

Postindian Aesthetics: Affirming Indigenous Literary Sovereignty. Edited by Debra K. S. Barker and Connie A. Jacobs. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2022. 247 pages. \$100.00 hardcover; \$29.95 paperback; \$29.95 ebook.

In his essay on Blackfeet horror writer Stephen Graham Jones, Eric Gary Anderson quotes the author imploring Native American writers to “write where you’re not supposed to write, and then move on, do it on the next shelf over too. And the next, on down the line. Leave the whole bookcase red” (quoted in Anderson, “Demon Theory for Beginners,” 172). Painting the whole bookcase red is precisely what the collection of essays, *Postindian Aesthetics: Affirming Indigenous Literary Sovereignty*, edited by Debra K. S. Barker and Connie A. Jacobs, asks its readers to do. The audience for *Postindian Aesthetics* includes both scholars of Native American and Indigenous literature, as well as educators in spaces outside of academia who desire a wider breadth of accessible scholarship about a variety of Native American and Indigenous writers. The resulting collection of essays by literary scholars studying writers who have not garnered the critical attention the editors argue they deserve takes readers into unexpected genres: to places like manga (“Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, Haida Manga, and the Political Possibilities of Comics Art” by Jeremy M. Carnes), horror (“Demon Theory for Beginners, or the Intertextual Badlands of Stephen Graham Jones” by Eric Gary Anderson), and Indigenous disability literature (“In and Out of the Crazywoods: Cheryl Savageau’s Abenaki Grounding of a Bipolar Diagnosis” by Siobhan Senior). The timing of this task and this collection is excellent. For the past several years, scholars and readers have been treated to a steady stream of literature by Native authors in genres outside of literary fiction. I am thinking here of books like Métis author Cherie Dimaline’s wildly popular young adult dystopian novel, *The Marrow Thieves* (2017), or Sicangu Lakota writer David Heska Wanbli Weiden’s crime novel, *Winter Counts* (2020).

In addition to the goal of writing literary criticism about lesser-known and lesser-studied Indigenous writers across a variety of genres, the editors of this collection also ask readers, particularly those in the scholar set, to reconsider debates that might have previously divided critical perspectives. As Robert Warrior explains in his foreword, scholars emerging from the nationalist school of thought emphasize the importance of studying texts in their political and historical context, while other critics demand that the same book’s aesthetics, beauty, and craft should be paramount. By including mention of both *sovereignty* and *aesthetics* in its title, Warrior points out, the editors Barker and Jacobs invite us to consider the works from both perspectives.

And the scholars writing on writing in this collection certainly do. Although it is, perhaps, a little awkward to draw a line between those authors who make up the Native American literary canon and are part of the mainstream and those

"lesser-known" or emergent writers, *Postindian Aesthetics* makes this necessary distinction with the goal of increasing the visibility of a greater number of writers and maybe eventually widening the canon itself. The emergent and lesser-studied writers are not without merits and accolades all their own. As Eric Gary Anderson points out, the absolutely prolific Stephen Graham Jones has published more than twenty-five books and over 300 short stories in literary journals. The fact that we find Stephen Graham Jones in a collection of scholarship featuring underrepresented writers lends credence to another of Barker and Jacobs's arguments in *Postindian Aesthetics*: that there is a certain public appetite for the themes mainstream readership expects of Native American and Indigenous literature and when authors write outside of that theme (or paint the entire bookcase red—not just the Native American literature section), their work is less frequently taken up.

The critics featured in this collection, including Molly McGlennen, Kenneth M. Roemer, and Kirstin L. Squint, stand as "Guardians of the Native Literary Galaxy" of sorts, turning their scholarly attention, respectively, toward prominent scholars whose creative writing you may or may not have encountered: White Earth poet Kimberly Blaeser and "Choctaw chameleon" (68) LeAnne Howe. In the essay "Acts of Attention: Communal Aesthetics in Kimberly Blaeser's Poetry," McGlennen examines both the aesthetic quality of Blaeser's poetry as well as the ways her poems, in a practical sense, act as anchors to home. By turning the reader's attention to what McGlennen calls the "Indigenous aesthetic of community building" (40) in Blaeser's poetry, she shows the power of small gestures of attention in human experience and storytelling. McGlennen also employs Howe's concept of *tribalography*, which is itself the subject of Roemer and Squint's essay, "Tribalography in Motion: LeAnne Howe." Roemer and Squint take on the challenging task of defining tribalography, a concept in motion, and settle for a definition that emphasizes "the transformative power of Native stories" (69), which derive their strength from the interconnectivity of a people and their place. Roemer and Squint argue that in both her theory and her fiction, Howe's movement between everyday places (like ball fields) and sacred sites (like Choctaw mounds) are prime examples of tribalography in motion.

While some of the book's contentions have been considered time and again—such as the insistence that these literatures be treated as art rather than "ethnic" literature or, worse, ethnography—this argument will still be revelatory among the broad audience *Postindian Aesthetics* aims to reach. The editors make clear their efforts not to alienate readers and teachers outside of academia with too much jargon or theorization. But with as fabulous a title as *Postindian Aesthetics*, I found myself in want of more discussion of Vizenor's concept of the *postindian* than was offered. However, with each essay making a critical intervention in an average of about ten pages, I can see why a long and potentially complicated explanation of the postindian might not be suitable for the writing style the editors cultivate.

At its best, *Postindian Aesthetics* introduces readers to underrepresented writers in unexpected and contemporary genre categories and renews an appreciation for the widest possible spectrum of Native writers and genres. It finds space for those writers eclipsed by the wide shadow cast by authors such as Louise Erdrich and N.

Scott Momaday, who are celebrated by the mainstream (and rightfully so). As the writers considered in this collection put in the work to “leave the whole bookcase red,” to quote again from Stephen Graham Jones, we scholars can keep up our end of the bargain, find joy in discovering and rediscovering Native American and Indigenous authors, and, as Warrior concludes in his foreword, “Most of all, keep reading.”

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