

Trickster Academy. By Jenny L. Davis. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2022. 72 pages. \$16.95 paperback; \$16.95 e-book.

Reviewing Jenny L. Davis' poetry collection *Trickster Academy* from within the space that her work so cleverly and clearly critiques requires attention to the complexities of academic and institutional storytelling. Davis embodies this slippage among and around academies as a Chickasaw linguistic anthropologist and a poet. Her academic scholarship and creative writing both center intersections of Indigenous language reclamation and Indigenous gender and sexuality, especially the reclamation of two-spirit experience, just through different articulations. Davis's first poetry book, *Trickster Academy* elides singular definition. The book weaves together deeply ironic and deadly funny songs, recipes, and radical citations of survivance to carve space for Indigenous thriving in settler academic space and to make space for epistemology and pedagogy. Simultaneously, *Trickster Academy* is also a chorus of trickster voices speaking from distinct locations (Rabbit, Coyote, Crow, Spider, Buzzard, Fox, and more) calling for collective concrete actions: repatriation, *rematriation*, *retheytriation*; the Land Back movement; knowledge back; language back; medicine back. What is most potent, Davis's poetry is *itself* medicine—both salve for the ongoing settler colonial violence and deep nourishment of knowledge gifted—in this *Trickster Academy*.

Davis's poems are collected into three sections, which each share a title with the poem that begins their respective collection. Sprinkled throughout the text are two ancient trickster proverbs, the second of which is an adaptation of Audre Lorde, claiming that “the settler's teaching will never dismantle the settler's academy” (46). This calls in the urgency of Davis's trickster work in this particular amalgam of various poetic forms. As a whole, Davis's poems are largely freeform. They mold and match the conceptual material they address. For example, the collection begins with five sequential poems that address and play with university land acknowledgements. In their forms, they mimic first a short style guide complete with bulleted pointers, then an internalized prayer (“please let me say these names right, or at least pretty close”), a land acknowledgement for the Trickster Academy, a blackout poem pointed directly at the core of land acknowledgements, and last, a five-stanza freeform poem asserting Indigenous women's power and sovereignty (4).

The first section, “Land Acknowledgement Statement,” shifts from direct engagement in this topic to grappling with the complexities of Indigenous (specifically Davis' Chickasaw) homespace. This transition follows the first trickster proverb urging practices of survivance through adaptation and is ushered in by Davis evoking *Of' Tohbi'*—the Great White Dog that has guided and protected Chickasaw people on their journeys towards home. The section concludes with a comparison of ways of knowing, situating white Western Eurocentric positionality as singular and contrasting

to Indigenous understandings of connection across generations, where “there is only one direction / its name is *home* and / I am never there and / I have never left” (15). The last poem in this section provides a specifically queer lens onto the complexities of homespace, in which Christian heteronormative practices adopted as survival percolate alongside neighboring settler logics to, in many ways, force queer folk out.

The second section, “What Kind of Trickster Are You?” reckons with authenticity, using *trickster* as a metaphor for Indigenous belonging. In “Inside Each of Us Are Two Tricksters,” Davis uses succinct prose to riff off an “Indigenous myth” of two wolves perpetuated by Anglo romanticization. This flippant trickster teasing is not only levied at settlers but also Indigenous performers of their own identity or potentially stolen identity (Pretendians) in pieces such as “Süper Tradish” (35). This second section also addresses survivance in the face of colonial violence: “Maps” spins victim narratives of first contact into embodied “colonial histories / retold as love stories,” and “How a Turtle Got Her Shell” reminds readers that “survival / meant preserving / softness,” (32, 34). A third topic articulated in this second section and threaded throughout the whole of the text is the ongoing colonial violence experienced by Indigenous peoples in academia. Again, Davis deftly uses humor as a tool to both directly parallel the academic tokenization of Indigenous scholars to a circus performance and as a method of questioning if “this / diploma / is a vehicle for / smallpox / or the vaccine against it / (and what’s the point if / we can’t immunize / the whole herd?)” (40, 36).

In the third section, titled “Trickster Academy,” Davis pushes this tactical irony further into academia, where flippancy pokes holes in academic metaphors of inclusion and whose forms parody the antiradical inclusivity politics of settler academic spaces. Davis speaks to the theft of Indigenous ancestors by academic institutions, often questioning what this means bodily, spiritually, mentally, and emotionally for her participation and placement within the academy. And yet, Davis’s poems speak directly to Indigenous kin situated similarly in the academy and working through parallel experiences. This space-making and recognition is not only another throughline in *Trickster Academy*’s entirety, but also appears as a driving force and intention for the text as a whole.

Trickster Academy is the eighty-ninth volume in the *Sun Tracks* series, which includes poetry by internationally renowned Indigenous poets such as Ofelia Zepeda, Joy Harjo, Leslie Marmon Silko, and Luci Tapahonso. While parallels can be drawn in form and position among many of these Indigenous scholar-poets and Davis’s work, I find the deepest resonance between Davis’s multiplicitous approach to critiquing settler academia and the perpetuation of settler logics with the multimedia work of Nishnaabeg writer, musician, and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. Like Davis, Simpson mixes form and language between poetics and scholarly academic compositions as well as Indigenous knowledges and language alongside settler and English explanation or refusal. Simpson and Davis echo one another in their insistence on precedence for Indigenous survivance in settler space based on legacies of this praxis as embodied by tricksters, Indigenous women, and Indigenous trans, queer, and two-spirit folk. However, Davis’s *Trickster Academy* opens itself through beautifully crafted, intentional, and accessible language and short form to wider audiences. As a scholar

working with Indigenous storytelling in settler academia, I am endlessly grateful for the works of both scholars, but particularly for this offering of otherwise ways of knowing and being in relation to academia, humorously, tenderly, and fiercely proposed by Jenny L. Davis in *Trickster Academy*. It is a text I hope every young scholar can encounter early in their journey, and return to time and time again as medicine.

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