Theatre of Chance: Native Celebrities of Nothing in an Existential Colony. By Gerald Vizenor. Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2025. 230 pages. $60 unjacketed cloth; $19.95 paper; $15.99 e-book.

Theatre of Chance is the fifth and final book in the Native Liberty series of semi-autobiographical historical novels by prolific author Gerald Vizenor. Readers of one or more previous books in the series will be happy to know that the master weaver of stories here pulls together many of the threads for readers of previous books who were left dumbfounded and still looking for answers. The main characters are finally developed, and author Gerald Vizenor moves from a shadowy cameo figure weaving ancestors into the main storyline to a working journalist and featured character in his story.

Important themes of the book include chance versus destiny, the importance of mockery and satire both on reservations and in the cities (which Vizenor calls "the existential colony"), the cosmopolitanism of Native people in the twentieth century, the juxtaposition of "high" and pedestrian cultures, and, of course, survivance. The author expounds upon major world events and local trivia to highlight Indigenous communities' global connections and their relationship to more familiar stories. Vizenor also takes aim at culture merchants, fraudsters, fakes, and plastic shamans.

Vizenor the historian tells of the Minneapolis Teamsters Strike of 1934 as one led not just by high-profile Trotskyists but also by Ojibwe and Dakota truck drivers who were rank-and-file members of Teamsters 574. It would be difficult to discuss the International Brotherhood of Teamsters—or any truck drivers during Prohibition—without mentioning the Mob. We learn that in Minneapolis, bosses contracted with not Italian but Jewish mobsters to do work too dirty for the police against working-class agitators and socialists whose actions might reduce their profit margins.

The book chronicles the transformation of cities in the post–World War II era. Vizenor expounded on the "urban-renewal" programs that destroyed historic buildings in favor of steel and glass behemoths to displace working-class populations and pave the way for more profit. Likewise, collective transportation, especially municipal rail infrastructure of cities, was torn up to make way for the private vehicles of the upwardly mobile, and buses for those not so lucky.

Readers are offered a window from the White Earth Reservation and the Native "existential colony" of Minneapolis on major historical events after the troupe's return from the Seattle World's Fair. The turbulent 1960s are elucidated from John F. Kennedy's defeat of Richard Nixon in the 1960 presidential election to JFK's assassination in Dallas three years later, followed by Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech to King's own assassination, the election of Nixon, and the National Guard's

killing of four unarmed protesters and wounding of nine more at Kent State. Readers familiar with Neil Young will somberly chant the soliloquy "four dead in Ohio."

Many readers, especially my historian colleagues, tend to expect a strict and linear temporal narrative. But Vizenor has always challenged those notions. The series roughly chronicles the 1890s, signposted by the Great Hinckley Fire of 1894, until the summer of 1970, when the group "returns" to French Portage Narrows on Lake of the Woods. Each book in the series overlaps the next. This book is mostly situated during the Great Depression until the 1960s, but it also includes important references back to the eighteenth century, with scions of the fur trade such as John Jacob Astor and the early territorial governors and Indian agents of the region such as Lewis Cass. This book (and the series as a whole) is better understood as a space-time travel history in which the past is never *really* past, the future creates the present, and any given present location is deeply connected to other places in other times. It is a hyperwarped hyper-reality beyond postmodern—a supermodern literature that strings together collectivity for a hyperindividualized world.

History has something to tell us in the present. Reading this book, one cannot help but see the multiple echoes of the past that beg attentive readers to stand up for humanity and against the assault on our more than human relations. "Cops Fire on Unarmed Pickets," the 1934 banner head in *The Militant*, echoes to 1970 Kent State and onward to today and tomorrow. Nixon's corruption echoes backward and forward, conspiring with McKinley and Andrew Jackson; Himmler and Heydrich to inform our present. Mother Jones' parlay with Andrew Carnegie could be a parlay today between Bernie Sanders and Elon Musk. George Lincoln Rockwell is apparent in Steve Bannon; the John Birch Society in the Proud Boys, Patriot Front, and Oath Keepers. In the era of Trump, the parlay between Erik the Red and Cristóbal Colón(-izer) should be brought to every schoolhouse on Turtle Island.

The book—and series—concludes after the Beaulieu brothers get Dummy Trout's collection of dream songs published as a book and the troupe returns to her birthplace at French Portage Narrows on Lake of the Woods. The location—for those geographically challenged or cartographically curious—is just northeast of the Northwest Angle of Minnesota and south of Kenora, western Ontario. Listeners to the presumably unlicensed radio station on a summer night in 1970 are treated to a few whispered words, which readers must conclude is Dummy Trout, the troupe's mute leader and central figure in Vizenor's five-book series, who had not spoken in seventy years. In this quiet action, Vizenor, himself a writer for seventy years, seems to be quietly passing the mantle to the next generation.

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