poking through my greasy MacBook screen? Where are the Black folks in this picture? We had slaves, right? We had slaves? The Royals are down 5-1 in the top of the eighth, now, they don't have a chance, right?

VISITING THE MILWAUKEE PUBLIC MUSEUM WITH SHANAE

The butterflies just land on your hand there,
if you place your fingers just so on a leaf
in front of them. Who'm I to judge
a butterfly's happiness? The powwow
exhibition is stuck, it doesn't rotate
like it should, but there is an American flag and a cooler
and a bored kid looking scrawny in an ill-fitting T-shirt and an old
laptop, so I guess they got some things right.

They got some things right:
we are still alive, they point out
on occasion, but generally we don't look like how we look
in a museum. That's what a new famous book
by a newly famous Indian author
talks about at the beginning, or at least
that's what I heard on NPR. Shanae crinkles
her nose when I mention I'm reading the book and we talk

at the bar about toxic masculinity
and she's right,
as most always. I don't read
much of the placards, just gallop through
the stuffy halls that portend to hold us,
whatever small history. Shanae pauses to read most

everything. We come away
talking about how unlike the real
the depictions were, how we felt like
we were walking through a big *National Geographic* magazine,
the pain of ossification, and on the first floor

before we got up to the second floor Indian exhibit
we stared at two dinosaurs, one devouring the other's
innards, and I made some joke about colonialism and looked
over at Shanae to see if she laughed—I love her laugh—
and caught her nodding, her eyes fixated
somewhere back before.

SEEING RED

No need to try to understand the man
wearing the dumb inexact idea-of-an-Indian

avatar, the cartoon of us. We already understand
him, we trudged

through land and language for him.
In theory, he can only take

so much, yet here he is
taking ourselves away

as he chomps on eggs made by Latinx dudes
and served by white folks

(in this I am also complicit). We know we will continue complicitly moving
through the four-cornered world

but if I see that motherfucker wearing that insignia again
I will knock his ass down where even Dayunisi can't find him.

WALK

for Angela

During a commercial during Thursday Night Football
I read a Yona Harvey poem Soham gave me that makes me
cry and consider
how I don't use metaphor much, like she says a coat
is a door and I never say anything is anything
other than what it is and yeah of course a coat
is a door and vice versa and her poem
is so meticulous in its loneliness; it's
so beautiful and careful and I'm crying
now which is not a metaphor for anything
except my body, which Angela and I talked about

(more generally as one of many many bodies)

over good gravy at The Nicollet Diner and Angela—
whose house I slept in which come
to think of it is incredibly intimate, and who piloted
her big truck with us in it all over
Minneapolis, narrating the city and driving me
slowly past First Avenue so I could cry
softly there at seeing the ghost of Prince through her window
and time—asked what makes a body
and she meant it
and it was such a beautiful moment with florescence hovering
and I'm so lucky to be surrounded by people
that are still alive!

SESTINA: AMERICAN CHEROKEE

Hey, there is a lot
of food in my pantry. I'm not
proud of it. I don't eat it that often: I tend

to go out instead, maybe catch
the football game or the baseball game,
depending on what's on. Sometimes

I can't finish all my food and I think
maybe I should give my leftovers
away to someone,

anyone. Would that make you
proud? To know I think
that without prodding? Well, not often,

of course. I'd say one out of ten times
I have an impulse to give.
Would my ancestors be not proud of me

for I don't know
no
or maybe I did know no

and forgot its oomph, or
don't have much use for no
anymore.

There may be an occasion in which karma's boomerang
smacks me
whatever it's made of

ten little Indians all killing each other
and/or themselves
I'm proud to be Cherokee

(minus that bullshit about our disposition
towards booze and basketball
though I love booze and basketball).

I rarely eat the Three Sister foods
I'd rather eat out than cook
if I were to guess what that's all about it must be

that I like being waited on,
not just when food
is involved.

Genetic wish for oneupsmanship fulfilled often I think I should have been born bigger and stronger so I could have been a baseball player. Hey are you proud to be an American James 4:6: *God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.* Football players never point at the sky after they screw up a play. Maybe they should how often do you point at the sky do you do it before you eat your food hey does it end this way hey is there anything else hey maybe it ends frequent and never like a basketball game in infinite overtimes a game you can't get thrown out of at least there's food if you forget hard enough there's so much about which to be proud.

MYTH

in which the last word is everything

The darkness is like small animals crawling on top of each other
as we pile into Jimmy's rusted '77 Reliant K
to go shoplift some vodka
to fill our sixteen-year-old minds with anything
other than ourselves.

The four of us walk in the grocery store all
smiles. We make a point to buy some toilet paper;
not enough to attract attention

(an aside:

once we were detained at Wal-Mart while security asked why we needed 200 rolls and
Jimmy said he had diarrhea and we laughed through the cops' sighs and eventually they let
us go and said they'd get us good one day and after we *yeah righted* all over town)

but anyway

we get enough TP to warrant our backpacked presence in the grocery store
and a good start on what we'll need to TP another Jimmy's house later.
Alan elbows a jar of spaghetti sauce onto the ground
around the time Quentin rolls out, stuffed blue
backpack with three Smirnoff handles clanking
and there's a chaos
and somehow they know
and some underpaid manager chases after us
and we jump laughing into Jimmy's running car
and speed off
and for real a cop
follows us for a few blocks
so we take a quick left-right-left
and turn into the Sarah-that-Jimmy-lost-his-virginity-to's garage
to hang out for a bit while we wait for it all to blow over;
plus Sarah's brother is a dealer
so we can smoke a lot
in the little box of moonlight
their garage provides
and her parents, good hard-working Italian folk, second-generation Americans,
always have snacks.

Later I will throw up under a streetlight, then even more later
after Alan gets a blowjob from Jenny (with whom Jimmy is in love)
we go out to the other Jimmy's house
in the fancy suburbs and let the TP fly:

72 rolls' worth floating through the sky
like how some clouds look like birds.
When we're done, we know
we've done something right, we've shown the world
how much we matter.
For the next couple days,
you can see our work from 169-South,
the highway that pushes us down back
from the nicer houses
into our parents' cramped apartments,
the whites of the TP from the trees swaying like surrender flags,

like all the stuff surrounding the part of the eye that sees

which some teachers must've tried
to teach us the word for
in vain they tried to teach us

while we were too busy plotting
how to get away with/from everything.

THE NEXT

in public with my earbuds

in i was in

a movie a music

video sometimes i mouth

the words to

an imagined camera which remains always a few paces ahead

taking a tracking shot of me i do a lot

i go to the grocery
store even when I still have food

i can eat i get

it anyway i get

cans of water on sale, chicken, salad mix in a plastic bag, frozen pizzas, all-natural juice

i get cans of soup on clearance that don't expire

for the longest

so i can eat them

later i like

later i like when it's next i like the next

WON'T GET FOOLED AGAIN

with a line from Bill Olsen

Having emptied as much out of the world as I can stand, I
slump inwards, selfish genes, a not taken-down

Christmas tree, a woman's snores a room over
rendered inaudible, *I'm so lonesome*

every day the Everly Brothers sing in fluffed tandem effectively
defeating their own argument, two people

lonesome together, cold
across America, -25° wind chill or thereabouts outside, the community

meeting at All People's Church on Clarke postponed til next week ok with me,
I don't trust systems of power I can't control, they're knocking

on the latenite doors of protest organizers, waking
their mothers, all hours, the squirrels living

in the gutters are getting louder, maybe they're
laughing, bad earth, the Thunder lost

to Cleveland, LeBron got hot in the fourth and nailed
back-to-back-threes that hollowed Morrow then a nasty pull-up long-two fade,

I don't want flashlights probing my closed eyelids, they remembered
me that time I was drunk and spit and called

them pigs and they took me to a side alley
and put me in the back of the car threatening

to take me down to District 5, the implication
when I got there I'd be out of place, different

from the rounded-up others, I would be safer on the outside,
the implication they were saving me

from myself, little snowflakes like halos, *nothing*
seems to be the same old way the Everly Brothers continue, one

of the cats tips the water bowl so the water ripples
before she drinks it, must be some genetic memory, so frothy

at this forever tipping point, elsewhere big murder,

detonated schoolbus in Kabul, Lindsey Lohan posts

a selfie people realize is photoshopped cause there's a small bottle of soap
that looks bent inwards near her stomach, I hate how I feel

when I say America, paranoia
avalanche, the cops in Milwaukee

have frightened me and I don't have it nearly as bad
as those west of Holton continuously fucked with, I

look white, I am more white than Tsalagi, the baby
downstairs crying, I was telling Lauren

at Sugar Maple how all this must criss-
cross, my cats clean themselves, I am white, I am not white,

didaniyisgi, policeman, translation:
"he argues repeatedly and on purpose

with a purpose,"
in Cherokee the object

proceeds the verb
but is still after the subject, lots

of us swept from southeast to Oklahoma mostly, who
would ever become police or politician, Sitting Bull

killed by Red Tomahawk officer of Indian
Police, I'm scared to walk on ice, I wish I was in a cool rock

and roll band with Ephraim and Soham where I just talked
over squawking guitars, all this used to

be grass, the want to build up, to now conquer sky, *I have been
trying to walk out of this body my whole life*, how can the Everly

Brothers fade out like
that if they're together, I know

it's gotta be tough to not look
white like me

ECHOLOCATIONS PART II
for Dig Reeder

I WAS NOT DEAD Sarah bellows
underneath the little dipper
to some of us disrupting
the quiet dark

tomorrow, a big void
where nothing matters

America Xeroxes
itself nicely

our empty clothes sprawled
like fingers, having known
so much skin

HAVE MERCY

I've gotten a lot
of mileage out
of the luxuries

of slaughter. I
swerved to hit
a collapsed bird

on the road today;
I'm not sure if it
was already dead

or not, but it certainly
couldn't fly. It was
a puddle of a bird.

Meanwhile, several police
officers stood outside
an indoor

soccer field staring off
into the distance
with their guns pointed

at a coyote. One of them
shot at it but it didn't
move; the damn thing

was frozen. They shot
more at it. It continued
to wag its tail mockingly.

I don't know much
about my family history (I'm learning),
but I have a little blue

card I carry that says
I'm Cherokee so I
often feel displaced.

Eventually the youngest
of the gathered officers
got sent over

to the animal and discovered
it was a scarecrow
with a couple of bullet holes

in its ass. Today
the news said
that fifty terrorist attacks

were prevented through
the surveillance of hundreds
of thousands of Americans,

which I saw careening across a screen
displaying the news in a restaurant
while I was eating

lunch. Today's Featured Picture
on Wikipedia is
an Albatross. I admire

the brazen irony
of secrets. A few
of the officers

had missed and put
thumb-sized holes
in the dirt, so

there were ants scurrying
about confusedly, which
come to think of it

is pretty much how ants
always seem to get around.
I bet

they have a better plan
than they get credit for.
We've all got a little

torture in our blood,
but it's a matter of what side
our ancestors were on.

Mine are on both.
I never got

any money from the government

for being Cherokee
but that's the first thing
people ask me

when they find out.
It was so cold
in the airconditioned

restaurant that I felt
uncomfortable, but then
it was so hot

outside that I didn't want
to be there,
either. Most of us

have mercy every now
and again!
I don't

look Cherokee,
except maybe
the nose a bit.

I don't look like
much of anything.
I can't remember the last time

I looked in the mirror. I hate having
my picture
taken.

THE EASE AND DIFFICULTY OF HATING AND LOVING ONE'S SELF

a fly bonks itself against
a screen, seeing the trees

not able to get to them
generally not getting it

feeling morose today and divided
the mixedblood sleeps

alone on a twin mattress
i can't find Santee's book, too bad

i've been thinking about it
i've been driving around

without my driver's license
got refused service for trying to use

my tribal ID at a bar
dust thickens on the tops of things

there's some scene in some movie where some character
says *i have so much to give* pleadingly

i can't remember the context
as far as i can think the fly is going to do a combination of the following

die in my apartment and/or propagate
in my apartment and/or leave my apartment

then die and/or propagate
the mixedblood feeling morose today wishing

I had some gin or something maybe some pills
maybe instead of morose I mean vulnerable

not sure what the difference is or
if they inform each other

if they talk to each other the way the fly
talks to the screen as it yearns to talk to the trees

ANOTHER DRUNK INDIAN POEM

elegy for Adrian C. Louis

The flaws in my veins
course more heavily as I shake

again. The ritual of opening
the bottle, pouring, the soft

burn of the liquor that got cheaper
and cheaper as the bottle

emptied itself faster
and faster. I wish I could

blame the bottle or even
the stuff inside of it,

or the rain or really anything
other than myself. Some hereditary

predilection—I think of my father's
veins, how green they looked against

his toasted skin, how years later I
told a doctor about those veins and the doctor

said he was just dehydrated. Dad said
he quit drinking and then the other day

he calls me with an unmistakable
slur, a glitteriness. At a certain point,

you come to expect the overwhelming
solitude of guilt, and turn

back to the fog of booze to get over it.
I prefer to drink alone;

there's less of a chance of saying something
I regret, though I love

to dance, that open freedom of not caring
what you're saying to whom, the ways

a party becomes a mass of faces

each with their own resolute

absence of potential for much
of anything beyond whatever you want

them to provide in that moment. It's the closest to an ocean
a group of people can get,

and me, there, somewhere in the vortex, smiling like
an island.

I HAVE THINGS THAT HAPPENED IN MY LIFE THAT THERE IS NO RECORD OF

Violins squealing tinny
from the computer (my computer
a robot constructed by other
robots constructed
by other
robots
constructed by humans
constructed by humans) my mother
purchased for me: decrease
in sound! How much
can I get away with until I get
what's coming to me? Let me F11 you down
into nothingness. My student
says she doesn't like how I don't
make them raise their hands before they speak. I say
I don't believe in making them feel
like I know who says what is best,
like cause I point at someone and say
YOU that makes them more right,

more listenable.

Brian Wilson stopped working with the other
Beach Boys to the point where the group
almost split up and most people think *Pet Sounds*—the record
that came out right before
they got into
their biggest fights—is their
best but
I really like the four or five
records that came out after that one for their
playfulness. Anyway,
obedience
is the name of the game.

I don't say no
to much. I, I, I, I, I:
all the time
when younger. *Who do you
think you are*, the radio
thumps at me, and Jean Knight makes
a convincing point when she croons *you're never*

gonna get my love. I've been caught

shoplifting; arrested for public

drunkenness;

taken citations for partying

too loud and not
stopping

after a warning; thrown
up upon

so many shoes; accidentally cut

I don't know how many people's
feet with glass from

wine jugs, beer bottles, fifths

of rye I carelessly smashed; run away from

different cops (inasmuch
as there are different cops)

after they shined a flashlight on me

and John

peeing

in an alleyway with stolen whiskey

and Cokes in our hands. I want

to obey, I only have

at most two drinks before I drive anymore, I say

hello, officer and smile.

Brian Wilson strove to write a pocket

symphony. War Machine, the UFC

fighter, beat up his ex, Christy Mack, real

bad a lot

then tried to kill himself

I understand the latter

but not the former; I can't obey

the drawbacks of my bad life; I look at my unslit

wrists out of sweet

habit. I was full

at breakfast

and now I'm
hungry
again.
I favor music with vertiginous guitars. Last night I had to turn
down the Condo Fucks record because
my downstairs neighbors have an easily agitated
baby but
all I want to do
is make it
louder, always.
I've thrown up from disobeying my body's orders
so much, but not
for a long time now. I remember
once I threw up
on a tree
then huffed a bunch of ether
then watched
Quamar play *Fallout* for a couple
hours. I use my credit
card too much. Who
makes my shoes?
In fact I had a beer
earlier today even though I promised
myself I wouldn't. *I have things that happened
in my life that there is no record of,*
says the ex-wife of an NFL player when
asked if she experienced domestic abuse,
why she and many other wives
didn't come forward, how
scared they were to. I don't believe
in any magical or spiritual force holding earth
together, but then I look
out the window at the tops of red trees

poking their way
above my neighbors' vertiginous roof

and below a pile
of dishes ruins the view

I'll wait

as long as I can, and I don't know

why

I wait to do them, I like
hot water and soap and warm
clean smell but

I don't like

to do,
you know? Led Zeppelin
stole the riff
from "Stairway to Heaven" from the band
Spirit, who are best known
for their one-hit wonder
tune "I Got A Line On You," a classic
AM radio rocker.

All this is why
I like
so
much
to imagine being
dead: to obey
the natural order of doing
so much and then
not anything
again but of course for now I am still
standing, unless you subscribe
to that philosophical view that
only that
which you can see

exists.

FRANKLIN K.R. CLINE

EDUCATION

PhD, English—Creative Writing, University of Milwaukee-Wisconsin, Milwaukee, WI	May 2019
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI	April 2014
Master of Arts in Literature, Truman State University, Kirksville, MO	May 2011
Bachelor of Arts, Truman State University, Kirksville, MO <i>Majors: English (emphasis in criticism and composition) and Philosophy & Religion</i>	July 2009

AWARDS

- Distinguished Dissertation Fellowship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2018-present
- Advanced Opportunity Fellowship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2015-2018
- Graduate Teaching Assistantship, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014-2016
- University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee American Indian Student Services Student Success Recognition Award, Fall 2014-Fall 2016
- Western Michigan University All-University Graduate Teaching Effectiveness Award, 2014
- Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Western Michigan University, 2011-2014
- Gwen Frostic Fellowship, Western Michigan University, 2011
- Graduate Teaching Assistantship, Truman State University, 2010-2011

CREATIVE AND ACADEMIC PUBLICATIONS

(An explanation: each poem in my full-length book of poetry, *So What*, is entitled “So What”—each “So What” in this list is a different poem!)

- *So What*. Vegetarian Alcoholic Press, 2017. 55 pp.
- *Y Que* (Spanish translation of *So What*). forthcoming from Vegetarian Alcoholic Press
- “Ballgame,” “Sestina Written After I Call My Mother.” *Yellow Medicine Review*, forthcoming
- “Walk.” *Dreginald*, forthcoming
- “The Ease and Difficulty of Hating and Loving One’s Self.” *Science-Based Vulnerability: Scientists and Poets Resist*, forthcoming
- “Looking West on 26th and Emerson.” *Ouroboros*, forthcoming
- “Review of *Carnivalia*.” *Georgia Review*, forthcoming
- “Eat.” *Eat Local Read Local*, April 2019
- “Give Me Shelter.” *The Politics of Shelter*, Brackish Daughters Publishing, 2018
- “And.” *Outlook Springs*, Issue 5
- “Sonnet: To Eat, To Fall In Love.” *Eat Local / Read Local*, 2018
- “So What.” *Matter: A Journal of Political Poetry*, Issue 15
- “So What”; “So What.” *Forklift, Ohio*. Issue 35-36
- “So What.” *Wisconsin’s Best Emerging Poets*. Z Publishing, 2017
- “So What”; “So What”; “So What.” *Red Ink*, Issue 19.2
- “Sonnet: The Spider and the Fly.” *Eat Local / Read Local*, 2017

- “So What”; “So What.” *Return to the Gathering Place of the Waters: 39 Milwaukee Poets*. Vegetarian Alcoholic Press, 2017
- “No Escapin’ This”; “So What.” *Resist Much / Obey Little*. Dispatches Editions, 2017
- “Review of *LetERRs*.” *Wasafiri Magazine*, Issue 91
- “Review of *Conflict Resolution for Holy Beings*.” *Studies in American Indian Literature*, Volume 28.3
- “Check Engine”; “Won’t Get Fooled Again.” Connotation Press: 14 Possibilities of Native Poetry. January 2017
- “Domicile.” *Cleaver Magazine*, Issue 10
- “Ours Poetica.” *Modern Poetry Quarterly Review*, Issue 3
- “Chainsaw Miniatures.” *Oyez Review*, Issue 38
- “Pistons +6,” *Eat Local / Read Local*. 2015
- “Rob Van Dam Versus John Cena For The WWE Championship,” *Word Riot*, Issue 9
- “Party in the U.S.A.,” *Banango Street*, Issue 8
- “In Which An Old Dusty Springfield Song Comes Along.” *Literary Juice*, Issue 8
- “Sammy the Poet” (published under different name), “Whatever It Is A Dead Thing Might Do,” “Professional Wrestling” (published under different name). *B O D Y*
- “Keith Calls Me To Speak Of Relationships.” *Rabbit Catastrophe Review*, Issue 7
- “Nature Poem” (published under different name). *Cheat River Review*, Issue 1
- “Have Mercy.” *Matter: A Monthly Journal of Political Poetry and Commentary*, Issue 5
- “Trigger Warning.” *Beecher’s*, Issue 3
- “Interview with Glenn Shaheen.” *The Wide Net*, Issue 1
- “*Slur Oeuvre: A Review*.” *Third Coast*, Spring 2013
- “The Inadequate Bookshelf,” “Aubade,” “The Moony Poem,” “On Greenness,” “12/20.” *The Chariton Review*, Issue 35.1

READINGS AND CONFERENCES

- Workshop leader, AllWriters Workshop at the University of Wisconsin-Waukesha, “Storytelling and Empathy in the Age of Loneliness,” 5/25/19
- Poetry reading, Travelling Mollys Reading Series at Buzz Café, Chicago, 4/8/19
- Poetry reading, V.A. Goes West, Portland, OR, 3/29/19
- Panel presentation, “The Lifeblood of Regional Literary Celebrations,” Association of Writers and Writing Programs Conference, 3/29/19
- Poetry reading and Q&A, Syracuse University, 2/19/19
- Poetry reading, Sunday Stories Reading Series, Var Gallery, Milwaukee, 12/16/18
- Poetry reading and Q&A, Southeast Wisconsin Festival of Books, University of Wisconsin-Waukesha, 11/4/18
- Poetry reading, United We Read, Public House Cooperative, Milwaukee, 10/18/18
- Poetry reading, LitFam Reading Series, Sugar Maple Tavern, Milwaukee, 10/17/18
- Poetry reading, “Featured Poets of Milwaukee,” St. John’s on the Lake, Milwaukee, 4/23/18
- Presentation, “Who’s Laughing Now?: Indian Humor Despite It All,” North Dakota State University, 4/6/18
- Poetry reading, Uncharted Books, Chicago, IL, 3/16/18

- Poetry reading and Q&A, Carthage College Instructor Spotlight, Carthage College, Kenosha, WI, 3/27/18
- Poetry reading, Poetry Night at the Jazz Estate, Milwaukee, 2/26/18
- Poetry reading, “Walk,” Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference: Asymmetry, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2/16/18
- Poetry reading, Kismet Bookstore, St. Louis, MO, 1/25/18
- Poetry reading and Q&A, Westminster College, Fulton, MO, 1/24/18
- Poetry reading, Taproom Poetry Series, Lawrence, KS, 1/21/18
- Poetry reading, Bookmarx Bookstore, Springfield, MO, 1/20/18
- Poetry reading, Steel’s Used Books, Kansas City, MO, 1/19/18
- Poetry reading, Wolverine Farms, Fort Collins, CO, 1/18/18
- Poetry reading, Jazzetry Poetry Reading Series, Boulder, CO, 1/17/18
- Poetry reading, Rediscovered Books, Boise, ID, 1/14/18
- Poetry reading, The Store, Portland, OR, 1/13/18
- Poetry reading, Bellingham Alternative Library, Bellingham, WA, 1/11/18
- Poetry reading, Café deux Soliel, Vancouver, BC, 1/10/18
- Poetry reading, Vermillion Art Gallery, Seattle, WA, 1/9/18
- Poetry reading, Outer Space Collective, Arcata, CA, 1/8/18
- Poetry reading, Old Capitol Books, Monterrey, CA, 1/7/18
- Poetry reading, Octopus Literary Salon, Oakland, CA, 1/6/18
- Poetry reading, “Franklin K.R. Cline and Santee Frasier sponsored by the Poetry Coalition and Milwaukee Native American Literary Cooperative,” Woodland Pattern Book Center, Milwaukee, 11/19/17
- Poetry reading, Wolf House, Minneapolis, 11/15/17
- Poetry reading, Volumes Bookstore, Chicago, 10/26/17
- Poetry reading, *Return to the Gathering Place of the Waters* Book Release, Public House Cooperative, Milwaukee, 5/25/17
- Poetry reading, *BONK! #104*, Racine, 5/20/17
- Panel presentation, “Milwaukee’s Poetry of Resistance,” Untitledtown Book and Author Festival, Green Bay, 4/30/2017
- Poetry reading and performance art alongside Maplewood Gardens, “Poets Read Some Stuff Somewhere In Milwaukee,” Var Gallery and Studio, Milwaukee, 3/30/17
- Poetry reading, “Because We Come From Everything: Poetry and Migration,” Woodland Pattern Book Center, 3/28/17
- Presentation, “‘I Am Contingent’”: Words and Resonances in Craig Santos Perez’s from unincorporated territory..., Words Matter: Politics, Rhetoric, and Social Justice Conference, Indiana University, 3/25/17
- Poetry reading, “CIASOM,” Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference: MOSAIC, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2/17/17
- Poetry reading and craft talk, “American Cherokee,” Landbody: Indigeneity’s Radical Commitments Conference, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 5/6/16
- Presentation, ‘When It Gets This Big, It’s Hard To Tell What You Have The Most Of’’: Lotería Cards and Katamari Damacy, Radical Writes Conference, Southeast Missouri State University, 4/16/16

- Poetry reading, “Check Engine,” Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference: Unbearable, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2/20/16
- Poetry reading, Poetry in the Park: Native American Poetry Spotlight, Milwaukee, 11/15/15
- Poetry reading, “Triangles, Squares, Rich Folks” antgenre work alongside Frankie Mastrangelo, Midwest Interdisciplinary Graduate Conference: Unbearable, 2/10/15
- Panel presentation, “Checking The Box Score: Sports And Literature,” Western Michigan University Sigma Tau Delta Annual English Studies Conference, 3/6/13

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- Lecturer, Carthage College Department of English, January 2017-December 2018
 - Classes taught: Introduction to Creative Writing, ENG 2050 (4 sections)
- Instructor, Woodland Pattern Book Center Summer Poetry Camp, June 2016-present
 - Classes taught: two week-long poetry workshops to students from grades 4-11
- Teaching Assistant, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, August 2014-December 2016
 - Classes taught: Introduction to College Writing, ENG 101 (5 sections); Introduction to Creative Writing, ENG 233 (2 sections)
- Assistant Director of First Year Composition, Western Michigan University, August 2012-May 2014
- Teaching Assistant, Western Michigan University, August 2011-August 2012
 - Taught Introduction to Composition, ENG 101 (3 sections)
- Teaching Assistant, Truman State University, 2010-2011
 - Classes taught: Writing as Critical Thinking, ENG 1050 (1 section); Introduction to Creative Writing, ENG 2200 (1 section)

ADMINISTRATIVE POSITIONS AND SERVICE

- Member, Woodland Pattern Book Center Board of Directors, July 2015-present
- Co-coordinator, Juneau Park Friends Poetry in the Park, December 2015-present
- Food & Drink Correspondent, *Shepard Express*, July 2015-present
- Officer, Word Warriors (Indigenous Literature And Culture Student Organization At UWM), September 2016-May 2019
- Co-curator, Short Shots 9 Poetry Reading, May 2019
- Book Reviews and Interviews Editor, *cream city review*. August 2015-April 2019
- Volunteer poetry instructor, American Civil Liberties Union Youth Social Justice Forum, October 2017 and October 2018
- Graduate representative, UWM Department of English Graduate Policy Committee, May 2015-September 2018
- Guest poetry instructor, Indian Community School, March 2018
- Member, Woodland Pattern Book Center Executive Director Search Committee, March 2017-Feb 2018
- Assistant Poetry Editor, *cream city review*, September 2014-September 2015
- Book Reviews and Interviews Editor, *Third Coast*, September 2012-May 2014

- President, Association of Graduate English Students at Western Michigan University, April 2012-July 2014
- Assistant Editor, New Issues Press, September 2011-May 2014
- Assistant Poetry Editor, *Third Coast*, September 2011-September 2012